



**ITEC**



**VTCT**

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# Unit Specification

UMH3 – Understanding stress and anxiety

Unit reference number: L/618/6283

**Level: 2**

**Guided Learning (GL) hours: 12**

## Overview

Learners will develop an understanding of stress and anxiety. Learners will explore what is meant by the terms stress and anxiety, the possible causes and the impact that both have on the individual and others. Learners will also explore the management and treatment options that are available for people suffering from stress and anxiety.

## Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit, learners will:

LO1 Understand stress and anxiety

LO2 Understand the causes of stress and anxiety

LO3 Understand how stress and anxiety affects individuals and others

LO4 Understand how to manage and support people experiencing stress and anxiety

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# Unit content

## LO1 Understand stress and anxiety

### Know what is meant by the terms stress and anxiety

#### Taught content

- Definitions and descriptions
  - Stress 'the degree to which you feel overwhelmed or unable to cope as a result of pressures that are unmanageable'
    - Our body's natural response to a situation or event. What contributes to stress (a feeling of being under abnormal pressure) can vary hugely from person to person and differs according to our social and economic circumstances, the environment we live in and our genetic makeup
    - Mental health foundation – <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stress>
  - Anxiety 'feelings of unease, worry or fear' (Mind 2018)
    - Everybody experiences anxiety at some time and is a natural response in various aspects of life perceived as challenging or threatening. If feelings of anxiety go beyond this in terms of severity, duration and interfere negatively upon a person's life it may be termed an anxiety disorder
    - Mental health foundation – <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/a/anxiety>

### Know the signs and symptoms of stress and anxiety

#### Taught content

- Stress and anxiety can present in physical, behavioural and emotional responses
- Common signs and symptoms of stress can include:
  - Feelings of constant worry or anxiety
  - Feelings of being overwhelmed
  - Difficulty concentrating
  - Mood swings or changes in mood
  - Irritability or having a short temper
  - Difficulty relaxing
  - Depression
  - Low self-esteem
  - Eating more or less than usual
  - Changes in sleeping habits
  - Using alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs to relax
  - Aches and pains, particularly muscle tension
  - Diarrhoea or constipation
  - Feelings of nausea or dizziness

- Loss of sex drive
- <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/how-to-manage-and-reduce-stress.pdf>
- People experiencing general symptoms of anxiety may also experience the symptoms of stress but may also include more severe symptoms such as:
  - Physical
    - Palpitations, chest pain, rapid heartbeat
    - Hyperventilation
    - Difficulty in breathing or a tight band across the chest
    - Dry mouth, nausea, gastrointestinal symptoms
    - Tremors and shaking
    - Hot flushes or increased perspiration
  - Psychological
    - Unrealistic and or excessive fear and worry. You want to run away/escape from the situation
    - Things are speeding up/slowing down
    - Confusion
    - Difficulty making decisions
    - Feeling on edge
    - Unwanted unpleasant repetitive thoughts
    - You're detached from your environment and the people in it
    - Rumination – thinking a lot about bad experiences, or thinking over a situation again and again
  - Behavioural
    - Avoidance of situations; often only a short term solution
    - Repetitive compulsive behaviour
    - Distress in social situations
- <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/get-help/about-anxiety-and-anxiety-disorders/>
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/symptoms/>

## LO2 Understand the causes of stress and anxiety

### Know the possible causes of stress

#### Taught content

- A variety of situations can cause stress and individuals experience these differently depending on their vulnerability to stress as proposed by Zubin (1977)
- A stress that one individual may be able to take in their stride and deal with easily may cause significant stress symptoms in another
- Stress is a normal part of life. We move between fight and flight and rest and digest. Exposure to stress in many situations is beneficial as it can focus our minds to complete tasks, motivate us to achieve goals and can protect us
- Stressful situations can be present in a number of ways, some of which are in an individual's control and some of which are not. Examples of sources of stress are:
  - Physical stress
  - Environmental stress
  - Emotional stress
  - Acute life events
  - Chronic stress
- There is a biochemical pathway that is activated in stressful times. Hormones are released to help us prepare for a stressful situation (e.g. cortisol) and hormones released to return us to a restful state when the stress has passed
- Elevated levels of the stressful hormones can lead to negative changes to health if prolonged

### Know how internal and external demands that result in stress

#### Taught content

- Stress can be initiated by a multitude of factors. These factors can be internal demands (self-imposed) or external demands (demands imposed by outside sources)
  - Internal demands examples
    - Low self-esteem
    - Fear
    - Uncertainty
    - Self-criticism
    - Jealousy
  - External demands examples
    - Environmental stress (poor housing, social isolation, employment, moving house, holidays)
    - Emotional stress (relationship problems, leaving home, caring for a family member, conflicting cultural values)
    - Acute life events (bereavements, physical illness/accidents, victim of crime or abuse)
    - Chronic stress (accommodation issues, debts, prolonged use of drug/alcohol, existing mental health issues)
  - Physical stress (for example, late nights, binge drinking, illicit drug use, lack of routine, poor diet)
    - These can be placed in either internal or external demands dependent on the situation

## Know the possible causes of anxiety

### Taught content

- Anxiety (fear) is a natural response which is useful in helping us to avoid dangerous situations and help motivate us to achieve goals. There are many possible causes of anxiety. There are various types of anxiety disorders
  - Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is used to describe overwhelming anxiety and worry
  - Panic disorder. A person has panic attacks (sudden onset of intense apprehension, fear or terror) and is afraid that a panic attack may occur
    - A traumatic or very stressful life experience, such as bereavement
    - Having a close family member with panic disorder
    - An imbalance of neurotransmitters (chemical messengers) in the brain  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/panic-disorder/>
  - Phobias. A person experiencing this has an overwhelming and incapacitating fear of a specific object, place, situation or feeling. They avoid or restrict activities because of this. Causes may include:
    - An association with a particular incident or trauma
    - A learned response that a person develops early in life from a parent or sibling
    - Genetics may play a role – there's evidence to suggest that some people are born with a tendency to be more anxious than others  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/phobias/>
  - Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This may arise as a result of an actual distressing or catastrophic event or it may be as a result of witnessing such an event
  - Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
    - Family history
    - Differences in the brain – some people with OCD have areas of unusually high activity in their brain or low levels of a chemical called serotonin
    - Life events – OCD may be more common in people who have been bullied, abused or neglected, and it sometimes starts after an important life event, such as childbirth or a bereavement  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/>

## LO3 Understanding how stress and anxiety affects individuals and others

### Know the emotional, behavioural, physical and mental effects of stress on an individual and others

#### Taught content

- Emotional and mental effects of stress
  - Anxiety, fear, anger, sadness, frustration, low self-esteem, struggling to make decisions, constant worry, forgetfulness
- Behavioural
  - Being irritable and snappy, verbally or physically aggressive
  - Sleeping too much or too little
  - Eating too much or too little
  - Avoiding certain places or people
  - Drinking or smoking more
- Physical
  - Headaches or dizziness
  - Muscle tension or pain
  - Stomach problems
  - Chest pain or a faster heartbeat
  - Sexual problems
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/understanding-stress/>

### Know the long term effects of the stress response system on an individual

#### Taught content

- There is a biochemical pathway that is activated in stressful times. Hormones are released to help us prepare for a stressful situation (i.e. cortisol) and hormones released to return us to a restful state when the stress has passed. Elevated levels of the stressful hormones can lead to negative changes to health if prolonged. This may result in some of the following consequences:
  - Mental health problems
  - Cardiovascular disease
  - Obesity and other eating disorders
  - Menstrual problems
  - Sexual dysfunction
  - Skin and hair problems
  - Gastrointestinal problems, such as GERD, gastritis, ulcerative colitis, and irritable colon
  - [https://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/stress-symptoms-effects\\_of-stress-on-the-body](https://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/stress-symptoms-effects_of-stress-on-the-body)

**Know the physical, cognitive and behavioural effects of anxiety on the individual and others**

## Taught content

- The physical, cognitive and behavioural effects of anxiety on the individual are similar to those described above for stress. These could also include nagging sense of fear, irritability, having trouble sleeping, developing headaches, or have trouble getting on with work and planning for the future; you might have problems having sex, and loss of self-confidence
- The effects on others can be wide ranging. Those close to the individual may feel fear and worry themselves about what the individual is experiencing and the future. In some instances those close to the individual may experience frustration or resent the individual as they don't fully understand the situation and the experiences of that person

## LO4 Know how to manage and support people experiencing stress and anxiety

### Know the steps that can be taken to manage stress

#### Taught content

- Stress is a natural aspect of life. However stress levels can become so intense or prolonged that it then can have a negative impact on physical and mental health
- The first important step is to realise when it is becoming a problem. Recognition of any of the signs and symptoms listed above is important
- Identify underlying causes. Try and distinguish between those causes that can be controlled and those for which you don't have control. A good start point is to address those causes that you have some control over
- Review your lifestyle. Are you taking on too much? Can you get help by handing over tasks to somebody else? Could you prioritise more effectively?
- Build supportive relationships. Try talking about your feelings with a friend, family member, work colleague or health professional
- Eat healthily
- Be aware of smoking and drinking
- Exercise
- Take time out. Take part in activities you enjoy
- Be mindful
- Get restful sleep
- Don't be too hard on yourself
- <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stress>
- Take control. The act of taking control is in itself empowering, and it's a crucial part of finding a solution that satisfies you and not someone else
- Challenge yourself. Setting and achieving challenges helps build confidence
- Work smarter not harder
- Try to be positive. Recognise the good things in life and try not to focus on the negatives
- Accept the things you can't change
- Help other people. This can include volunteering or simply doing someone a favour. These actions can develop resilience in an individual
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/reduce-stress/>



## Know the steps that can be taken to manage anxiety

### Taught content

- Reduction of stress levels can be a good starting point for managing anxiety. Anxiety may also require some of the following management strategies
  - Identify triggers – use potential triggers to identify periods of high anxiety or to manage fearful situations
  - Communication – connecting and communicating with others can improve personal wellbeing
  - Exercise/physical activity – has been known to reduce symptoms of anxiety through the release of endorphins
  - Diet/nutrition/avoid stimulants – Avoid certain foods and stimulants that can trigger anxiety or panic symptoms. Good nutrition is seen as beneficial for general good mental health
  - Relaxation techniques/complementary therapies – these techniques and therapies can be used to minimise the symptoms of anxiety and promote relaxation and well-being
  - Redirection of focus – social activities, volunteering, sports participation
  - Group support with others experiencing similar problems
  - Self-help and self-management. Utilising specially designed resources
- <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/a/anxiety>

## Know the treatments available for people experiencing stress and anxiety

### Taught content

- Talking therapies. Counselling or cognitive behavioural therapies are effective for individuals experiencing anxiety
  - <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/How%20to...fear%20and%20anxiety.pdf>
  - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/benefits-of-talking-therapy/>
- Medication. Managed by a GP or clinical psychologist
- Drug treatments are used to provide short-term help, rather than looking at the root of the anxiety problems
- Antidepressants used to treat depression have shown to be of some help when dealing with anxiety. This may be linked to the possibility of a similar role of serotonin imbalances linked to anxiety and depression
- Drugs may be most useful when they are combined with other treatments or support  
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/How%20to...fear%20and%20anxiety.pdf>

## Know the organisations available to help with the management and support of stress and anxiety

### Taught content

- Anxiety UK
  - One of the UK's leading charities for anxiety disorders
  - [www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk)
- The Samaritans
  - Provides emotional support 24 hours a day
  - [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)
- Anxiety Alliance
  - Provides help and support for those with an anxiety disorder
  - [www.anxietyalliance.org.uk](http://www.anxietyalliance.org.uk)
- Mental Health Foundation
  - Offers information on mental health, mental health problems, self-help and how to get help
  - [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)
- Mind
  - [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- Rethink
  - [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)
- Stress Management Society
  - [www.stress.org.uk](http://www.stress.org.uk)

### Guide to taught content

The content contained within the unit specification is not prescriptive or exhaustive but is intended to provide helpful guidance to teachers and learners with the key areas that will be covered within the unit and relating to the kinds of evidence that should be provided for each assessment objective specific to the unit learning outcomes.

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# Assessment requirements

## 1. Knowledge outcomes

Learners must complete an external theory examination for this unit. This will consist of a multiple-choice question paper which is mapped to the relevant assessment criteria stated below. The theory examination will test the knowledge and understanding from across learning outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Learners should use the unit content sections of this unit to aid revision since exam questions will test the full breadth of content over time.

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Assessment requirement
LO1 Understand stress and anxiety	1.1. Describe what is meant by the terms stress and anxiety	External theory examination
	1.2. Outline the signs and symptoms of stress and anxiety	

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Assessment requirement
LO2 Understand the causes of stress and anxiety	2.1. Describe the possible causes of stress	External theory examination
	2.2. Describe how internal and external demands that result in stress	
	2.3. Describe the possible causes of anxiety	

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Assessment requirement
LO3 Understand how stress and anxiety affects individuals and others	3.1. Describe the emotional, behavioural, physical and mental effects of stress on an individual and others	External theory examination
	3.2. Outline the long term effects of the stress response system on an individual	
	3.3. Describe the physical, cognitive and behavioural effects of anxiety on the individual and others	

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Assessment requirement
LO4 Understand how to manage and support people experiencing stress and anxiety	4.1. Explain the steps that can be taken to manage stress	External theory examination
	4.2. Describe the steps that can be taken to manage anxiety	
	4.3. Describe the treatments available for people experiencing stress and anxiety	
	4.3. Outline the two organisations available to help with the management and support of stress and anxiety	

### Document History

Version	Issue Date	Changes	Role
v1.0	01/04/2021	First published	Product and Regulation Manager