

COPING WITH STRESS ON THE FARM?



The farming community face stressors that townies don't...weather doesn't do what it needs to, the unpredictability of working with animals, never-ending farm work to be done, seasonal employment, unfair or unequal returns for investment and effort, too much responsibility and/or too much uncertainty to mention a few. It is easy to let it get to you.

If you or someone you know frequently feels frazzled or overwhelmed, you can help protect yourself and others from the stresses farm life throws at you by learning how to recognise the symptoms of stress and taking steps to reduce and manage it.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is a normal physical response to changes or events that make you feel threatened or upset. When you sense danger – whether it's real or imagined – the body's natural defences automatically kick into high gear; this is known as a "fight or flight" reaction, or stress response. It's the body's way of protecting you from harm.

This response helps you to stay focused, energetic, and alert, improving your ability to respond intuitively to a situation, for example, being able to slam on your brakes to avoid an accident or keeping you on your toes when you are kicking a game-winning conversion.

The danger lies in too much stress or stress over a long time. Beyond a certain point, stress stops being helpful and starts causing damage to your health, your mood, your productivity, your relationships, and the quality of your life. Everyone experiences and deals with stress in different ways.

WHAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO STRESS?

In the rural workplace, examples of things that can cause stress include:

- Weather not doing what is needed.
- Time pressures, "too much work, too little time" (especially during calving, shearing, silage, cropping).
- Financial pressures and uncertain incomes (for example, paying the mortgage, supporting children, buying property or shares, buying stock or feed, managing staff).
- Unfair and/or unequal returns in the market.
- Rising costs and lack of support from being geographically isolated (for example, education, health care, transport, communications, social services).
- Relationship issues with boss, staff, neighbours, and family.
- Long hours, shift work.
- Having unclear roles and responsibilities, a promotion with more responsibility.
- Complicated or unpleasant tasks, poor training.
- Feeling isolated or undervalued.
- Bullying or harassment.
- Physical environment (for example, noise, dirt, dangers, poor equipment, working in bad weather, difficult animals).
- Juggling work and home life.
- Technology – it can be so frustrating and stressful, especially if it breaks down.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WARNING SIGNS OF STRESS?

Every person has a different reaction to stress, here are some of the more common warning signs that it's time to manage your stress and consider getting help:

- Loss of enjoyment and interest in activities usually enjoyed.
- Loss of energy and constant tiredness.
- Persistent worrying about little things.
- Changes in sleeping patterns: sleeping difficulties despite physical exhaustion, or sometimes sleeping too much.
- Indigestion or stomach upsets.
- Muscle tension and pains (for example, lower back, chest, shoulders, joints, nervous "twitches" or muscle spasms).
- Skin itches or rashes for no apparent reason.
- Frequent sickness (for example, cold, flu and stomach bugs).
- Shortness of breath or shallow breathing.
- Memory or concentration problems.
- Doing risky or careless things (excessive drinking, gambling, drug use).
- Continuous feelings of anxiousness and tension for no obvious reason.
- Feeling irritable, impatient or teary with no apparent reason.
- Finding it hard to make decisions and concentrate.
- A sad mood that will not go away despite good things happening.
- Loss of appetite or over-eating.
- Isolation by avoiding people, places and events.

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THIS PAMPHLET CONTAINS SOME GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT STRESS AND ITS MANAGEMENT. MEDICAL ADVICE SHOULD BE SOUGHT FROM YOUR DOCTOR.

[New Zealand Government](http://www.govt.nz)



WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT STRESS?

In some instances you may be able to remove the cause of stress. However, it is not always practical to change your workplace, where you live, or your relationships – but you can manage your body's reaction to stress by learning new ways to manage or cope differently. What you do may make the difference.

Here are some ways to help manage stress:

Talk about your worries: Spend time with someone you trust. Talk to a friend, partner, parents, counsellor or clergy. Talk to your mates, you might be surprised to find out that they are or have experienced similar difficulties.

Limit your expectations: Be selective and use your energy to do the most important and achievable tasks. Set goals you can reach. Do not blame yourself if you don't reach all your goals, these may be possible next time.

Eat well: Eat a variety of fresh foods in a balanced diet. Some foods actually cause increased tension, for example, coffee, tea, chocolate, alcohol and soft drinks. These are foods we crave when we are stressed so be aware and try to limit your intake of them.

Make time to exercise, take time out, and spend time with family and friends: Make some time (3 times a week minimum) for exercise such as walking, swimming or something you enjoy. Give yourself a breather now and then. Get away from the farm for a few hours or a day. Spend time with family/whanau and friends or find ways of meeting new friends.

Organise your work habits: Get up 5 or 10 minutes earlier so you don't have to rush; break large projects down into more manageable smaller tasks. Spend 5 to 10 minutes at the end of the day preparing for the next day. This helps you gain control of your life.

Solve problems: Try to find a solution to conflict; learn to be more assertive and say NO.

Get sufficient sleep: To help sleep, take a walk in the evening, practise relaxation, make your bedroom a sleeping space only (remove the TV).

Put fun and laughter in your life: This has proven to be good for health and it makes you feel good.

If you or someone you know is experiencing high and persistent levels of stress and would like further information or support, talk to your doctor about how you are feeling. Your doctor will let you know what options are available.

“When you are working by yourself, as many farmers are, it is important to get off the farm – go to the bach or play sport. I isolated myself and it was the worst thing I did”.

Ken Ballantyne (Ken and Sue Ballantyne are the 2010 Ballance Farm Environment Awards Supreme Winners in the Horizons region)

“If I ever felt a downer coming on I would pick up the phone and call someone, just to talk and get things back in perspective. The support from friends was huge once I was prepared to let them know what was going on”.

Lindsay Wright (former Wendonside farmer and Chairman of the Southland Rural Support Trust)

INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Other avenues for information and support include:

Depression information	www.depression.org.nz
Depression Helpline	0800 111 757
Like Minds Information Line	0800 102 107
Lifeline	0800 543 354
Victim Support	0800 842 846
Relationship Services	0800 735 283
Youthline	0800 376 633
The LowDown, for youth	www.thelowdown.co.nz
Healthline	0800 611 116
Alcohol Drug Helpline	0800 787 797
Gambling Helpline	0800 654 655
Rural Women New Zealand	0800 256 467
Federated Farmers	0800 327 646
Supporting Families in Mental Illness	www.supportingfamiliesnz.org.nz

If you or someone you know needs urgent help, call 111

This pamphlet was produced with help from Rural Women New Zealand, Like Minds and the Rural Support Trusts.

For copies of this pamphlet please contact the Ministry for Primary Industries on 0800 00 83 33 or email brand@mpi.govt.nz

RURAL SUPPORT TRUSTS

Rural Support Trusts are a nationwide network which assist rural communities and individuals during and following adverse events such as floods and droughts. As well as this, many of the trusts also provide their services in times of general hardship.

The services that the trusts provide vary depending on funding and focus, but in general they offer:

- **Help during and after an adverse weather or environmental event:** The trusts work with local Civil Defence and can provide information, and assist in emergency and ongoing help. This may include rescue and movement of stock, financial support, labour, or other needs.
- **Support during personal, and/or financial difficulties:** The trusts can help rural people by either providing or facilitating referral to professional counselling, financial advice, and farm management expertise. Help can also include mentors or colleagues from rural backgrounds to talk to, facilitation of financial assistance, Work and Income support, and labour assistance.

The trusts' members are local people who have themselves faced the challenges rural life brings.

Free and confidential help is available through the trusts' coordinators. Contact is one-on-one at a place that suits you. Please refer to www.rural-support.org.nz for the services your local Rural Support Trust provides.

To contact a Rural Support Trust near you please call

**0800 787 254
(0800 RURAL HELP)**

**RuralSupport**

