

# Fact sheet

## Reducing the impact of stress – The Three Rs

- The way we look at threats or stressors, as well as personal resources and environmental factors, affect how we respond to stress
- A combination of the Three Rs: **Refuel** | Whakatipu, **Resolve** | Whakatika, and **Relax** | Whakatā can help us reduce the impact of stress <sup>1,2,3</sup>

We all respond differently to situations and events depending on our own views and experiences. What one person finds thrilling, another person may find terrifying.

Stress is not always caused by an event or situation. Sometimes stress can be caused by our own thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Often, how we feel and think about a situation can change how we react. While we may not be able to control the situation that triggers our **stress response**, we can learn how we can change the situation, rethink the problem, or accept what has happened.

To help reduce the impact of stress, use the Three Rs:



**Refuel | Whakatipu** – looking after wellbeing and cultivating energy to refuel.



**Resolve | Whakatika** – identifying stressors and finding solutions that help resolve the causes of stress.



**Relax | Whakatā** – switching on the relaxation response to restore and rest.

### Refuel | Whakatipu <sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

We all face multiple demands on our time and energy. To keep moving, we need to have enough fuel to manage these demands. It's important to recognise the areas in your world that help you refuel and make time for these. Regular exercise, eating healthy food, doing activities that bring you joy and making time for relaxing, socialising and connecting with others are all important ways we can look after ourselves. The **Refuelling the tank** worksheet helps you recognise what tops you up and what drains you.

Trying to balance all aspects of our lives is important. Recognising what areas of our physical, mental, spiritual and whānau wellbeing need support helps focus what parts of our life need the most fuel. The Finding Balance worksheets (**individual** and **workplace**) help you identify different things you can do to keep you and your workplace well.

Workplaces need to be proactive in keeping their people's tanks full, planning for busy times and knowing how and when their people need more fuel. There will be times when the amount of fuel we use needs to be reduced, so choosing to reduce demands for a time can keep us going until we are able to top up our tanks.



**For worksheets to help you refuel:**

[Finding Balance: Te Whare Tapa Whā \(individual\)](#)

[Finding Balance: Te Whare Tapa Whā \(workplace\)](#)

[Tank on empty](#)

[Refuelling the tank – Fuel in, Fuel out](#)

[Workplace fuel consumption](#)

The **Five Ways to Wellbeing** are simple and proven actions you can introduce into your life, at home and at work, to help build resilience and boost mental health and wellbeing. There's also a **Five Ways to Wellbeing at Work Toolkit**.

## Resolve | Whakatika <sup>5,6,7</sup>

How we experience the world helps shape what we perceive to be a threat and how well we can cope with what is happening. The world around us, including our culture, beliefs, economic situation, physical health, relationships and our place in communities all provide protective and risk factors for our wellbeing.

Risk factors impact our stress levels and our protective factors help us manage. These can change over time as we learn new things and as our environment changes.

We may not be able to control the situation that triggers our **stress response**, or we may have multiple causes of stress. When the situation is out of our control, dangerous or has a traumatic impact, support and help from others is often needed. Find someone you feel safe to talk to or look at some of the supports available on the [Getting help and advice fact sheet](#).

For other stressors, we can explore what options we have to: change the situation, rethink the problem, or accept what has happened. This can involve:

- Identifying our stressors and our stress reactions
- Looking at protective factors and resources
- Finding possible solutions and choosing the right ones for us
- Planning, practicing and reviewing our success

At work there can be a range of situations teams and individuals find stressful, as well as external impacts on workers. Identifying what the issues and situations are that are impacting on stress levels and recognising the impacts will support effective problem solving.



**For worksheets to help you resolve the causes of stress:**

[Identifying the challenges and practicing balanced thinking](#)

[Acceptance and change](#)

[Working backwards to a solution](#)

## Relax | Whakatā <sup>1,2</sup>

No matter where our stress comes from, it is important to regularly 'switch on' our relaxation response so we can minimise the harm that long term stress can cause. We need to trigger this relaxation response to let our body recover.

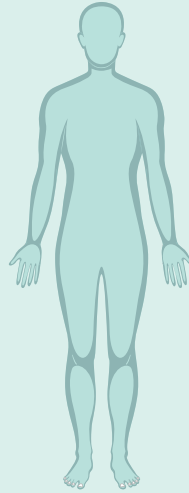
### When our relaxation response is switched on, our:

**Heartbeat and breathing slow down**

**Bodies use less oxygen**

**Blood flows more easily through our circulatory system**

**Blood lactate levels decline (high levels have been associated with anxiety attacks)**



**Genes associated with chronic inflammatory responses (which contribute to things like heart disease, inflammatory bowel disease and diabetes) are switched off**

**Genes linked to the use of energy in the body are switched on and help regulate blood sugar levels and protect our cells from the damage of stress**

To get long-term benefits we need to regularly turn on our relaxation response. There are many ways to switch it on and these can often be practised anywhere, without special equipment or training.

Workplaces can offer opportunities throughout the workday and week for staff to take a minute or five to practice relaxation. Providing information, reminders and opportunities regularly to your people can help build and sustain these practices.



**Activities to help you switch on the relaxation response**