

### **What Is Stress?**

Stress is a normal part of life. It is simply the way you react to changes and challenges, and, like change, stress can be positive or negative. It can be the buzz of excitement or the sense of concentration which helps you to do your best when faced with a new or challenging situation, such as an exam, an interview or a new 'date'. It may also be the sense of anxiety or tension you experience when you feel "I just cannot cope".

### **Positive Stress**

Positive stress helps you to concentrate or channel your energies to perform well. Without positive stress, most people would never reach their full potential. To perform well it needs to be balanced with time off for relaxation in order to build up your reserves of physical and emotional energy.

### **Negative Stress**

If stress is constant or the challenges you face are outside your ability or control, you may experience negative stress. Negative stress can affect your health and well-being, causing many ailments, ranging from tension headaches to heart-attacks. It is therefore vital that you learn to manage your stress in order to have a happier, healthier and more productive life.

### **How To Manage Stress**

No one can ever be in control of all the stresses in their life, but we can learn how to manage them better. The first step is to become aware of the things which cause you stress and how you feel when you are stressed. The second step is to develop relaxation skills. These could be active relaxation such as sport or exercise or quiet relaxation like listening to music or practising a relaxation technique. Thirdly, a positive attitude to life and a healthy lifestyle are key tools in reducing negative stress.

### **Awareness**

If you are able to recognise the things or situations which cause you stress and your normal reactions to these, you can begin to develop ways to deal with the problems these stresses may be causing. Think of all the situations where you feel tense or ill at ease, check your body reactions to these situations. Do you get a headache? Stiff shoulders? Upset stomach, backache or edginess? These are symptoms telling you that you could be stressed.

### **Active Relaxation**

For many people physical or mental activity helps them to relax. To be useful the activity need not be strenuous. A stroll in the country or a hobby such as pottery or cooking is ideal if this is what you enjoy. On the other hand you may prefer an energetic activity such as dancing or squash.

### **Quiet Relaxation**

There are many relaxation techniques you can learn to help you unwind. These techniques include breathing exercises, muscular relaxation, visualisation and meditation. If you practise one or more of the techniques, you will soon feel the benefits of the increased relaxation.

### **Positive Attitude**

The development of a positive attitude to life is an important skill in managing stress. Feeling good about yourself and confident that you will succeed in all you do, helps you to be positive in your approach to develop the assertiveness skills which make relationships work.