

# Don't stress it

## *The Health Column*

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As a nation we are becoming more stressed, a survey last year highlights just how dramatic this trend is.

Undertaken by the Australian Psychological Society, the study showed that in 2013, Australians reported significantly lower levels of wellbeing and significantly higher levels of stress and distress than in 2012 and 2011.

In fact, almost three-quarters of Australians (73%) reported that stress was having at least some impact with almost one in five (17%) reporting that stress was having a strong to very strong impact on their physical health.

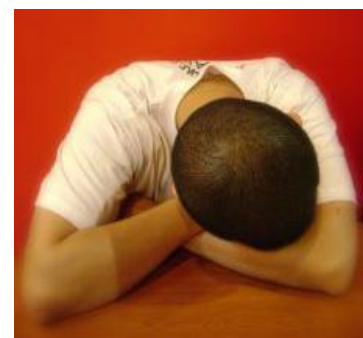
Additionally, significantly more Australians (65% 2013 vs. 60% 2012) reported that current stress was affecting their mental health, with one in five people reporting it had a strong to very strong impact on their mental health. One in four (24%) Australians reported mental health issues as a source of stress.

And we are looking to self-treat stress with significantly more Australians having reported visiting social networking sites, eating or sleeping more to manage stress than in previous years.

The factors that are causing this increased stress are often everyday things which we can't really avoid, with finances, family and health issues ranking as the top causes of stress for Australians.

Working Australians reported significantly lower overall workplace wellbeing in 2013 compared with findings in previous years.

In addition, working Australians reported significantly lower levels of job satisfaction and significantly lower levels of interest in their jobs than in the previous two years. Generally, working women were significantly more likely than working men to report that they felt valued and supported to do their job.



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The level of stress is increasingly affecting our mental health and the study found as a nation last year we reported significantly higher levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms than in the previous two years:

- 14% of Australians reported depressive symptoms in the severe to extremely severe range.
- 12% of Australians reported anxiety symptoms in the severe to extremely severe range.
- Younger adults continued to report significantly higher levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms compared with older Australians.

- Unemployed Australians and students (18+) reported the highest level of depressive and anxiety symptoms.

Stress, of course, can often be managed and Australians tend to turn on the TV as the first point of a management regimen. The study found watching TV or movies was the most popular activity for managing stress among Australians with 88% of us opting for this method.

Spending time with family and friends (82%), listening to music (81%), focusing on the positives (81%) and reading (77%) were also popular methods of managing stress.

Learning to handle stress in healthy ways is very important. Fortunately, it is easy to learn simple techniques that help. These include recognising and changing the behaviours that contribute to stress, as well as techniques for reducing stress once it has occurred.

For example it is important to identify warning signs that reveal you are getting stressed, to identify the situations that trigger excessive stress, and take steps to reduce their frequency or impact, and to monitor negative 'self-talk' that may be contributing to unhappy feelings.

Also, we must look after our health, by eating well, exercising and undertaking calming activities as well as investing time with people we care about, who care about us.

Sometimes this is not enough and seeking help from health professionals is necessary. Your pharmacist is a very good point of call for help and advice in managing stress. Your pharmacy is your health destination and your pharmacist is there to provide advice, counselling and professional services along with dispensing prescription medicines.

In addition, you can get more detailed information about stress management in pharmacies around Australia providing Self Care health information as these have fact cards on the subject including specific information on *Relaxation techniques* and *Post-traumatic stress disorder*.

Ring 1300 369 772 or log onto the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia website at [www.psa.org.au](http://www.psa.org.au) and click on Self Care then 'Use the Self Care Pharmacy Finder' for the location of your nearest Self Care pharmacy.