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# Foreword from the Farm Safety Foundation

*UK farmers are renowned for the attention they give to their livestock, crops and machinery, but they do not have such a good track record when it comes to taking care of their own wellbeing.*

*Levels of depression in the industry are thought to be increasing and suicide rates in agricultural workers are among the highest in any occupational group (Office of National Statistics). According to the HSE Helping GB Work Well Strategy, difficulties with mental health and depression, in particular, affects 1 in 5 people - this could equate to 20% of farming workforce.*

*In an industry with the poorest safety record of any occupation in the UK, stress can be a factor in many of the accidents, injuries and illnesses taking place on farms. Stress is something that many farmers face at some point and is an important contributor to mental health problems.*



# What is stress and what can cause it?

The Health and Safety Executive<sup>1</sup> defines workplace stress as ‘The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work’

The response to stress is based on the ‘fight’ or ‘flight’ response:



**heart rate  
increases**



**adrenalin is  
produced**



**nervous system  
is activated**

If stress persists the body’s resources become depleted and the risk of mental and physical health issues increases.

**Farm stressors - things that could cause you to feel stressed, include the following<sup>2</sup>:**

▶ **Major life event**

Death of a co-worker or a farmer you know, life threatening accident, serious injury.

▶ **Chronic strains**

Problems that you experience over time, such as ongoing high workload, financial pressure, isolation, livestock disease, concerns about legislation and farm succession.

▶ **Daily hassles**

Relatively minor events that can be troubling such as arguing with a co-worker, dealing with paperwork, or a piece of machinery breaking down.

▶ **Ambient stressors**

Hazards in the environment such as the risks involved in operating heavy machinery, bad weather, excessive noise and exposure to chemicals.

**STRESS AND SAFETY**

Stress can lead to problems concentrating, reduced alertness, an increased tendency to rush, and can compromise your situation awareness<sup>3</sup>

**A stressed farmer is a farmer potentially at risk of injury or accident!**



# What are the **WARNING SIGNS** of stress?



Although everyone's signs of stress are individual to them – below are some key signs to look out for. Most people will experience some of these signs during times of stress.

Physical Changes	How you might feel	How you might behave
Problems sleeping	Overwhelmed or overburdened	Difficulty making decisions
Feeling tired a lot of the time	Irritable, wound up	Avoiding situations that are troubling you
Heart beating fast	Anxious, nervous or afraid	Unable to concentrate
Headaches	Like your mind is racing and you can't switch your thoughts off	Worrying a lot of the time
Muscle tension	Difficulty enjoying yourself	Snapping at people or avoiding talking to people
Feeling sick or dizzy	Depressed, sad or low in mood	Eating more or less
Blurred eyesight or sore eyes	A sense of dread	Sleeping more or less
Indigestion or heartburn	Worried	Drinking alcohol or smoking more
Diarrhoea or constipation	Lonely	Restless – difficult to sit still
Less interest or enjoyment in sex	Like your sense of humour or sense of fun has been lost	Taking risks you wouldn't usually take

# STRESS & MENTAL HEALTH

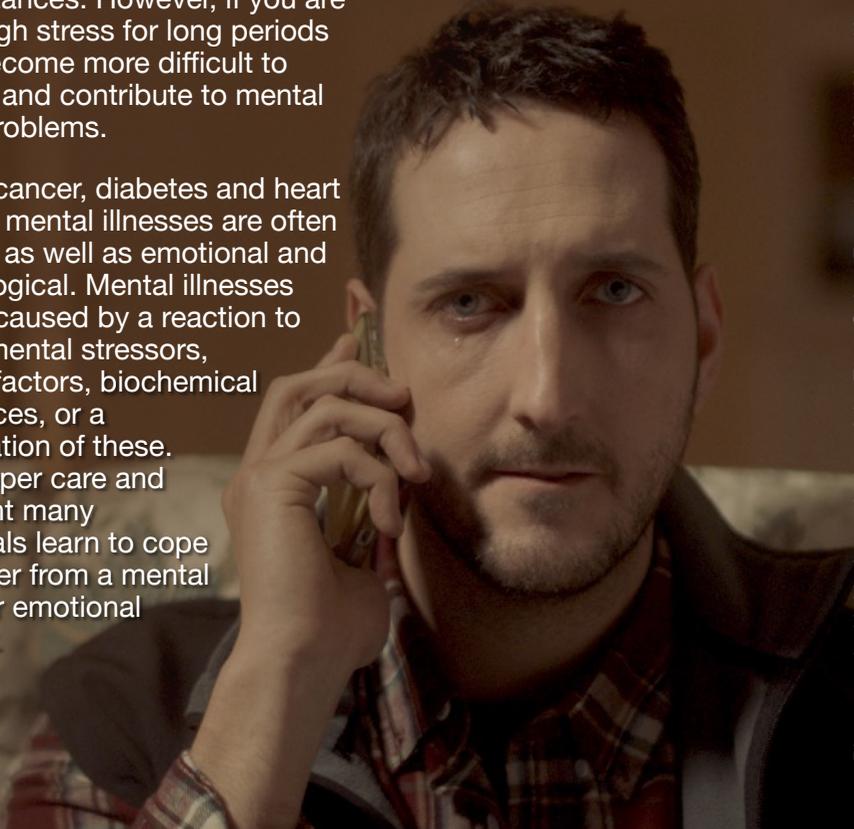
Many people believe that poor mental health is rare and “happens to someone else.” In fact, poor mental health is the biggest health topic in the UK at present - one in four people have been diagnosed with a mental illness and, in the farming community, mental health issues continue to be of great concern (including depression).

It is a normal reaction to experience episodes of stress in response to difficult circumstances. However, if you are under high stress for long periods it can become more difficult to manage and contribute to mental health problems.

As with cancer, diabetes and heart disease, mental illnesses are often physical as well as emotional and psychological. Mental illnesses may be caused by a reaction to environmental stressors, genetic factors, biochemical imbalances, or a combination of these. With proper care and treatment many individuals learn to cope or recover from a mental illness or emotional disorder.

## REMEMBER:

- ✓ Look out for the signs and symptoms of stress in yourself
- ✓ Learn to spot changes in others (health, personality, behaviour) that might signal a need for help
- ✓ Taking the time to talk to others can help to develop a support network that can benefit everyone



# FOUR TIPS FOR COPING WITH STRESS



**TALK ABOUT IT:** Talk to friends, family and co-workers about the source of your stress. You can also join farming forums and facebook groups to chat to other farmers. They may have useful advice, and be able to provide support.



**TAKE A BREAK:** It's difficult to relax while on the farm as there is always plenty to do. Try to schedule regular breaks where you leave the farm for a period of time (anything from a few hours to a weekend away). A short time away can help you come back with a fresh perspective.



**LOOK AFTER YOURSELF:** Stress can have a physical toll, it's important that you eat a healthy diet, take part in physical exercise and ensure you have sufficient time to sleep. Making time to take care of yourself will help you stay strong in the face of stress.



**RELAXATION:** There are a variety of ways in which you can relax – you might like to read a book, go for a walk or watch your favourite TV show. Try to find time to relax each day, even if it's just for 15 minutes.

If you find things so difficult you become worried about being able to keep yourself safe, seek immediate help: tell someone you trust, talk to your GP or the support organisations on the right.

## LINKS TO FURTHER SUPPORT

Each of these websites features useful information and includes a helpline that you can call for additional support.



**Farming community network**  
[fcn.org.uk/help/health](http://fcn.org.uk/help/health)



**Farming Help**  
[farminghelp.co.uk](http://farminghelp.co.uk)



**Papyrus**  
[papyrus-uk.org](http://papyrus-uk.org)



**Mind**  
[mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk)



**Breathing Space**  
[breathingspace.scot](http://breathingspace.scot)

## References

1. HSE (2017). Tackling work-related stress using the Management Standards approach. A step-by-step workbook. HSE: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wbk01.pdf>
2. Israel, B. A., Baker, E. A., Goldenhar, L. M., & Heaney, C. A. (1996). Occupational stress, safety, and health: Conceptual framework and principles for effective prevention interventions. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 1(3), 261.
3. Sneddon, A., Mearns, K., & Flin, R. (2013). Stress, fatigue, situation awareness and safety in offshore drilling crews. *Safety Science*, 56, 80-88.