

What is stress and what can you do about it?

Information about mental health for people with a refugee background



What is stress?

When you are forced to flee to a different country, you've left family and friends behind. You've also left your home and job behind. There may be things that take some time to get used to in the Netherlands. You might also be worried about your future, job or family. All of these things can cause stress.

There is nothing unusual about that. Often, your stress will simply go away after a while. Sometimes, you need help from other people before you feel better. This information is about stress.

Symptoms that come with stress

The symptoms may differ from person to person. Examples of symptoms include:



Negative thoughts
or worrying



Poor sleep



Feeling scared or
panicking



Not feeling like
doing anything



Negative emotions
or a lack of hope
for the future



Pain in your body



Overeating or not
feeling like eating



Headaches
or dizziness



Getting angry
quickly

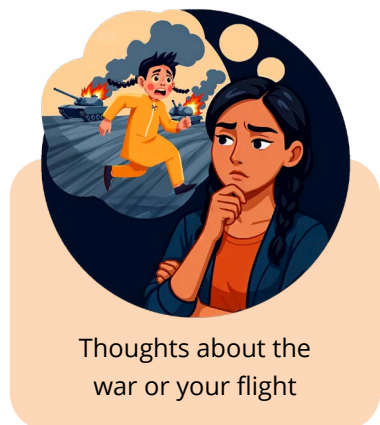
Hassan's story

Hassan (38) fled from Syria to the Netherlands. His wife is still in Syria.

In the Netherlands, he thought: 'I'm safe here'. For the first few months, Hassan felt fine. After a year, he got his residence permit. He moved into a town and applied for a family reunion with his wife. The wait took a long time and he was sleeping poorly. Hassan also started having difficulty focusing. Learning the Dutch language became a struggle for him. On top of that, Hassan started having bad dreams about the things he went through in Syria and on his journey as a refugee. He often woke up in the middle of the night, sweating. This made him feel anxious.

Causes of stress

Stress differs from person to person. There are lots of things that can cause you to feel stressed. It's entirely normal that these things leave you feeling stressed. Here are a few examples:





Little privacy while living
at a centre for asylum
seekers or in a small home



Missing family
and friends



Having no goal in life
or no job



Family members
or friends falling ill



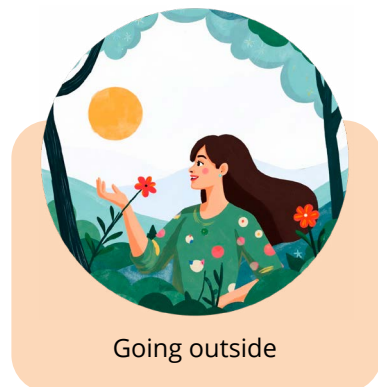
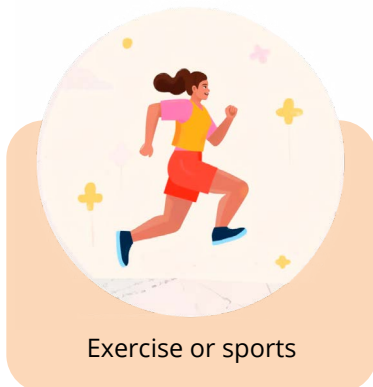
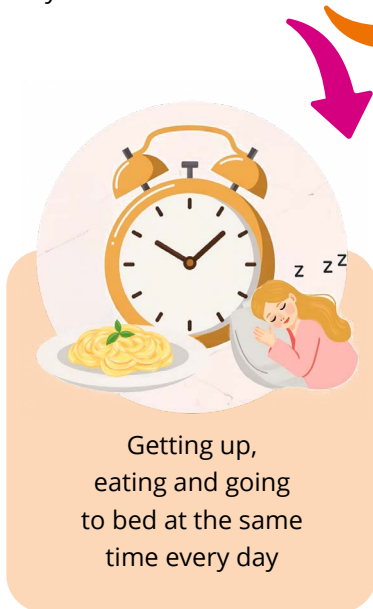
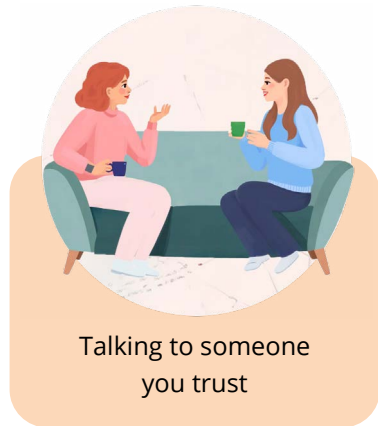
Discrimination



Struggling to
learn Dutch

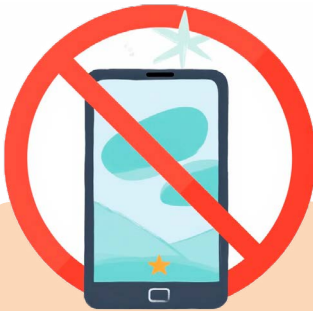
What can you do to reduce your stress?

The things that help reduce stress may differ from person to person. Examples of things that can help you relax are:





Doing something
creative



Reducing your
screen time



Your faith

What is Hassan doing himself?

Hassan starts feeling worse. He decides to go see his family doctor, who explains that his symptoms are caused by stress.

The family doctor advises Hassan to get out more often and to exercise more. He also refers Hassan to the social services, who arrange a job for him as a volunteer. This acts as a distraction for him. It helps to keep him going while he waits to be reunited with his family. Hassan is doing a little better now. He still has bad dreams. He sleeps poorly, and he often feels anxious.

Ask for help if your symptoms are not going away

Sometimes, stress can make you ill. You might notice aches and pains in your body or head. Lots of people who have fled their home go through this. It is nothing to feel ashamed about. If you have lived through lots of difficult things, your body and head may respond this way.

Go see your family doctor if your symptoms don't get better within a few weeks. Your family doctor can help with symptoms caused by stress. The family doctor will listen to you and ask questions about your life. Sometimes, your family doctor will prescribe some medicine.

In most cases, your family doctor will be working with a mental health practitioner. This person is also referred to as a POH-GGZ. The practice support worker knows a lot about mental health and will discuss possible solutions with you.

If you often think about death

When your stress becomes too much, you might start feeling anxious and extremely down. Sometimes, you might feel like you no longer want to live. If you often think about death or wish that you didn't have to wake up in the morning, it's good to remember that these feelings are human. One place you can reach out to is Stichting 113. This is an organisation that helps people who often think about death. You can contact Stichting 113 to have a chat or talk to a care provider at any time. You can do so in Dutch or in English. Take a look at **www.113.nl** for more information.

If you're often thinking about death, you can also talk to your family doctor.

Referral to GGZ

Sometimes, your problems may be too big for the family doctor and mental health practitioner to deal with. If so, they will make sure you can go see someone in the GGZ. This is called a referral. The GGZ is the Dutch mental health-care system.

If your family doctor refers you to the GGZ, the GGZ will contact you to make an appointment. During your first few appointments, your care provider will get to know you better and listen to your problems. You will also talk about what of treatment suits you best.

It's good to ask for help

People who have fled their homes are often very strong. You're likely to have been through lots of difficult situations. You do not need to deal with these problems alone. Asking for help is completely normal. In fact, it's a sign of strength.

Whatever you discuss always stays private

All care providers are sworn to professional secrecy. This means that no one else will ever find out what you discussed. Anything you share will always stay private. That's what the law says. Your care providers need to ask for your permission first before discussing your problems with someone else.

Hassan finds help

Hassan's anxiety and bad dreams are not going away. He sometimes thinks he is being followed. His anxiety leaves him feeling very tired. He decides to go back to his family doctor and ask for help.

The family doctor refers him to the mental health practitioner. After a few conversations with the mental health practitioner, it's clear that Hassan needs more help. The mental health practitioner refers him to GGZ. At the GGZ, a psychologist tells Hassan that he is struggling with trauma. The psychologist is the first person with whom Hassan finds the courage to really talk about what he has been through. He also gets some medicine to help him sleep better. Slowly, he starts to feel a little better.

What about the cost?

Support from your family doctor is free. Your health insurance covers any fees for this. If you are given medicine, you will sometimes need to pay for all or part of this. People who are living at a centre for asylum seekers do not need to pay for a referral to GGZ. If you are living in a town and you have your own health insurance, you will need to pay part of the cost yourself. This is called 'eigen risico'. Any GGZ support on top of 'eigen risico' will be covered by your health insurance.

Interpreters

If your Dutch isn't good enough yet, your care providers can arrange an interpreter for you. You don't have to arrange this yourself. An interpreter can join you during your conversation or help you over the telephone. You do not need to pay for an interpreter yourself. The interpreter is also not allowed to tell anyone what you discussed.

Other translated information

You can find [more information](#) in simple language about stress and health in this overview. Simply take a look under the 'mental health' section.



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