

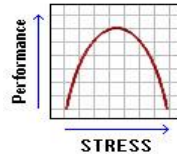
Staying healthy and managing stress

Assisting with disaster relief and response efforts is inevitably stressful. However, poor health and high stress levels affect an individual's well-being and performance, potentially putting others at risk.

Recognising stress

Pressure is positive if effectively managed, but too much pressure leads to stress, poor health and poor performance.

Stress can result from the accumulated strain of working too frequently or for too long in a difficult or frustrating environment such as an emergency situation. This ultimately leads to 'burn out'. Signs of stress may include the following:



Physical	Thinking	Emotional	Behavioural
Headaches, Pain	Bad concentration	Fear, Anxiety	Hyperactivity
Nausea	Poor memory	Guilt, Hopelessness,	Dangerous driving
Fatigue	Confusion	Depression	Overwork
Rapid heart rate	Fast/slow reaction	Resentment	Angry outbursts
Sweats, Chills	Poor decision-making	Anger, Irritability	Argumentative
Trembling	Negative attitudes	Loss of humour	Not caring for self
Nightmares		Distant from others	

Acute stress disorder can be caused through personal experience of, or witnessing of, a trauma. The symptoms normally present within a month of the trauma. They can include persistent, intrusive distressing thoughts or dreams, dissociation, negative moods, avoidance and sleep disturbances. These symptoms will often resolve themselves within a month or may progress to post-traumatic stress disorder.

Post-traumatic stress disorder can emerge at least a month or longer after experiencing trauma. The symptoms are similar to that of acute stress disorder.

Both acute stress disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder require specialised treatment and support.

Principles for managing stress - for humanitarian agencies*

1. **Policy:** agency has written, active policy to prevent or mitigate effects of stress.
2. **Screening and assessing:** ensure staff are equipped to respond to and cope with the anticipated stresses involved in their role. Monitor how staff manages stress.
3. **Preparation and training:** pre-assignment training in managing stress.
4. **Monitoring:** stress levels amongst staff monitored on an ongoing basis through 1:1s etc.
5. **Ongoing support** for staff to deal with their daily stresses. Train managers to spot signs.
6. **Crisis support and management** that provides culturally appropriate support for traumatic incidents or stressful periods of work.
7. **End of assignment support:** practical, emotional and culturally appropriate at the end of assignments or contracts.
8. **Post assignment support:** clear written policies for staff adversely affected.

Mitigating stress

Humanitarian workers are at risk of becoming run down, stressed and prone to illness. Aim to:

- Be aware of signs of stress in yourself and others
- Recognise what type of person you are and how you relax e.g. need your own space or company of others
- Develop a system for people to support and check on each other
- Talk to a colleague, friend or support person when something is bothering you
- Take leave and Rest & Recuperation (R&R) entitlements on time
- Stay in touch with family and friends
- Recognise your limits and accept them
- Make 'done' lists as well as 'to do' lists
- Try to be flexible and accept change
- Get enough sleep
- Take light exercise and maintain a healthy lifestyle
- Take regular breaks
- Do some enjoyable or fun activities
- Drink lots of water, and maintain a regular balanced diet
- Pray, meditate or relax

Additional resources on All In Diary website

Mindfulness and Wellbeing, © CHS Alliance, 2015
 * Managing Stress in Humanitarian Workers © Antares Foundation 2012
 How to manage leadership stress, © Center for Creative Leadership 2009

Web links for further information

Psychosocial Wellbeing: <http://www.headington-institute.org>
<https://www.antaresfoundation.org/>
 Health Advice: <http://www.iamat.org/index.cfm>