



## Stress

### What is Stress?

Stress is a natural response and is part of normal life. It can be emotional (coping) stress that can be good or bad, for example winning lotto, or having a bad day at work, or physical stress, for example having an accident or operation. The human stress reaction is often called the “fight or flight” response. This enables your body to adjust within seconds to stand and fight or to run away....fast! This stress can be positive (e.g. excitement) or negative (e.g. anger).

### How does stress affect my blood glucose levels?

The fight or flight hormones released during stress

- reduce the production of insulin
- cause the liver to put stored glucose back into the blood
- stop the muscles from taking up that extra glucose.

This means that during a stressful period most people with diabetes will see an increase in their BGLs. The BGLs should come down again once the stress is removed or managed.

### What are the common signs of stress?

- Headaches, back or neck pain
- Muscle tension
- Grinding teeth
- Heartburn
- Interrupted sleep
- Anxiety
- Irritability

A little bit of stress is good but a lot of stress for a long time that isn't removed or managed will result in the blood glucose levels remaining high. This can increase the risk of the long term effects of diabetes.

### How can stress be managed?

The key to managing stress is to recognise it early and do something about it or try to include regular stress management as part of your lifestyle.

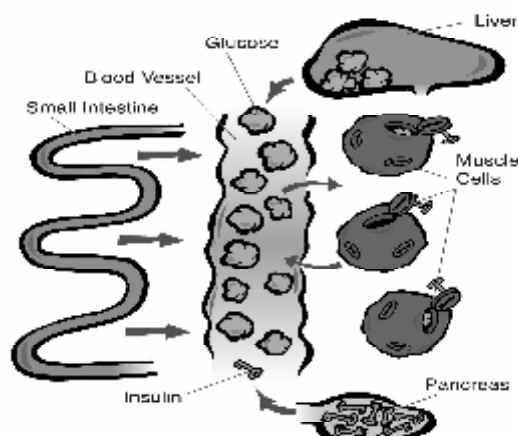
### Step one: Can the cause of your stress be altered or avoided?

Eliminating unnecessary causes of stress is the first step in stress management. If it is within your control to avoid or alter the cause of stress – do so.



#### Stress

Liver and muscles put glucose back into blood and the pancreas stops putting out insulin



## Step two: Control your thoughts

Your thoughts have a large influence over your ability to manage stress. You can either think positively or negatively about a situation.

The more negative thoughts you think, the greater your stress will be. Avoid statements that contain words like 'can't', 'won't' and 'never'. Try to see the cup as half full instead of half empty.

## Step three: Empty your rubbish bin

Stress is like having a rubbish bin inside of you. This rubbish bin needs emptying. While you carry around a full rubbish bin, it is impossible for you to manage stress. Here are some examples of how you could empty your rubbish bin:

- Talk to someone about your stress
- Go for a brisk walk or jog
- Get a punching bag
- Listen to your favourite music – turn it up loud and dance if you need to.
- Make yourself smile
- Do something that makes you laugh
- Do something that makes you feel good about yourself
- Have a good cry

## Step four: Prevent your rubbish bin from filling up

Relaxation and meditation help to clear out any left over rubbish you have in your bin and help to prevent it from filling up again. There are many different things you can try:

- Talking to a friend or family member – catch up for a coffee once a fortnight for a chat to empty your rubbish bin!
- Stretching – such as yoga and calisthenics
- Progressive relaxation – tensing and releasing muscle groups in the body until a relaxed state is reached.
  - Slow deep breathing

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- Doing something that relaxes you on a regular basis – a bubble bath, massage or walk down the beach
- Meditation
- Visualisation or guided imagery – imagine yourself in a special place where you are calm and relaxed
- Regular physical activity – will help to release positive hormones that enhance a feeling of well being.
- Prayer

Try practicing one of these techniques – slow deep breathing together with some visualization. It will only take 5 minutes:

### Deep breathing activity:

1. Begin by focusing on your breathing. Take a deep breath and imagine you have a balloon inside your stomach that you are trying to inflate. As you breathe in your stomach will push out, not in. Now slowly breathe out. Keep breathing like this.
2. Now close your eyes and picture a place that you find relaxing – it could be the beach, a hot bubble bath, crisp mountain air, a comfortable couch, it could be just a relaxing colour.
3. Now the next time you breathe in, breathe in those feelings of relaxation and feel the fresh, clean air filling your body.
4. As you breathe out picture cloudy, black and smoky air leaving your body. This is your stress. Feel it leaving your body and as you breathe in being replaced by clean, fresh air.
5. Repeat this at least ten times and see how relaxed it makes you feel.

Managing stress is an important part of diabetes management so try to include stress management as part of your life.