

Medicare  
stress



# What is stress?

**W**e generally say we are stressed when everything gets too much for us and we feel we cannot cope. Or when we are in a situation in which we feel agitated, angry, ready to explode or out of control.

Stress can have a positive function, motivating us into action or helping us to recognise and react to danger. But generally when we talk about stress we are talking about bad stress, which is unhealthy and if left unchecked can have serious consequences for our mental and physical health.

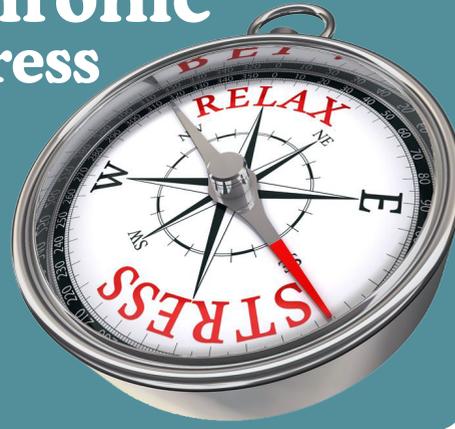
Stress can be acute – caused by the circumstances

of the moment, or chronic – a general state of stress that pervades our lives and all we do. Whether acute or chronic it is important to keep stress in check.

Stress has been linked to high blood pressure, heart disease, cancer, stroke, obesity and insomnia and it is estimated that one in five visits to the GP are stress related.

When you are stressed you experience a rush of hormones that elevate your heart rate, boosts your blood pressure and stop your digestion. Symptoms you may be more directly aware of include feelings of nervousness and anxiety, headaches, insomnia, nausea and inability to focus.

# Managing Chronic Stress



**Get your stress levels down and control chronic (ongoing) stress with these stress managers...**

## Take regular exercise

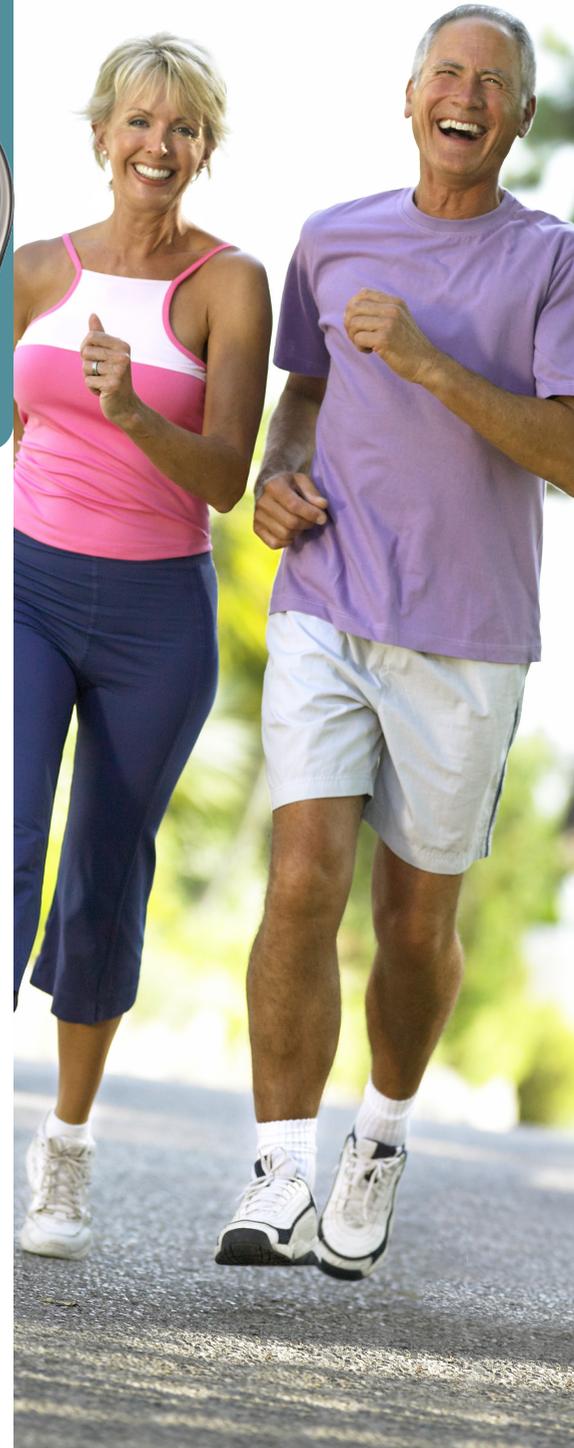
Exercise is excellent for helping you to manage stress. Your brain actually recognises exercise as a moment of stress – perhaps harking back to more primitive times it thinks you must either be fighting an enemy or fleeing from danger. So when you exercise a number of stress-fighting chemicals are released, including the protein BDNF (Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor), which has a repairing and restoring function, ANP, a hormone that helps control the brain's response to stress and endorphins, the feel-good chemicals, which also fight stress. This is why after exercise we often feel at ease and can think with more clarity.

## Be positive

Having a positive outlook on life helps reduce stress and leaves you better equipped to cope. Develop a more positive attitude by always looking for the good things in your life. Try writing down three good things about the day before you go to bed each night. This helps you focus on the positive.

## Laugh more

Laughter really is the best medicine. Studies have shown that laughing boosts stress-busting hormones and relaxation hormones – and the effect can last for up to 24 hours. So look for things that will make you laugh – watch funny films, seek out video clips to chuckle over on YouTube, switch on your favourite comedies on TV, or read an amusing book – whatever tickles your funny bone.



## Solve the problems you can solve and accept the things you can't change

In the words of the Dalai Lama: "If there is no solution to the problem then don't waste time worrying about it. If there is a solution to the problem then don't waste time worrying about it."

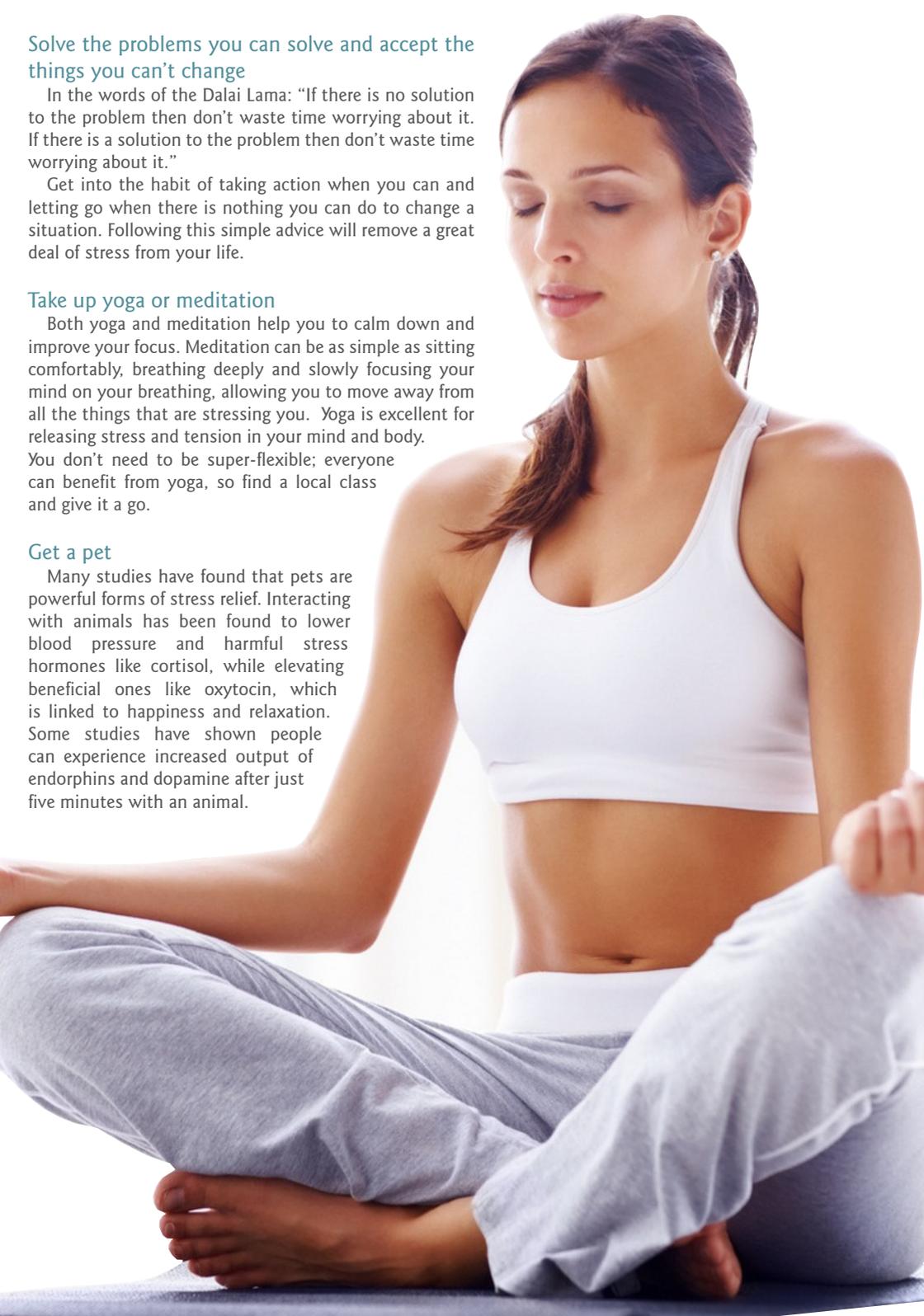
Get into the habit of taking action when you can and letting go when there is nothing you can do to change a situation. Following this simple advice will remove a great deal of stress from your life.

## Take up yoga or meditation

Both yoga and meditation help you to calm down and improve your focus. Meditation can be as simple as sitting comfortably, breathing deeply and slowly focusing your mind on your breathing, allowing you to move away from all the things that are stressing you. Yoga is excellent for releasing stress and tension in your mind and body. You don't need to be super-flexible; everyone can benefit from yoga, so find a local class and give it a go.

## Get a pet

Many studies have found that pets are powerful forms of stress relief. Interacting with animals has been found to lower blood pressure and harmful stress hormones like cortisol, while elevating beneficial ones like oxytocin, which is linked to happiness and relaxation. Some studies have shown people can experience increased output of endorphins and dopamine after just five minutes with an animal.



# Instant acute stress busters

**Try these quick stress busters for an instant calming effect when you find yourself in the middle of a stressful moment...**

### Take a deep breath

Slowing down your breathing and breathing deeply will instantly calm your body and help your mind relax. Take three deep breaths and release them slowly, while concentrating on your breathing.

### Speak slowly

Next time you are in a high stress situation try slowing down your speech. This will not only calm you and help you think more clearly but you will also appear less anxious and more in control as people tend to speak fast when they are under stress.

### Rub your ears

According to ancient Indian 'science of life' Ayurveda there are marma points, like acupuncture points, on the ears that when stimulated will ease tension. Rub the circumference of each ear for an instant calming effect.

### Leap into action

A quick burst of exercise helps release endorphins, which are natural stress relievers. Try 10 star jumps, 10 press-ups or run around the block.

### Posture check

If you are feeling stressed it is likely your body is stressed. So, perform a quick posture check. Stand up straight and relax any areas where you are holding tension. Relieving stress in the body will help to relieve it in the mind as well.

### Add to the pressure

Pressing on the right acupressure points can give you some instant stress relief. Try putting your left forefinger on the base of your skull, move it down the width of one finger, then move to the left the width of one finger. Place your right finger in the same spot on the right side. Press both points for between one and three minutes. Or find the stress relieving spots on your legs, four finger-widths below your kneecap and one finger-width to the outside of your leg, where you should feel a slight indentation. Press and hold for a minute or two.

### Open your chest

When we are stressed we tend to hunch up. By opening your chest and pushing your shoulders back you will release stress from the body, which in turn will relieve stress in the mind. Try putting your hands behind your back in a prayer position and tilt your head back. If you can't manage this just make a conscious effort to push your shoulders back and down and open your chest by tilting your head back.

# Stress busting foods



Certain foods can have an effect on our moods and help alleviate stress.

## Tea

Studies have shown that black tea has an effect on stress hormone levels in the body. Tea contains catechins, polyphenols, flavonoids and amino acids that affect the brain's neurotransmitters and ultimately reduce blood levels of the stress hormone cortisol.

## Complex Carbs

Complex carbohydrates boost serotonin levels, promoting a sense of calm and relaxation. Try whole-grain foods and cereals, such as whole-grain breads, oats and brown rice, as well as peas, beans and lentils.

## Vitamin C

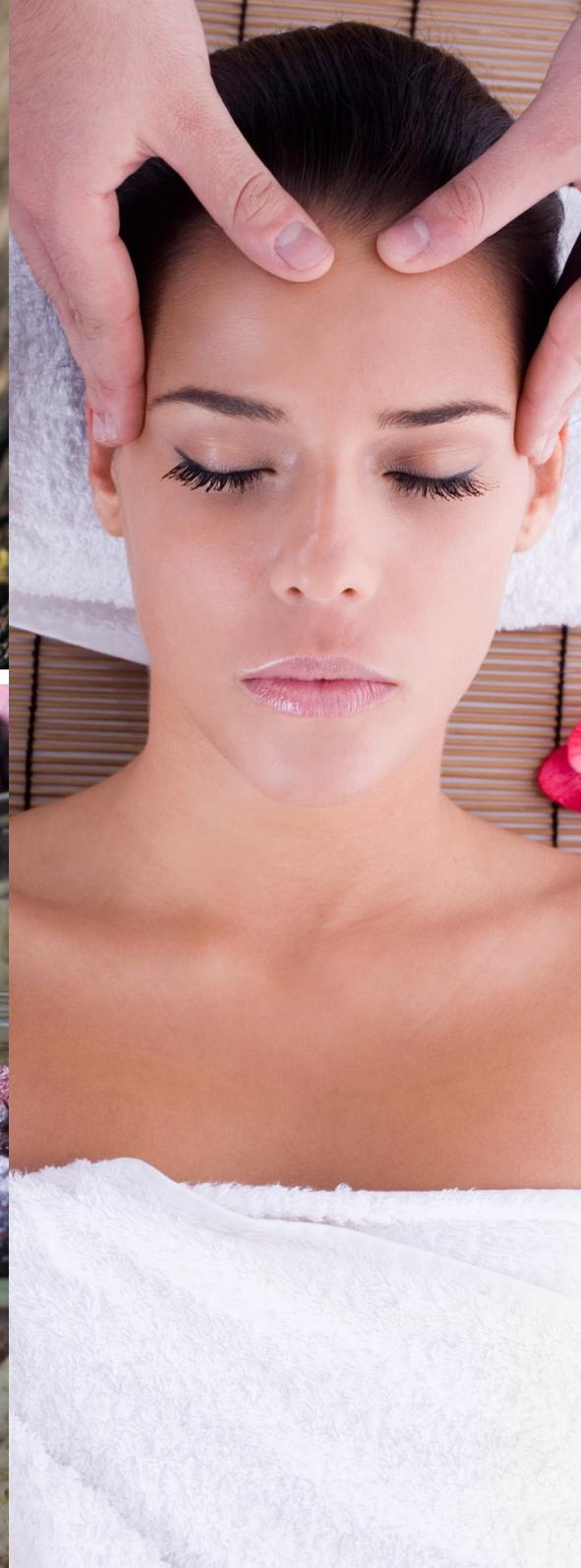
Research has found that vitamin C reduces the levels of stress hormones in the blood, which may alleviate the body's response to stress. Eat foods rich in vitamin C or take a supplement. Studies suggest that 1,000 mg of vitamin C is most helpful.

## Berries

Blueberries, blackberries and other berries are packed with vitamin C, making them excellent stress-busters. And they contain powerful antioxidants, which may help repair some of the damage done by stress. Stress causes the body to release free radicals, highly unstable oxygen molecules that can damage normal cells, and antioxidants help to neutralise those harmful molecules.



# Stress relieving therapies



## Aromatherapy

Certain scents can have calming effects that alleviate stress. Stress-reducing aromas include lavender, lemon balm, geranium and chamomile. Put a few drops of essential oil on a pad or cotton wool ball and leave by a fan or heater. As the air wafts over the oil, the scent will release its calming power. You can also try putting the balls in the car for stress-free motoring.

## Massage therapy

Massage therapy deeply relaxes your body and as it is hard to be mentally stressed when you are physically relaxed your mind also calms and de-stresses.

## Psychotherapy

It's good to talk and if you are having trouble dealing with stress talking to a psychotherapist can really help you to resolve issues and unwind. Psychotherapy is known as the 'talking cure', and lets you explore your worries and problems in a secure, impartial environment.

### De-stress with Medicare

Enjoy a **FREE** massage at Medicare and let our skilled massage therapist ease your stress away\*

### Have a **FREE** blood pressure check

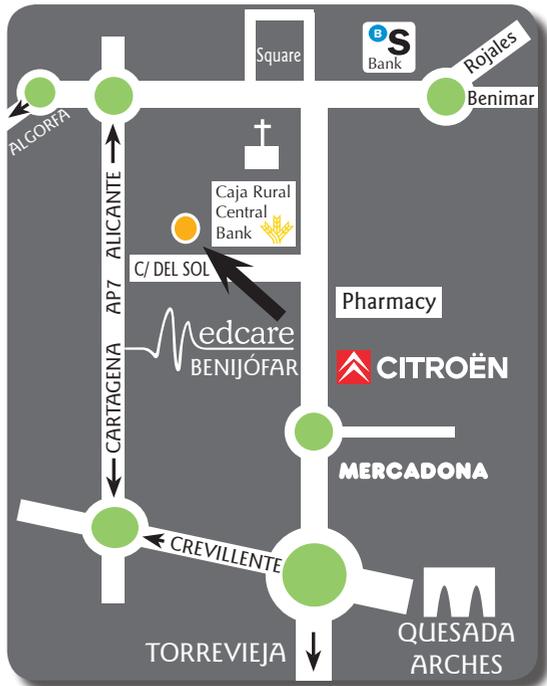
Book a consultation with our sympathetic psychotherapist to help manage your stress

\*Only for people who have not previously had a free massage at Medicare

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Calle Oslo 24, Alfaz de Pi

**966 860 258**

✉ [doctors@medcarespain.com](mailto:doctors@medcarespain.com)

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