

# Clearing your head helps you to feel better

**Giving yourself the time and space to clear your thoughts and relax is a great way to stop events or situations becoming overwhelming.**

## + reducing stress

Stress is a normal part of life and can be either positive or negative. However, if you are feeling overwhelmed by stress and finding it hard to relax this can affect your emotional state. There are several ways to reduce the stress in your life.

Whatever stressful things are going on, it's usually possible to take some simple steps to help you reduce and manage it. Of course there will always be things that are out of your control, that you just have to get through somehow, and when you are in one of these situations it's even more important to reduce stress in other areas of your life, where you do have some control.

### Postpone major life changes

Making big changes in your life, such as changing jobs or selling your house, is usually stressful. It may be a good idea to postpone such changes if you are finding it hard to cope. You need to be in good mental shape and have plenty of energy to take on major projects.

### Resolve personal conflicts

Having unresolved relationship issues with people who are important in your life is very stressful and can increase your risk of getting depressed. This is especially the case if you have had an unhappy or difficult relationship for a long time, and it feels like you can't do anything to change or improve things. If you are feeling stuck and don't seem to be able to sort things out, try talking to a counsellor or psychologist who can help you find ways of addressing your problems.

## If you want to talk to someone who can help:

Call the Depression Helpline on **0800 111 757**

Text The Lowdown team for free on **5626**

Or talk to your doctor

## Manage your work situation

It's very common for stress to be work-related – after all, your job is really important in your life. If things aren't going well at work, perhaps you are not feeling valued, or you are having disagreements with your workmates, or finding that you are working long hours for not much reward, you may need to create more of a balance between work and the things you enjoy doing. You may need to set limits on the hours you work, or the amount of responsibility you take on. Many workplaces offer limited free counselling or mediation services for their staff, and this can be very helpful if you are feeling stressed out about something at work.

## Get physically active

Building in daily physical exercise such as walking, swimming, gardening or going to the gym, can help relieve tension in your muscles, and relax your mind. Learning breathing exercises and muscle relaxation techniques (eg though yoga and meditation), can be very helpful and effective in reducing stress.

## Do the things you enjoy

If you find you are spending less time doing things you enjoy, and more time worrying about things, you may need to consciously build in enjoyable activities to your day or week. Make time to spend with friends, or go to the beach, or listen to music, or anything else that makes you feel good.

It can also be helpful to learn some relaxation techniques. You will find some useful methods on the NZ Guidelines Group website, [www.nzgg.org.nz](http://www.nzgg.org.nz), in the Consumer Resources section under Anxiety.

## + sleeping well

Getting enough sleep is important for maintaining good health. Lack of sleep increases your risk of getting depressed in the first place, and makes it harder to recover from depression. Depression can also cause sleeping problems.

Several things can disrupt regular sleep patterns. These include being sick, in pain, stressed, anxious or depressed. Sleep is important to help your body recover and recharge.

How much sleep is needed will vary from person to person, but getting a lot of sleep is less important than whether you're getting the right kind of sleep – known as 'deep sleep'.

Deep sleep usually occurs during the first five hours of the night. (So if you only sleep for four or five hours, you'll get as much deep sleep as someone who's sleeping for eight to ten hours). Deep sleep is best achieved when you have regular sleeping patterns.

### Tips to improve your sleep

If you have been having trouble sleeping for a while, you may need to 're-set your body clock'. Try the following suggestions:

- When you wake up, get up and out of bed as soon as you can – don't go back to sleep.
- Try and get up at the same time each morning, perhaps around 7am-7.30am, and go to bed each night around the same time too.
- Go outside in the fresh air and/or do something active soon after waking. Having some physical activity every day helps you to sleep too.
- Don't nap during the day. You'll be less tired when you go to bed, so it'll take you longer to fall asleep.

- Make time during the day to sort out the problems that you might worry about at night.
- Keep a "sleep-wake diary", which lists the hours you've been asleep and awake.
- Avoid drinks that contain caffeine after about 4.00pm (coffee, strong tea, coke, etc). Also avoid drinking more than two of these drinks per day.
- Avoid drinking alcohol or smoking before you go to bed. Alcohol may cause you to sleep less deeply and wake up more often. Smoking may put you on edge so you'll find it hard to get to sleep.
- Give yourself time to wind down before going to bed. Stop studying or working at least 30 minutes beforehand, and try to get to bed at the same time most nights.
- Avoid watching TV, reading or any other activity in bed (except sleep or sex) as this may make you restless when you try to sleep.
- Avoid taking sleeping pills. If you do need to, don't take them for more than a week because they can be addictive.
- Get yourself into a routine that you can follow every night before going to bed.
- Try to make your bedroom quiet, dim and cool.
- Avoid too many blankets or using electric blankets. If you're too hot, you don't go into deep sleep and you're more likely to have disturbing dreams.

## + getting help

**If you want to talk to a trained counsellor about how you're feeling, or you've got any questions, you can:**

- **Call the Depression Helpline on 0800 111 757**
- **Text The Lowdown team for free on 5626**

They can listen to your story, and come up with ideas about what might help. They can also put you in touch with health professionals close to where you live, if that's what you want.

**Or for more information you can visit:**

**[www.depression.org.nz](http://www.depression.org.nz) or [www.thelowdown.co.nz](http://www.thelowdown.co.nz)  
[www.nzgg.org.nz](http://www.nzgg.org.nz) - Consumer Resources**

The Ministry of Health would like to acknowledge information sourced from: NZ Mental Health Survey 2006, NZ Guidelines Group, Royal Australian and NZ College of Psychiatrists, MaGPIe Research Group, Beyond Blue (Australia).

For more information and fact sheets visit  
**[www.depression.org.nz](http://www.depression.org.nz)**