

Staying healthy and managing stress

Poor health and high stress levels affect the well being of individuals and can put others at risk.

Recognising stress

Stress can result from the accumulated strain of working too frequently or for too long in a difficult or frustrating environment such as a relief situation. This ultimately leads to 'burn out'.

Acute stress disorder can be caused through witnessing or personal experience of trauma as may occur in the aftermath of a disaster.

Post traumatic stress disorder can emerge weeks or months after experiencing trauma or develop as a result of persistent acute stress.

Signs of acute stress may include the following:

Physical	Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioural
Nausea	Bad concentration	Fear, anxiety	Hyperactivity
Fatigue	Poor memory	Guilt, hopelessness	Dangerous driving
Rapid heart rate	Confusion	Depression	Overwork
Sweats / chills	Fast/slow reaction	Resentment	Angry outbursts
Muscle tremors	Poor decision making	Anger, irritability	Argumentative
Nightmares			

Staying healthy and mitigating stress – advice for individuals

Humanitarian workers are at risk of becoming run down, stressed and prone to illness. You can mitigate these risks through simple measures:

- Get sufficient and regular sleep,
- If working long hours, take regular breaks and conserve energy,
- Eat well and avoid fatty, sugary foods,
- Limit alcohol and tobacco consumption,
- Avoid arbitrary use of medicines,
- Take regular exercise,
- Maintain a sense of humour
- Maintain a social life & contact with family
- Develop meaningful relationships,
- Think positively,
- Identify sources of stress,
- Recognise your limits and accept them,
- Manage your time and take time off,
- Try to be flexible and accept change,
- Avoid aggression and try to tolerate conflicting ideas.

Principles for managing stress by humanitarian agencies

1. Agency **accepts** and demonstrates **responsibility** for reducing, mitigating and responding to the effects of stress.
2. Thorough assessment of **staff suitability** during recruitment.
3. Effective pre-departure staff **briefing and training**.
4. **On-going monitoring** of stress levels amongst staff.
5. **Regular training** to support demands on staff working in a humanitarian context.
6. **Specific support** / provisions (extra leave entitlements, counselling) for traumatic incidents or stressful periods of work.
7. Individual staff operational and personal **de-briefings** on contract completion.
8. Commitment to **on-going support** of staff exposed to trauma or extreme stress as part of their work.

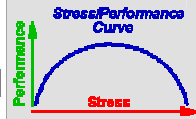
Adapted from © Antares Foundation (2006) 'Managing stress in humanitarian workers'

All In Diary CD Resources:

© Antares Foundation (2006) Managing Stress in Humanitarian Workers – guidelines for good practice
 © InterHealth (2006) Good Pressure!-Bad Stress!

Web links for further information

http://www.psychosocial.org/psychosocial/resources/field_aid_stressmgt.html
www.interhealth.org.uk ; www.antaresfoundation.org



Balancing pressure and stress

Stress is manageable.

Stress is a part of everyday life and essential to our survival.

Being challenged is stimulating and necessary for human development and growth.

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

Stress can be addictive and can contribute to addictive behaviour.

Failing to cope with continuous pressure is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of stress.

Failure to identify and manage stress can lead to more serious illness.