



NATIONAL CENTRE FOR FARMER HEALTH 

Dealing with farmers in crisis – mental health

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Learning Objectives

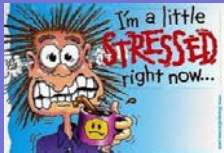
- What is stress?
- Stress in farming life
- Working with the DASS21
- Are you an active listener?
- Case studies
- Signs, symptoms & hazards of stress
- Seeking help

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What is stress?

- Stress is arousal of mind and body in response to demands on them
- When arousal is too high or too low distress occurs
- Stress can be helpful as well as harmful





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Stress in farming life

- ❖ Increased agricultural stressors (flood, drought, financial stress)
- ❖ When you have low control over tasks and the tasks are of high demand, stress increases

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Low Strain Jobs

These jobs are defined by few psychological demands and a high level of control in the workplace. As expected, workers have higher than average levels of health and happiness. Example jobs include natural scientist, software designer, and architect.



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Working with the DASS21

- Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scales
- Developed by Lovibond and Lovibond
- Complete all items in the questionnaire
- Add up questions on stress, then for anxiety and finally depression & note scores, remembering to multiply by 2
- Your results are confidential

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Scoring the DASS21

	Depression	Anxiety	Stress
Normal	0-9	0-7	0-14
Mild	10-13	8-9	15-18
Moderate	14-20	10-14	19-25
Severe	21-27	15-19	26-33
Extremely Severe	28+	20+	37+

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Working with the DASS21

- Be sure to check the DASS21 – 20 min assessment
- More probably this will be the participant's first opportunity to discuss how the flood has effected their mental health
- Be an active listener (listening activity)

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Listening Tips

- Be present and pay attention – face the speaker
- Watch your body language and eye contact.
- Smile or laugh when appropriate
- Show you understand – nod, 'uh-huh'
- Keep an open mind
- Repeat key information back to speaker – clarification
- Summarise

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Case Studies

- What signs and symptoms could your participant have? What issues could the participant raise?
- Write down what the participant's family is experiencing.
- What would you suggest to the participant to help with their stress?

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Warning signs of stress

- Lack of energy, not interested in socialising
- Difficulty remembering
- Lack of interest in sex
- Sleeping problems - early waking/over sleeping
- Irritability - short temper
- Headaches
- Stomach churning
- Heart palpitations
- Thoughts of suicide

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BRAIN AND NERVES
Headaches, feelings of despair, lack of energy, sadness, nervousness, anger, irritability, increased or decreased eating, trouble concentrating, memory problems, trouble sleeping, mental health problems (such as panic attacks, anxiety disorders and depression)

SKIN
Acne and other skin problems

MUSCLES AND JOINTS
Muscle aches and tension (especially in the neck, shoulders and back), increased risk of reduced bone density

HEART
Faster heartbeat, rise in blood pressure, increased risk of high cholesterol and heart attack

STOMACH
Nausea, stomach pain, heartburn, weight gain


PANCREAS
Increased risk of diabetes

INTESTINES
Diarrhoea, constipation and other digestive problems

REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM
For women: irregular or more painful periods, reduced sexual desire. For men: impotence, lower sperm production, reduced sexual desire

IMMUNE SYSTEM
Lowered ability to fight or recover from illness


Rebutals – Images courtesy of Mental Health America
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Hazards of ongoing stress

- Depression, anxiety
- Substance abuse, alcohol, smoking, drugs, overeating
- Domestic violence
- Relationship breakdown
- Increased risk of accident and injury
- Suicide
- Illness - increased heart disease and mental illness

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Hazards of ongoing stress

- Farmers experiencing high economic related stress are 2-3 times more likely to experience a serious injury than farmers not experiencing high stress
- Impaired concentration leads to accidents
- High stress reduces neural efficiency and ability to learn and remember

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Tips - 'good thinking' ANT and PETs

- Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANT)
 - 'I cant cope'
 - 'This always happens to me'
 - 'Here we go again'
 - 'Stevens in a terrible mood – must be something I did'
- Positive emotions and thoughts (PET)
 - Start with positive affirmations
 - 'We run a good farm'
 - 'My daughter took her first step'
 - 'We are capable farmers'
- Squash the ANTS
- Change your ANTS to PETS

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Managing stress – avoid burn out

- Be aware of & control your stressors
- Take care of yourself - diet
- Deep breathing
- Laugh- funny jokes, movies (releases endorphins)
- Sleep, relaxation, meditation
- Health buffers – exercise releases endorphins
- Life Balance
- Handout – "Finding your focus: What's driving you?" 

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