

## Stress

There are noted risk factors, both physical and mental, associated with farming. Research indicates that on-going mental distress leads to anxiety and depression. Mental distress also leads to increased risk of accidental injury. Mental distress from farming can arise from on-going work time pressure, bureaucracy, financial pressure, work unpredictability and the presence of farm hazards. The juggling of such competing demands can accumulate to the point that it can lead to stress, and poor mental health.

One of the more general definitions of stress is the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure.

A certain amount of stress is a normal part of everyday living. A certain degree of stress can be positive, making us more alert and helping us perform better in certain situations, such stress is only healthy if it is short-lived.

Unfortunately, excessive or prolonged stress can lead to debilitating illnesses such as heart disease and mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

### Awareness of stress symptoms

Stress symptoms are warning signs that indicate that something needs to be changed. The signs of stress will vary, some of which can often overlap.

Physical symptoms - can include headaches, chronic tiredness and fatigue, insomnia, musculoskeletal aches and pains, stomach and bowel problems, hypertension, rapid heart rate, panic attacks, weak immune system.

Emotional symptoms - can include depression, anxiety, worry, fear, feelings of powerlessness and being overwhelmed, feeling trapped, frustrated, irritable or angry, loneliness, grief and feeling like crying a lot.

Cognitive symptoms - can include obsessive thinking, negative thinking, poor short-term memory, difficulty concentrating, catastrophising, mind reading, black and white thinking – interpret things as all good or all bad, unable to see options.

Behavioural symptoms - can include being angry with other people, inability to make decisions, chronic complaining, procrastination, withdrawal from family, friends, lack of self-care, compulsive behaviours, changes in eating patterns, increased alcohol and caffeine consumption, gambling and other addictions.

### Practical Ways of Personal Stress Management

Whenever there is a feeling of being overwhelmed by stress it is helpful to have a range of practical strategies to reduce its impact.

- Don't ignore signs that you are stressed
- Focus on what you can do to work through problems and what support is available
- Talk to someone about how you are feeling
- Try relaxation exercises

he 'Take Five Steps to Wellbeing' model is one such strategy which you can find in the appendix of this resource.

### **Where can I find out more about managing stress?**

#### **Public Health Agency**

Free stress control classes are delivered across Northern Ireland.

For more information visit <https://ni.stresscontrol.org>

[https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/Steps\\_for\\_stress\\_1%2020\\_final.pdf](https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/Steps_for_stress_1%2020_final.pdf)

#### **Rural Support**

If you are experiencing stress or worry in relation to the farm Rural Support can offer free, independent and confidential support from a farm business mentor, experienced in agriculture and finance.

**[www.ruralsupport.org.uk](http://www.ruralsupport.org.uk)**

Freephone Helpline:

0800 138 1678 (Mon- Fri 9am to 9pm)