

Signs and symptoms

The following is a range of signs and symptoms of stress and depression. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, help is at hand.

Common signs of stress

- Restlessness
- Feeling tired easily
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Irritability
- Headaches
- Muscle tension and occasional pain in the neck, shoulders or jaw
- Sleep difficulties, problems falling asleep and not sleeping well
- Changes in behaviour or in relationships with family and friends
- Thoughts of fear or worry, negative thoughts
- Feelings of desperation that things won't work out.

Common signs of depression

- Feelings of sadness
- Fatigue or slowing down
- Restlessness
- Loss of interest in work
- Eating too much or too little
- Sleeping too much or not at all
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Thinking negative thoughts

What can I do if I'm stressed?

You can fight stress by taking good care of yourself. Here are suggestions to help:

- **Deal with tasks** – Farmers, for instance have particularly busy times of the year. Break down large tasks into smaller more manageable ones. Don't try and squeeze more work into a day than you can manage.

- **Take breaks** – We all need a balance between hard work and time out to take it easy. Build in breaks from work during the day. Plan to take time off after long periods of hard work and get away by yourself or with friends or family.
- **Develop other interests** – Going for a walk or getting involved in activities like darts, road bowls, aerobics, fishing, golfing or playing cards. Taking part in classes/courses is a great way to meet other people and relax.
- **Meet friends and family** – Spend time with them – listen, laugh, share advice, difficulties and information. You never know, they might be going through the same!
- **Eat well** – Healthy food is essential fuel for the body. The better the input, the better the output. When we eat well we have more energy to respond to the day's work.
- **Sleep well** – A good night's sleep refreshes the mind. Things always seem worse when we are tired. Most of us need at least eight hours sleep each night.
- **Get active** – Regular exercise helps you feel better and eases tension at the same time. It can distract you from your worries, give you more energy and improve your fitness and overall strength.
- **Try not to rely on drugs, alcohol or smoking** – These are short-term solutions to stress. As well as the health risks involved, they won't change what is causing the stress.
- **Learning to accept the things we cannot change** – Look for the best in people and situations. Remember, no one is perfect. Realise that financial and time pressure challenges due to weather, crop prices, and market demand are beyond your control.
- **Ask for help!** – Let someone know how you feel – Choose someone you can be honest with, and then explain your problems and discuss solutions with them.
- **Try writing it down** – Sometimes it can be hard to talk to someone. Try putting on paper what your difficulties are and how you feel about things.

Remember! Everybody feels stressed and anxious from time to time. A certain level of stress is normal and can even help us go about our daily lives. Sometimes, however, being stressed for a long time can lead us to unhappiness and may even lead to depression.

Who to contact if you need urgent help

Contact your GP, or an “out-of-hours” GP
see www.hse.ie

Contact Samaritans 24/7
on freephone **116 123** or
email jo@samaritans.ie
for emotional support

Go to, or contact, the
Emergency Department of
your nearest hospital
see www.hse.ie

Call the emergency services
on 999 or 112

For information on support services for issues like abuse, bereavement, depression, loneliness, suicide and more visit
www.yourmentalhealth.ie

Farm & Rural Stress

Help is at hand



Living in the country? Feeling down?

You're not the only one.

People's reasons for living in the country are many and varied. Whether you were born and reared there or made a deliberate decision to move, people tend to associate living in the country with having a better environment, more space, being more relaxed and possibly being safer. While these facts to a large extent are true, country life does not always live up to its perceived idyllic image and there can be many associated difficulties with living in a rural area.

Difficulties of living in a rural area

People living in the country experience the same stresses and worries as everyone else. Financial worries, difficulties at work or at home, domestic violence, relationship problems, issues around sexual identity, bullying, racism, abuse etc. affect people regardless of where they live. However, there are other difficulties that are primarily associated with living in a rural area such as little or no access to services, lack of public transport, isolation and loneliness. These issues are often considered to be problems associated with growing older but this is not the case, they affect people of all ages and occupations.

Time for change

Rural communities have changed dramatically in recent years but often, what hasn't changed, is that people feel there is a stigma around asking for help or talking about their problems. What is important to realise is that most people at some time or other feel worried, stressed or even depressed about a particular problem in their life. It doesn't matter whether you are young, old, single, married or separated, or what you do for a living, the same problems affect people regardless. What matters is that you seek help and support.



How do I know if my situation is making me feel stressed or depressed?

Do any of the following sound
familiar to you?

Seamus, farmer aged 66

Seamus has a small dairy herd and some beef cattle. He and his wife now live alone. He has one daughter working abroad, and his son lives and works in the city. He has worked hard all his life but he is now faced with the prospect of having to sell the stock and rent the land as his children have no interest in farming. Seamus is very proud and continues to work even though his failing health makes it difficult for him. He won't ask for help. The thought of selling up breaks his heart, as the farm has been in his family for generations. He feels very let down and angry sometimes that he has worked so hard for his family and now they don't want to know.

Maureen, widow aged 74

Maureen lives alone as her husband died last year. Her two sons moved away, got married and have their own families. They don't visit very often. Maureen is lonely and misses her husband. They never drank or went to the pub much but they used to enjoy the odd weekend away and often went for drives. They both enjoyed bingo and used to play once a week in town. She doesn't drive and she has therefore become increasingly housebound. There is no local public transport and Maureen relies on a few good neighbours to take her to the local shop or to mass on Sunday. However, she hates to be a burden and doesn't always take them up on their offer of a lift. The thought of old age on her own is sometimes overwhelming. She is frightened of being in the house alone and by the stories she hears on the news about older people being burgled and attacked.



Padraig, welder aged 25

Padraig lives at home with his parents. His older brother is married and lives in the city with his wife and two young children. Padraig has a strained relationship with his father. He goes to the pub most nights rather than sit at home. His first serious relationship recently ended and he is finding it hard to cope since the breakup. He thinks his friends will make fun of him if he talks about how he is feeling so he says nothing. He feels things are quite bleak and has thought about suicide.

Pauline, housewife aged 34

Pauline has three children under the age of five, one with special needs. She lives in a nice house on her husband's family farm five miles from the nearest town. Pauline doesn't know many of her neighbours. Most days she is alone with the kids while her husband is out working; he normally has the car for farm business. He goes to the local pub most nights for a few pints. Pauline doesn't go with him because it is usually all men talking about farming and cattle prices etc. In recent months, Pauline has become increasingly isolated and fed-up with daily life and struggles to manage the children. She is irritable, dissatisfied, constantly tired and finds it hard to face the day. Pauline feels she might be depressed but is not sure how to go about changing things.



Stress and depression

Whatever your situation, however great or small your particular problem or concern is, it can cause you to feel stressed or depressed.



Stress

Stress can be negative or positive and is a normal human reaction to events that we perceive as challenges or threats. Positive stress helps us to overcome daily challenges and accomplish things we thought were impossible. However, when a difficult situation goes on a long time and seems to be beyond your control it can result in negative stress or 'distress'. People experience stress in a variety of ways. Sometimes people respond by isolating themselves or by trying to ignore the effect that stress is having on them, or the people around them. Other people become angry and some take all the blame upon themselves.

Depression

Depression is not just 'feeling blue' or 'down in the dumps' - we all have bad days or even a few bad days. People who are depressed may experience a number of symptoms nearly all day, every day, for a number of weeks - making it hard to get on with everyday life. It is important to remember that depression is not your fault and is very treatable.