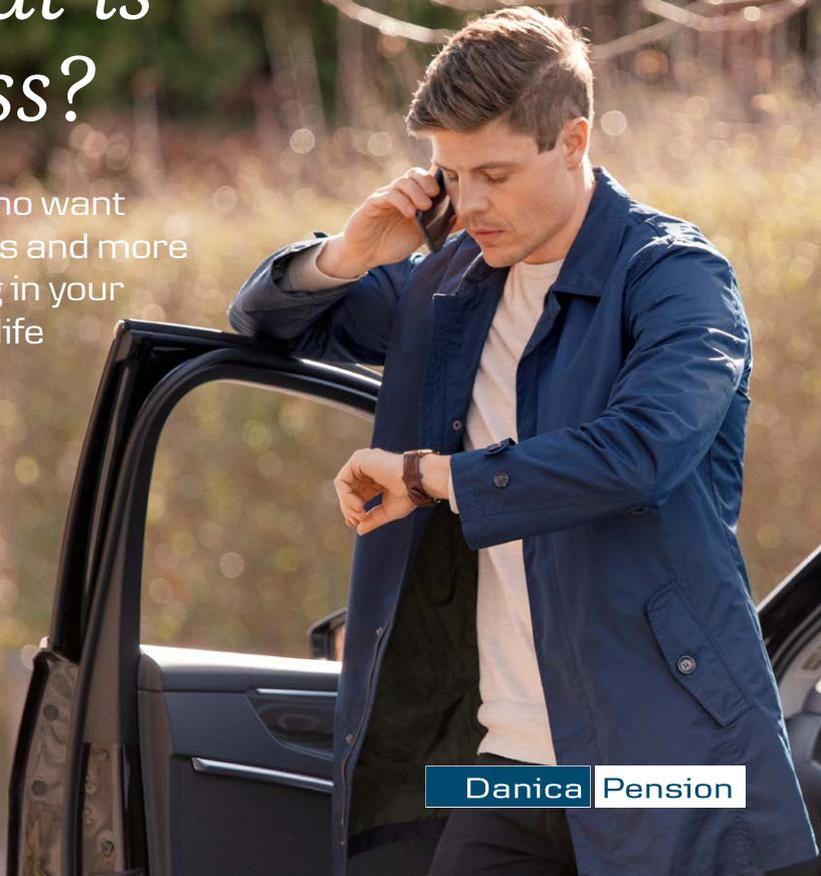


# *What is stress?*

For you who want less stress and more well-being in your everyday life



Danica Pension

# What is stress?

According to a survey among more than 180,000 Danes, 25.1% of Danes feel stressed. And stress is not only a problem for the individual – it also significantly affects the family, the workplace and society.

If you know about stress, what to do, and if you react in time, however, you may prevent and avoid stress. Both in yourself and in others.

First, you need to know that stress is a natural reaction, and that there are two types of stress:

- Short-term stress – necessary and can be motivating
- Long-term stress – unhealthy and makes us ill

## Short-term stress

Short-term stress is quite normal when we face major challenges, for instance at

work or in our private life. This condition causes a range of physical, mental and behavioural reactions that enhance our ability to perform. Short-term stress is not dangerous.

Acute short-term stress activates the autonomic nervous system and the release of adrenaline and cortisol, bringing the body into a state of alertness. Short-term stress serves a purpose, sharpening our senses and enabling us to act quickly. While it may feel unpleasant, the discomfort is only temporary and the body can relax again when it is over.

### Long-term stress

Long-term stress, on the other hand, is when the body is in a constant state of alertness which can last for weeks, months or years. Long-term stress is a state of tension and weariness that affects both our physical and our mental health.

Long-term stress causes excess levels of fat and sugar in the blood and puts strain on the system, including the heart, cardiovascular system and control of blood sugar. Long-term stress can cause hypertension and affect the immune system.

Long-term stress can also lead to temporary changes in the brain causing the learning and memory centre of the brain, the hippocampus, to shrink, while the brain's anxiety centre, amygdala, grows.



According to WHO, stress is one of the primary causes of illness in Europe today.

# *Symptoms of stress and how to detect them*

You will often experience both physical and mental symptoms of stress. The physical symptoms are particularly important. If you experience these symptoms for a period of more than two weeks, you need to take them seriously and do something. Both physical and mental symptoms of stress can lead to major behavioural changes, which may make it easier to detect stress – both in ourselves and in others.

## Examples of mental symptoms



## Examples of physical symptoms



## Physical and mental symptoms can cause changes in behaviour such as

- Lack of focus
- Indecisiveness
- Less enthusiasm and interest in assignments and in other people
- Procrastination
- Irritability
- Cynicism, loss of empathy
- Increased use of stimulants

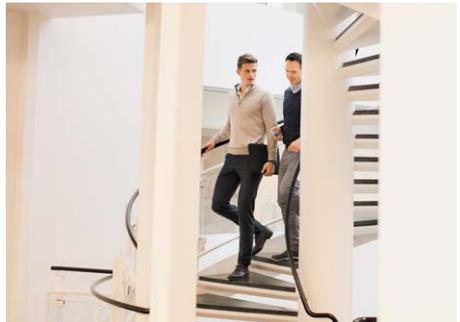
If you experience several of these symptoms for a period of more than two weeks, you should talk to someone and consult your doctor.

# What factors can cause stress?

Stress is often caused by several factors – and you can be stressed both in your private life and at work. Work-related stress can be caused by:

- Uncertainty about job
- Great demands and feeling of lack of influence
- Conflicts regarded as unfair
- Lack of management or recognition
- Job insecurity
- Poor work-life balance
- Pressure to adapt
- Work conflicting with own core values
- Own ambition

One in four Danes absent due to illness have stress-related illnesses. However, stress is not always just work-related – it is often caused by many factors.



# *What to do if you feel stressed?*

If you have experienced symptoms of stress for a period of more than two weeks, it is important to let your employer help you. You should therefore talk to your manager, the HR department or an employee representative – and do it as quickly as possible. The sooner you feel and act on your symptoms, the better.

Talk to your manager if

1. you feel you have lost focus – or cannot concentrate on your work assignments
2. you or someone in your family suffer an illness that affects your work performance
3. you often feel discomfort when performing your work assignments
4. you do not thrive in your job just now

Ask your manager for help if you experience symptoms of stress – the sooner the better – to get the optimal changes of getting better and to avoid being reported absent due to stress.





# *What can you do to avoid long-term stress?*

Here are six great tips to help you create more balance in your everyday life – and avoid long-term stress.

1. Get 7-9 hours' sleep per night
2. Exercise, ride your bike to work or take a walk in daylight
3. Eat a healthy, balanced diet
4. Practice meditation (possibly including mindfulness). Just 5-10 minutes per day is enough

5. Use your friends and family – for relaxation and fun, but also for help when you have too much on your plate
6. Prioritise doing things that make you happy

You can learn more about how to follow these tips in your everyday life on the following pages.

# *How to bring more well-being into your everyday life*

## Sleep well and enough

Stress and sleep deprivation are inextricably linked. Your nervous system is impaired and the level of stress hormones rises if you do not sleep enough. Make sure you get 7-9 hours' sleep per night.

## Exercise

All forms of exercise are useful in preventing stress. If you are already suffering from stress, you should steer clear of the most vigorous sports, however. Long walks/bicycle rides in daylight and yoga are the best choices as they also help you find peace of mind. It is important to note whether exercise helps you relax, however, or whether it is just one more thing you feel you have to do.

## Eat healthier

A healthy diet helps you fight stress. Sugar, tea and coffee affect your body's stress level, whereas a high fibre diet provides your body with great balance. Give your body a healthy diet to digest. Your immune system will be strengthened and you will be more calm.

## Meditate

Meditation is one of the most effective measures against stress because it helps you to be grounded in your body and aware of how you are feeling. Meditation is an effective way of preventing stress – but if you have already been caught in the stress trap, meditation is also beneficial. When you meditate, your body releases endorphins, making you feel happy.

## Use your family and friends

If you experience symptoms of stress, it is important to reduce the number of demands and tasks and to accept help from others to do the daily chores, such as cleaning, babysitting etc. It is all right to ask your friends and family for help. And keep in mind that people are happy to help. It is important that you let others help you. Maybe this will help you break a pattern of doing everything yourself.

## Prioritise things that make you happy

This is the key to treating yourself with kindness. Do good things for yourself that tell you that you are good enough the way you are. Be aware of any negative thought patterns. If you constantly have a little devil on your shoulder nagging you if you say something embarrassing or do something stupid, then whisk it away and rid yourself of your judgemental superego – it only adds to your level of stress.



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