

Stress is the result of an imbalance between the demands made on us and our personal resources to deal with these demands.

The balance between a person's resources and the demands being made on them can be compared with a bank account. If too many demands are made on the account we go into the 'red' and become overdrawn, which is comparable to being under stress. In normal circumstances we can cope with the everyday demands of life such as maintenance of job and relationships, which is comparable with the way routine standing orders regularly diminish our financial account. It is only when extra stresses or demands come along that we can tip over 'into the red'. Sometimes a crisis may be the result of a 'last straw' which just tips the balance and we fall 'into the red' or stress.

■ Recommendations

1 Some stress is good for you. Identify your own resources and situations which you find stressful. Learn to identify your own optimal level of stress and do not be pressurised beyond it.

2 Anticipate stress by balancing your demands and resources in advance. Decide what is important – have priorities.

3 When experiencing stress make sure that you:

- ◆ Do not withdraw from social support;
- ◆ Keep communicating – ventilate your feelings;
- ◆ Keep areas and times for relaxation.

4 Reduce demands:

- ◆ Do not expect too much of yourself;
- ◆ Do not feel that you have to live up to others' expectations of you;
- ◆ Think twice about how important tasks are. Try saying 'No';
- ◆ Break your goals into manageable proportions;
- ◆ Think positively about your abilities.

