



## **Managing The Symptoms of Stress**

Our world is a very busy hectic and over stimulating place to live at the best of times. This is only compounded further by the challenge of juggling work and home life, meeting the expectations and needs of others when also trying to honour our own needs and take care of ourselves. Managing to be calm and collected in times of stress can be very challenging.

For many of us the effects of stress are subtle but very pervasive. We feel tense and irritable, depressed, and overwhelmed. For some people this can manifest as generalised anxiety. For others it is a constant feeling that something is wrong and a sense of discomfort or ill ease and clenching in the

body, perhaps a restricted feeling in your chest, belly, diaphragm or throat. For others it is an unsettled jangly, hyper vigilant anxious feeling which can be very pervasive.

Stress and overwhelm can affect us all in very different ways. And living with stress in the body, without finding ways to decompress, relax, process and move through it, can begin to have an effect on our physical and mental wellbeing. Poor stress management and the effects of chronic stress can affect our work life, our home life, our relationship, our general wellbeing and self-esteem, and our capacity for resilience. Therefore is very important to find tools and practices which help us to manage the effects of stress, foster mindfulness, relax, decompress, find peace and inner calm.

Cultivating a regular self-care and wellbeing focussed practice helps to maintain our sense of balance and wellbeing. By assembling a toolkit of useful methods, strategies and practices can aid us at times of difficulty and stress so we have the tools and skills to help ourselves to find balance and peace, to self-regulate and self-soothe. Another very important aspect is finding a supportive community — a group of trusted people to turn to for support, we are social mammals and we heal better in community with others far better than we do alone.

Having better resilience will ensure that we can bounce back from periods of difficulty quicker and are able to sustain working in challenging and stressful environments whilst riding the waves. As the expression goes. We cannot stop the waves from coming but we can learn how to swim.

We can develop strategies and practices which create space and give us permission to be reflective, to accept the difficult thoughts, feelings and emotions that come up sometimes and allow them the space to be. We can grow brave enough to feel into them with curiosity and kindness, rather than trying to push them away, repress, distract or numb ourselves in order to avoid uncomfortable feelings or bodily sensations.

It is far better to recognise bodily sensations, emotions and feelings and acknowledge them, even if they are uncomfortable and sometimes frightening. Examining them with compassion, bringing acceptance and finding ways to self sooth and nurture ourselves, without bringing any criticism or judgement. It is also very important to seek support from colleagues, peers, friends and family or if the challenges are ongoing and hard to self-manage, a trained health care professional, (please reach out to IWP if you need additional support).

### **The mini meltdown/ system overwhelm**

Sometimes when responding to work or serving others we will find ourselves unexpectedly in very difficult or emotionally trying situations. When this happens and we are not prepared we can be completely overwhelmed. This often occurs when we haven't been attending to our own basic needs and haven't noticed, perhaps we have been working too hard and skipping on sleep or regular mealtimes. If this happens it is imperative to stop, notice and to attend to.

### **Gradual burnout**

Sometimes the effects of self-neglect are cumulative and there is no sudden meltdown but gradually over time we can find that suddenly we have hit a wall and feel exhausted, becoming easily overwhelmed, emotional or irritable or start to feel regularly anxious or panicked. This is all perfectly normal and doesn't mean you are weak, selfish or abnormal. But it is a warning sign from the body and should not be ignored! The body has a natural method for coping with stress and sometimes we do not notice that our Limbic system has been triggered and we are on high alert — we are in flight/fight /freeze, feint mode.

### **Mindful practices;**

Resetting the brain and allowing the limbic system time to return to normal and for the body's own self soothing system to be activated.

Particularly when we are working in challenging conditions where there is a heightened sense of responsibility, danger or emergency, the body releases stress hormones and chemicals. In these moments of stress we can feel like we 'don't have time' or we don't have the inclination to take breaks or to practice deep breathing, or undertake calming and restful activities. But this is precisely the time when we should make time for them! The more we feel you 'don't have time' to stop and have a break and recalibrate to practice a calm activity or rest, the more likely it is that you really need to do it.

**Group reflection and Support :**

If you are part of a well-supported team there should be some kind of formalised/ facilitated process for doing this, but often in urgent and stressful situations these are the first things to be omitted or forgotten. So, it is important that you develop some strategies for yourself or perhaps create smaller informal support groups with a few of your fellow volunteers/ colleagues so that you can support each other in a calm, structured and safe manner. This is better as a facilitated reflective process, rather than a chat in the pub, unpacking difficult experiences and reflecting is an important part of the work and essential for self-development and organisational practice.

**Some helpful ideas are listed below:**

**Active listening / sharing activities with a partner**, (in person if possible or can be done remotely using video call or Zoom).

**Circle sharing** - Using Zoom is a way to achieve this sense of communing, as the digital world of texting and messages can become very isolating and sometimes we need to see other people's faces and expressions to fully connect with them to feel heard and supported.

**Allow time for doing nothing**- filling your time with everything you must do can be very draining and doesn't allow for the fluctuation in mood and energy levels that happens when the body is undertaking emotionally and physically challenging work. So, give yourself some time off every day and at least a day a week where you have nothing scheduled and you just have time to be rather than to do and to allow for whatever comes up and attend to your emergency needs.





## **Nutritional support for your wellbeing in autumn**

### **Why is nutrition important?**

Nutrients and the components in food influence the functioning of the body,

protect against disease and restore health. Nutritional imbalances can be a contributing factor to an individual's symptoms and health concerns. It is never too late and it is never too early to pay attention to your food choices and optimise your nutrition.

## **Seasonal wellbeing**

Autumn is a time for pausing, slowing down and reflecting on the bounty of summer and the promise of spring. Maintaining wellbeing at this time of year is important so as to be resilient against seasonal bugs and to ward off the 'winter blues' in the shorter, darker days to come. A top tip in terms of advice for seasonal resilience is to pace yourself- balance busy times with restful times. If you are excessively busy and do not take down time to recuperate and recharge you can easily become depleted and when this happens the immune system can let its guard down leaving it more vulnerable.

## **Nutrients for seasonal wellbeing**

B vitamins and magnesium are great for maintaining energy levels when you need to be busy and they are also good for allowing relaxation as they nourish a healthy functioning nervous system. Magnesium is the number one calming nutrient and most people do not get adequate levels in their diets. Magnesium rich foods include: cooked spinach, sunflower seeds, black beans, mackerel, cashew nuts and almonds<sup>1</sup>. Foods rich in B vitamins include: free range chicken, lentils, pinto beans, sunflower seeds, almonds and eggs<sup>2</sup>. Easy ideas for incorporating these foods are as follows.

- Adding tinned black beans or pinto beans to slow cooked warming soups and stews.
- Vegetable and lentil or chicken broths with handfuls of spinach.
- Toasted sunflower seeds, almonds or cashews as a garnish to meals or keep on hand as a snack.
- Eggs are great for highly nutritious and quick meals; spinach omelette or poached eggs with steamed spinach.

## **Autumn vegetables**

Starchy vegetable are in season such as pumpkins, squashes and parsnips and potatoes. These can be filling and warming and they are rich in fibres that feed the good bugs in your gut. They are also generally low in calories but high in antioxidants which are vitamins and minerals that are

protective to your bodily cells. Starchy and root vegetables can be a seasonal replacement to the grains on your plate such as rice, bread and pasta.

1 <https://draxe.com/nutrition/foods-high-in-magnesium/>

2 [https://draxe.com/nutrition/vitamin-b-foods/#Top\\_11\\_Vitamin\\_B\\_Foods](https://draxe.com/nutrition/vitamin-b-foods/#Top_11_Vitamin_B_Foods)

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### **Seasonal Recipe**

PUMPKIN SOUP Serves 6

1 kilo of pumpkin (weigh with skin and pips)

2 large onions

2 large garlic cloves

25g coconut oil

1 litre of stock (for example bouillon powder or stock cubes) Sea salt

Freshly ground black pepper

150ml cream/oat cream/oat milk/ coconut milk

Fresh parsley (optional)

Cut the skin off the pumpkin and scoop out the seeds; cut the flesh into even sized pieces. Peel and chop the onions; peel and crush the garlic. Add the oil in a saucepan and cook the chopped onions for about 5 minutes, then put in the garlic and pumpkin and cook for a further 5 minutes. Add the stock and some salt and pepper; bring to the boil and simmer until the pumpkin is tender- this takes about 15-20 minutes. Sieve to liquidise or blend the soup then stir in the cream/ milk. Reheat the soup gently. Serve in bowls (topped with parsley if you have some).

TOP TIP: add a topping of lightly toasted almonds, cashews or sunflower seeds to this for protein rich sustenance



