



The **UN** Pocket Guide on **Stress Management**

Working for the UN in the field involves exposure to many types of stress: culture shock, hardship, danger, disease, loneliness, separation from your support base, exposure to human rights atrocities, and high work demands.

Stress can be cumulative: it piles up! Getting used to a high level of stress does not mean that you can cope with it. You can only take so much! **Everyone** has a breaking point! Your breaking point will differ from time to time, depending on your health, home, life, work demands, etc.

Chronic/cumulative and traumatic stress affects your whole being.

Your mind: concentration, memory. *Immediate reactions to trauma:* flashbacks, racing thoughts, impaired judgement.

Your body: headaches and other pains, and sleep, appetite and gastrointestinal problems. *Immediate reactions to trauma:* shivering, dizziness, rapid heartbeat, exhaustion, arousal.

Your emotions: anxiety, depression, withdrawal, irritability, anger. *Immediate reactions to trauma:* exhilaration, numbness, feelings of being overwhelmed, jumpy or unstable.

Your behaviour: abuse of alcohol, cigarettes and drugs, overwork, risk-taking.

Your values: disillusionment, doubting your beliefs, cynicism, loss of trust.

Your relationships: change in feelings, tension, misunderstandings.

If symptoms are disturbing or persist for more than one month, it could mean that you are heading for burnout. In this case and after exposure to a traumatic experience: seek professional help!

For help, information, advice or support call:

Penelope Curling, UNICEF Stress Counsellor

pcurling@unicef.org

+1 212 824 6902

+1 917 815 3843

UNSECOORD Stress Counselling Unit

+1 917 367 4065

You **WILL** be affected by stress, but you **CAN** also learn to do something about it!

Easy steps to reduce stress

Take care of yourself: You owe it to yourself and those who care about you.

Get enough rest: even when the work demands are high. You are NOT superman/woman. You need to set limits.

Eat and drink healthily and regularly.

Monitor your alcohol and tobacco intake: They may help you cope in the short term, but in the long run they reduce your body's ability to deal with stress.

Exercise: even if it's just a walk or sit-ups. It is possible to exercise even under the hardest conditions, and it WILL help you work off stress you've been under, and help you to be in better shape to deal with the stress to come.

Communicate and share your feelings: Talk to a colleague you trust, e-mail or phone a friend, write about or draw what you're feeling. Make an agreement with a buddy for mutual support.

Review how you're coping: Check with others for an objective view.

Quiet time: Meditate, pray, listen to music, focus on the beauty that is always a part of life.

Protect yourself: When stressed you are more likely to engage in risky behaviour, drink more and have random sex. Make sure you do not come home with any sexually transmitted diseases: **use a condom!**

You do have coping skills already. Use whatever it is that works best for you. These tips really do work and will help you to do what you're doing well, and keep on being able to do it well.

Helping someone else deal with a traumatic event:

- ◆ Make sure basic needs are met (medical, nutrition, shelter).
- ◆ Provide practical help (contacting family, colleagues, etc.).
- ◆ Provide access to factual information about the event.
- ◆ Provide structure (break down tasks into smaller, simple ones; encourage a return to normal routines).
- ◆ Make information available about possible immediate and long-term stress reactions (see above).
- ◆ Offer assurance that reactions he or she may experience are normal, and should fade with time.
- ◆ Don't expect every person to be open to counselling. Be available and supportive, and listen actively and non-judgementally.

Accept that you might be strongly affected by your own experiences helping others: focus on the positive changes as well as accepting the pain. Give it a place in your life, and move on.