



Australian Government

Module 1

Dealing with stress



How long will it take?
15 to 30 minutes



Learning outcomes

In doing this module you will:

- ✓ gain a better understanding of stress, its causes and your options for dealing with it
- ✓ develop action plans to resolve or reduce your main stressors
- ✓ commit to putting your plans into action
- ✓ understand that your plans may need to be adjusted when your circumstances change



Your wellbeing is important to us.

If you find talking about your experience as a carer upsetting, you may want to talk to someone.

Lifeline **13 11 14** and beyondblue **1300 22 4636** are two services that are both available 24 hours / 7 days a week if you need support.

Introduction

1

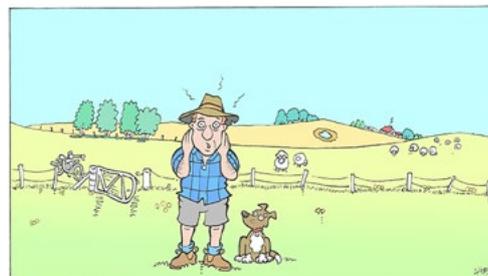
Introduction

While being a carer can be rewarding it can also be stressful. Balancing your caring role with caring for yourself and the other responsibilities in your life can be challenging.

Some stress is good for you. It can help motivate you; help you achieve your goals; or help you overcome an obstacle. Too much stress is not good.

Stress is a normal part of caring for someone. Some of the things that cause stress for carers include:

- lack of time to do the things you want or need to do
- feeling lonely and isolated
- managing relationships around the person you care for
- getting supports and services
- work, education or study concerns
- financial concerns
- feeling threatened or at risk, physically, mentally or financially



Self-evaluation: Symptoms of stress

2

Self-evaluation

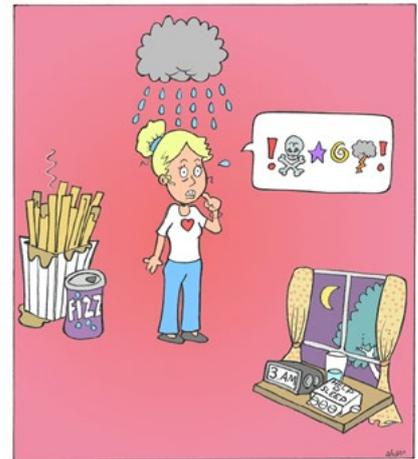
Prolonged or frequent stress may be harmful to your health and wellbeing, and may affect your ability to provide care.

Stress may result in physical, emotional or behavioural changes.

Everyone reacts differently in stressful situations and have different coping skills. Personal experience, life skills and how much support you have around you will make a difference to how you deal with stress and stressful situations.

The first step is to learn how to recognise stress in yourself and how you react to it.

Think about the symptoms in the table below and identify any symptoms you are experiencing.



Physical*	Emotional	Behavioural
Headaches	Anxiety	Not eating properly
Low energy	Frustration	Sleep problems
Aches and pains	Moodiness, irritability or anger	Difficulty relaxing
Stomach problems, such as constipation or diarrhoea	Depression or general unhappiness	Increased smoking
Memory and concentration problems	Feeling overwhelmed or hopelessness	Drug or alcohol misuse
Weight gain or loss	Fear of the future	Crying or feeling sad
Chest pain	Impatience	Social withdrawal
	Loss of confidence	Angry outbursts

* Physical symptoms are sometimes caused by more serious medical conditions, rather than stress. Please see your doctor if you have any of these physical symptoms to rule out other causes and get appropriate medical advice. It is a good idea to keep your doctor up-to-date about the impact of your caring role on your health and wellbeing.

Self-evaluation: Symptoms of stress

2

Self-
evaluation



I've come to learn that I need to better manage my stress as I keep burning out. This check list is a great first step ... I've even put it on the fridge to remind me of my warning signs.

Mary, 57. Carer to her husband who has MS and her father-in-law who has dementia.

Now you know how you react to stress, you can monitor your symptoms so you can deal with stress before it starts to affect your health and wellbeing.

Self-evaluation: Strengths

2

Self-
evaluation

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In order to succeed, we must first believe that we can – Nikos Kazantzakis

Strengths are the things we are good at – they include characteristics of our personality, our skills, our talents and our knowledge.

Research shows that knowing and drawing on your personal strengths can help you manage stress.

Use the checklist below to identify 10 of your top strengths which you can use to help manage your stress.

Creative	Fair	Friendly	Careful
Patient	Fun	Enthusiastic	Self-controlled
Energetic	Courageous	Honest	Unbiased
Versatile	Kind	Open minded	Compassionate
Strong	Strong work ethic	Practical	Motivated
Cooperative	Good social skills	Optimistic	Intelligent
Self-confident	Persistent	Focused	Articulate
Adaptable	Responsible	Organised	Balanced
Good at problem solving	Good sense of humour	Good team player	Observant



Nancy and I completed the checklist together. We identified our own personal strengths and also added strengths to each other's list. I really enjoyed this exercise and now I can draw on my personal strengths when things are not going well.

Tom, 67. Carer to his wife Nancy, 60, who has a spinal cord injury.

Stressors: What I can and can't control

3

Stressors

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You cannot always control what goes on outside. But you can always control what goes on inside.

- Wayne Dyer

From time to time there are challenges in everyone's life that they can't control but there are also things they can control.

Most people stress about things they can't control rather than focusing on the things they can change. Being clear about what you can and can't control for now will help you manage your stress.

The list below has been developed to help you work out your stressors.

When you do this exercise, really challenge your thinking about what you think you can and can't control.

Financial	Can	Can't
Cost of medications, aids and equipment, home modifications and services		
Having enough money for entertainment and recreation		
Cost for respite care		
Moving from two wages to one		
Being able to make ends meet		
Other – <i>please specify below</i>		

Stressors: What I can and can't control

3

Stressors

Work	Can	Can't
Needing to reduce your hours or give up your job because of your caring role		
Your employer does not support you in your caring role		
Difficulty balancing work commitments and your caring role		
You are expected to work and be a carer		
Other – <i>please specify below</i>		

The person you care for	Can	Can't
Worrying about the person you care for		
Conflict with the person you care for or other family members		
Being expected to make decisions for the person you care for or being excluded from discussions and decisions about them		
Getting supports and services		
Challenging behaviours		
Knowing how to provide the care that the person you care for needs		
Other – <i>please specify below</i>		

Stressors: What I can and can't control

3

Stressors

Your health	Can	Can't
Feeling isolated by your caring role		
Poor health		
Poor emotional and mental wellbeing		
Other – <i>please specify below</i>		

Time	Can	Can't
Pressure of having too much to do in too little time		
Few breaks or holidays away from your caring role		
No time to do housework, chores, grocery shopping or pay bills		
'On the go' all day without a break		
Other – <i>please specify below</i>		

Stressors: What I can and can't control

3

Stressors

Family members	Can	Can't
Balancing your caring role and family responsibilities/relationships		
Not having enough time to spend with family and friends		
Family and friends offering unhelpful advice		
No one helping you		
Other – <i>please specify below</i>		

Legal issues	Can	Can't
Guardianship, power of attorney and planning for the future		
Dealing with banks and insurance organisations		
Dealing with health professionals and service providers		
Occupational safety and health issues		
Other – <i>please specify below</i>		



We know this is going to be a long road for Alice, and the truth is ... some days are tough for our little family. What we have learned is that we can't control everything. Completing this exercise has helped us focus on what we can control, like juggling our work schedules, rather than worrying about things that are out of our control, like anticipating all the challenges to come.

Jack, 42, and Linda, 40. Parents to 3 children, including Alice, 7, with autism.

Action plan

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Action plan

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Step by step and the thing is done – Charles Atlas

Now it's time to develop a plan to resolve the top 3 problems that you can change. Planning is one of the most powerful and effective ways to take control of the stressors you can do something about.

Use the template below to make a plan for each stressor. Even a small change can make a big difference to your wellbeing.



Step 1: Identify the outcome you want and by when

Be clear and realistic. You might find that some stressors will need to be broken down into smaller activities.

Step 2: Identify what you need to do to achieve the outcome

Do you need to do some research, talk to someone or arrange for an assessment for the person you care for? Identify priorities. This helps you focus your attention on the most important activities.

Action plan

4

Action
plan

Step 3: Identify options for dealing with the stressor.

Have a think about who can help, what you need to do and when you need to do it. Are there any obstacles in your way?

Step 4: Identify the best solution.

Look at your options and pick out the ones that are most practical and helpful. There may be one obvious solution or it might be a combination of options. Don't forget to include the steps you will take and the timeframe in your action plan.



Since taking over Liz's care I have been struggling. I knew I needed help, but I didn't know where to start. So I used the action plan ... and as a result I used Carer Gateway to find support services in our area.

We ranked the options, and trialled our best solution. Unfortunately, Liz didn't like the service we visited ... but rather than getting stressed about this ... we went back to our list and made some more appointments to meet some other options.

Megan, 44. Mother of two, working full-time and carer to her sister Liz, 43, who has Down syndrome.



The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another – William James

Helpful thinking can help you deal with stressful situations that you can't change, solve or ignore. It can change your focus from how the situation 'should be' to accepting the situation 'as it is'.

Helpful thinking can help you stop fighting against the situation and focus on what's possible.

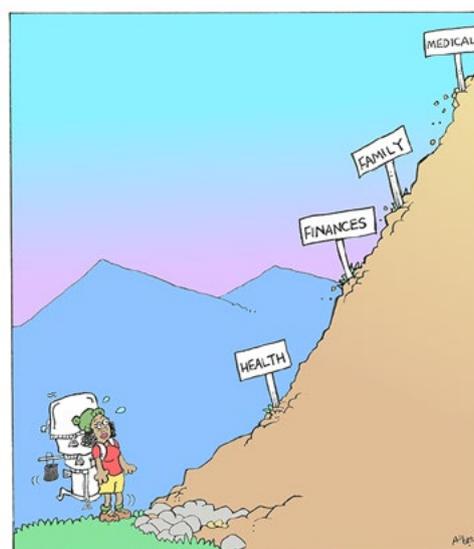
When doing this exercise remind yourself of the strengths you identified earlier.

Keep things in perspective. Think about:

- what you and the person that you care for have achieved together.
- what is possible today.
- how you can break down a big problem into smaller steps to make it more manageable.

Take a step back and ask yourself:

- What does the person I care for need today?
- What do I need today?
- What can I realistically do?
- What would I tell another carer in this situation?
- Can someone else help share the load?

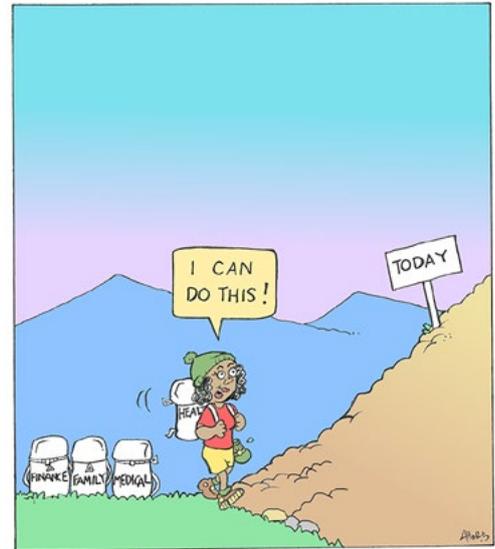


Use helpful self-talk:

- I did the best I could at the time.
- I am learning important life skills.
- Focus on what I can do.

Keep a positive attitude:

- I can manage this.
- I will get through this.
- Life is better when I have a positive attitude.
- I can do this.



I've found this really helpful. I've come to realise that there isn't a lot I can do about dad's situation, and so when I feel guilty, I try to remind myself that 'I am doing the best that I can'.

Renee, 20. Carer to her father, 48, who has schizophrenia.

Caring for yourself is an important daily activity:

- Set realistic goals and expectations.
- Maintain a healthy diet, exercise daily and get enough sleep.
- Keep up social activities.
- Build a strong support network which includes family, friends and support services.
- Take regular time for yourself to do things you enjoy.
- Look for opportunities to be creative.

Talk to someone you trust – there is no shame in asking for help:

- Family, friends, a colleague or even a stranger can sometimes lend an ear and make helpful suggestions.
- Support groups often have a helpline or online support.
- Professional counselling may help if you are feeling alone, overwhelmed or hopeless.



Reading through these materials has been a good reminder that I need to take better care of myself to be able to care for Sue. Since Sue had her stroke we have been eating a lot of take-out – so I'm going to start by meal planning to hopefully improve our health.

Jim, 70, lives in a rural area and is a carer to his wife Sue, 68, who had a stroke this year.



It's not stress that kills us, it's our reaction to it – Hans Selye

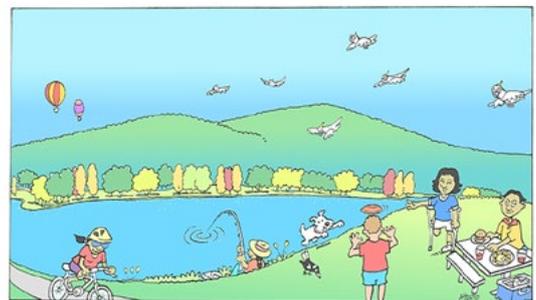
Coping skills are what a person uses to help them deal with stressful situations.

Some ways in which we cope are healthy and build resilience, while others help us avoid the real problems or encourage destructive behaviour.

Here are some coping strategies you can use to manage stress. These activities won't deal with the trigger, but they will help improve your wellbeing.

Think about who you were before you became a carer and try to reconnect with that person. The purpose of these activities is to recharge yourself. You might want to do some of these activities on your own, with your partner or with family and friends.

Research shows that spending time doing activities you enjoy is the single most important thing you can do to maintain your health and wellbeing.



Exercise – get physically active

- Go for a walk or run
- Garden
- Do a workout
- Ride a bike
- Dance
- Play a sport

Time out – to spend as you wish

- Go for a drive
- Watch tv or a movie
- Watch some funny animal clips
- Call a friend
- Write your thoughts in a journal
- Spend time with friends and family
- Go fishing

Hobbies – enjoyable activities

- Read
- Do a crossword or jigsaw puzzle
- Do a craft activity such as knitting or
woodwork
- Play a musical instrument or join a choir
- Join a club (book, car, sports etc.)
- Draw, paint or colour in

Relaxation – relax the mind and body

- Meditate or use a relaxation app
- Listen to music
- Play solitaire
- Have a rest or nap
- Stretching or yoga
- Play with a pet
- Have a bubble bath

Coping skills

6

Coping
skills

Develop a list of activities you enjoy in the spaces below, include who you will do them with and how often you will do it (daily, weekly, other).

Make sure you include:

- at least 2 or 3 options in each category
- some new activities to try.

Exercise

Hobbies

Time out

Relaxation



Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.
– Arthur Ashe

To give yourself the best chance of sticking to your plans, preparation is key. Take a moment now to think about when you will put your plans into action. Put aside time in your phone or diary.

Think about the people who could support you and build a network of relationships with them.

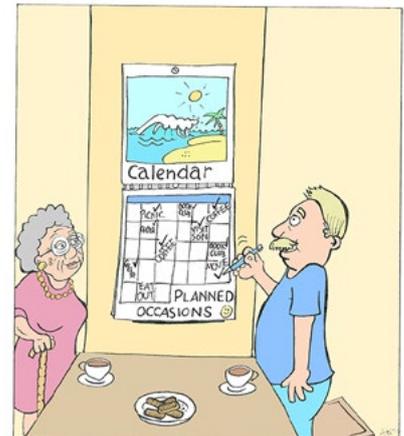
Remember to be realistic – start small. Small successes will lead to bigger ones.

Use the strengths you identified earlier and make sure you celebrate your successes.

After you have put your plans into action, take time to review the outcomes. Did you achieve what you aimed to achieve? Do you need to do something else?

If your plan needs further work, be kind to yourself. Sometimes plans need tweaking.

You can go back to make any changes you like and you can redo this module as often as you want.



Parenting has been a roller coaster ride for me. As a single parent I have struggled with thinking that I was not doing a good enough job and that it's my fault the kids have struggled. This module has been really helpful – I have started monitoring my stressors, identifying my strengths and working out what I can actually control in my life.

In the process I have tried to cut back on my negative self-talk about my parenting – after all 'I'm only human'. This is my new catch phrase!

I am also trying to take more time out for me ... both the kids are adults now and there is only so much I can do. I'm going to keep trying to use what I learned and I'm also planning on doing an online assessment to see if there is anything else I can do to better manage my anxiety.

Cheryl, 56, carer and parent to both her son, Daniel, 33, who has used marijuana daily since he was a teenager and daughter, Lily, 29, who has generalised anxiety disorder.



Congratulations, you've completed the *Dealing with stress* module.

Well done!

Having finished the *Dealing with stress* module you should now:

- ✓ have a better understanding of stress, its causes and your options for dealing with it
- ✓ have developed action plans to resolve or reduce your top three stressors
- ✓ have committed to putting your plans into action
- ✓ understand that your plans may need to be adjusted when your circumstances change