

Stress

Full transcript · 6 video clips · generated 22 September 2026

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1. What is Stress_

Thank you so much for coming in today and visiting me. Thanks for having us. How have you been? Good, yeah. Pretty good. How about you? How are you? Alhamdulillah, but you know, there are a lot of things going on with the community and sometimes I feel like, am I stressed? Yeah, it's a really good question. And I guess when I think about stress, you know, I think probably the most important thing to be reminding yourself is it's really normal. It's really normal to be, you know, feeling different when you're exposed to difficult and stressful times and it doesn't mean there's something wrong with you.

In fact, it's how our body communicates to us that it has needs. I like that. So we know that, you know, our mind, our body, our spirit are all naturally in balance and it's a reflection of, you know, what's going on for us and the state of our heart and, you know, our relationships and everything. That's going on in our lives. But when things are difficult, then that has an effect on us. It has an effect on how we think. It has an effect on our body. It has an effect on how we behave. And it actually results in chemical changes, which can manifest in, you know, physical changes in our body and in our behaviours.

And that is all really healthy and normal. That's what our body will do. That's good to hear, to expect those things. Yeah, because I know when I get stressed, I procrastinate. Like I just avoid everything and just leave everything to the last minute and don't sleep the best and don't get back to people. So for me, I know those are sort of some signs that I need to be mindful of. I know over time now, if I'm stressed, I tend to forget things. I'll miss my keys. I'll, you know, I'll forget where I put my money, my wallet. And then that has, over time, I've learned that that tells me, slow down, you are stressed.

You know, you've got a lot in your head. So it's something that I've learned about myself over time. Yeah, yeah, definitely. I've definitely noticed it a lot in my relationships. Like I'll notice that I get tired and I get cranky. And then it's usually my children who are the first people to notice that because I'm paying less attention to them more. I notice that I'm just, you know, on autopilot. I get home and start cooking dinner and they'll be in the background and I'll just be not tuning in to what they're saying. And then of course you get guilty and everything else. So I definitely notice those cycles in myself.

Well, when I get stressed, I've learned that I clean a lot. So maybe it's good to be stressed because then I start cleaning a lot and just, you know, thinking while I'm cleaning. Yeah. And I think it's really interesting what you're saying about that self-awareness that you have, like the fact that you know what those early warning signs are for you is really important. And when we think about, you know, the natural state of us as creation, you know, that Allah has given us the human condition, which is that we experience all the different range of emotions and that each of those is an opportunity.

To respond, that Allah has placed that for us as a sign. So we need to be thinking about our awareness and how we tune in to those signs, those internal signs that are then inviting us to respond.

2. Coping with stress – strategies that can help

So I guess the next question would be, how do we cope with this? What are some of the strategies that have worked for you? Yeah, for me, I know routine. I need routine. Like I need to stick to my routine of getting up a certain time, doing certain things, sort of self-care things, eating well, making sure that I do actually have all my meals, making sure that I try and do my prayers as close to the times as possible. So, yeah, for me, that routine is quite important. And asking for help. Like if I really am finding that things are getting a bit much, perhaps asking other people to help me with tasks, like my sister or friends, saying, can you do this for me?

Can you run this errand for me? Delegate a little bit. Yeah, a little bit. Yeah, I know that works for me. Yeah, I feel like taking care of our bodies is really important, eh? Like just to be thinking about, you know, what are the things that I can control when it feels like there's something that I can't do? There's so much that is out of control. And sometimes it's those really little things, like your spiritual practices or giving yourself a little bit more time during the day where you can just stop and breathe. I find that one thing I'm trying to do more of at the moment is what's called taking notice, which is that idea of slowing my world down and, you know, appreciating the really little things.

Like, you know, making myself a nice cup of coffee and sitting in the sun and just having a little bit of quiet time and I'll just, you know, do some dhikr or just notice, you know, the birds and the insects and just this real sense of the beauty that Allah has placed around us. And it can take me out of what's going on in my head for a few minutes. Yeah, and I think that has worked with myself definitely, and with a lot of the people that I interact with. I think there is this need for us to always remember that the medical world and the Islamic framework or principles do not always have to be at, what do you call that, in opposition to each other.

They can actually work together very well. And I guess for us Muslims, we also have that to fall back on to help us out with, you know, managing, stress and managing the challenges in life.

3. When to seek help_

Some of the questions that we sometimes hear from others and sometimes I ask myself too is when do we then start worrying about how we feel and how out of balance we are, you know, our mind and body. Yeah, I guess for me I'd probably start to get worried if it was an ongoing thing, like if I was doing it for two or three weeks ongoing and I'm sort of dropping off my routines, not attending to my obligations, maybe even my prayers, you know, like my religious obligations or my family obligations, my work obligations, if all of a sudden I'm, you know, just putting all of that aside or if my thoughts are really, like I'm always in my head, like if I'm, you know, can't even do the basics because I'm just so overwhelmed.

Sometimes I might feel that, yeah, my heart's racing, and it's, I mean, every now and then is okay, but if it's like a consistent thing for me, I know definitely for me that's like, it's not good, things are not good, and I should do something about it.

And I guess the other part of that as well is how much of an impact it's having on your life, you know, like is it, you know, are you feeling stressed at work, but then when you come home you're able to relax and enjoy time with your family and switch off, but if you're noticing that now it's starting to have an impact, on you when you're at home and when you're at work and when you're with your friends and when you're at the Mustard and wherever else you go in your life, you're feeling that though, you're noticing those feelings are following you and having an impact on all the things that you care about, then that might be a sign that now that stress is sort of becoming something that is more, you know, that is, that is having, a deeper impact on you and you might need a bit more support.

So yeah, so I hear it has to be something that is consistent, ongoing, and has impact on other aspects of my life or of our lives. So that's something for us to take note of that perhaps that stress could be now, something that I should be worried about.

4. How do I seek help_

But, you know, sometimes people are a bit worried about seeking help, you know, and who to get that help from, and what does counselling mean, or what does counselling entail. How do we help others understand that kind of help? For me, I guess I'd go to my doctor. Like if I got to a point where I was really worried, I'd probably, I have a good relationship with my GP, so I'd probably go to them and ask them for help, and yeah, I would hope that they would guide me to where I need to go in counselling. You know, asking for help is the first step, and then actually, you know, following that through and getting the help that you need is another step, and I think it can feel scary to think about sitting down with someone you don't know.

And talking about things that feel very personal to you. And I think there's a, you know, it's a process, like if we think about what it is that we are seeking when we meet with a counsellor or a psychologist, I guess there's a few different things that you can be doing with a person. Sometimes it's about talking through what's going on. Yeah. And trying to find out what are my needs, you know, what's the right level of support for me, and making a bit of a plan around that. With counselling and therapy, often some of the things that you're trying to do is trying to understand a little bit better about why you're feeling stuck, and trying to find some strategies and skills that can help you navigate your way forward.

So sometimes making those changes. Or, you know, trying to find the coping strategies that work for you is easier when you have someone to help you and guide you. So that's one of the things you can be doing in therapy. And another thing that you can be doing, which can be, you know, difficult work, is to really look at those experiences that you've had and work through some of those memories, some of that grief. And try to make sense of it. And again, it can be helpful when you have someone that you trust to walk alongside you on that road.

5. What to expect in therapy

I think the misunderstanding that people have is that some of my friends have is that they think it's a one-way process. One thing to be mindful of when you do therapy is that it's a two-way process so the therapist is there to as I said walk alongside you to you know to kind of they bring some understanding of what can help but ultimately you do the work so one of the things to be aware of is there's often homework that comes with going to a therapist so being able to take those strategies and and put them into your life and see that immediate behavior change which can then have an effect on other things for you.

Yeah for me I did go to counseling in 2019 and yeah it was quite nice to I only went for a couple of sessions but it was really helpful for me and that it was nice to sit with the therapist sort of go through what I was thinking and get the reflection back. Sort of her sort of tell me okay so this is some of the things that are going on for you what do you think might be going on and sort of exploring that and then recognizing for me at that time it was about self-care and that I needed to put some things into place to help sort of fill me up again put me back in balance as you say and and yeah and so I did I had some homework I had to go away and then a couple of weeks later come back and sort of go through that and for me that was really helpful.

What were some of the self-care things that you put in place for yourself? For me it was really going back to my family. Going back to my routine like I had just sort of thrown my routine out the window so it was about making sure that I ate my meals it was about going to sleep at a certain time turning my phone off and you know not checking it in the night it was yeah just those basic things of just getting back to the basics doing things that I enjoy like going for a walk at the park or reconnecting with friends um yeah it was just the little things really but just doing them consistently. Is that why you don't answer my messages at night?

6. Building a relationship with your counsellor

What if, you know, I guess there are some cases where, you know, you just don't gel with your counsellor. Maybe different personalities or just, you know, the match isn't what should we do. Yeah. I was just going to say, yeah, I think I have heard lots of people have that sort of concern. Maybe they don't gel or they don't feel they can bring their faith because of this person. And I think it's important to know that with counselling you can get someone else, that you can change. You don't have to sort of, it's not one size fits all. Communication has to be two ways. You know, being upfront and being truthful, I guess, and really expressing what you need.

And so that the counsellor can help you out with that, right? I think that's so important. And it's just made me think, you know, another thing that's really important is to bring your hope. You know, bring your whole self into the room. And, you know, for you, that's about what's important to you. And you want to be able to feel safe enough to do that and talk about, you know, that things might be feeling really difficult for you, you know, internally in terms of your emotions and your thinking. They might be feeling difficult in terms of your relationships. But you might also be thinking about your faith and, you know, what role is this playing for you?

It may be that you're... having difficulty with your prayers or with going to the masjid or maybe, you know, you really want to be able to be thinking about healing through your faith, but you're finding that that's difficult to talk about with your counsellor. And I would really encourage you to bring that up and make that part of the conversation because it's such an important part of who you are. Therefore, if you're going to heal your mind, body and spirit, you need to be able to talk about that. I have... I'll be able to talk about all these things. That's already a stress reliever for me.

So, yeah, you guys should come visit me more often. Let's have some migraine. Yeah.