

## CREW HEALTH ADVICE

# Dealing with stress onboard

We all encounter stressful events in our personal, professional or social life. It is important to remember that not all stress is negative, some stress is positive, motivating us to maximise our productivity and creativity.

In contrast, ‘distress’ is negative stress, which, “is evident when a person perceives himself as lacking the ability or the resources to control a stressful situation” (Selye, 1976).

Stress is defined as, “a negative emotional experience accompanied by physiological, cognitive and behavioural changes and responses aimed to reduce or change the stressful event or effects of it” (Baum, 1990). How well we cope with stress is mediated by our appraisal of the stressor and the resources available to deal effectively with the stressor.

Unequivocally, seafaring is a strenuous occupation, and seafarers are exposed to an increased number of work related stressors: fatigue, long hours, monotony, noise, vibration, temperature changes, a multinational environment, limited recreation, isolation, long periods away from home. In other words: “Factors that may produce an imbalance between work demands and personal resources leading to a decline in physical and psychological health and an increased risk for accidents and injuries”. (Carotenuto, et al, 2012).

Most seafarers can suffer from moderate to high stress that can lead to a vicious cycle of unhealthy behaviours that are difficult to escape: sleep disturbance, unhealthy eating and weight gain, causing mental and physical ailments.

Physical symptoms of stress include: anger, irritability, fatigue, nervousness, lack of interest or motivation, anxiety, sadness, muscular tension, faintness, dizziness, headaches, indigestion, stomach aches,

appetite changes, erectile dysfunction, change in sex drive and teeth grinding.

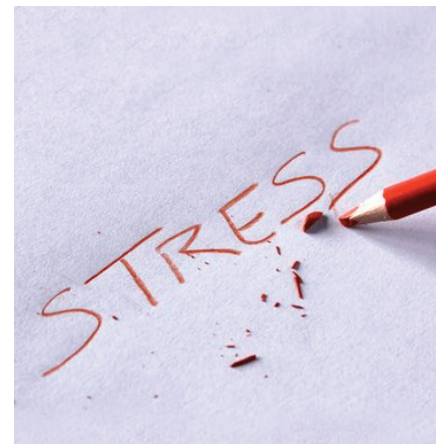
### Tips for dealing with stress

1. Identify the strengths and skills that increase your confidence. Think of a survival resource that helped you cope with a stressful experience in the past.
2. Assess, recognise and develop your creative resources: talents, traits, skills or competencies. What are your resources? Optimism, humour or flexibility?
3. Evaluate your resources. Are they internal or external? Internal resources refer to personality traits like humour, optimism, courage, flexibility, spiritual connections or accountability. External resources can be hobbies, activities, team or religious associations or social support.
4. Use cognitive reappraisal when evaluating a negative event. Notice the negative thinking causing you emotional tension. It is mostly how we interpret events that evokes negative emotions.
5. Engage and interact with other people onboard. Do not isolate yourself – become interested in learning and engaging with your team mates.
6. Establish an open communication channel with somebody you trust to discuss your difficulties or concerns.
7. Do not let negative emotions overtake you. When something bothers you, address it immediately – don’t turn it into rage, sadness or resentment.
8. Be realistic about your expectations.
9. Be accountable for your actions.
10. Develop a healthy lifestyle by eating

a balanced diet, maintaining a sleep and rest schedule, exercising regularly and partaking in recreational activities.

11. Keep a diary to note your thoughts and feelings.

12. Practice mindfulness and relaxation techniques.



### Mindfulness

Research shows that practicing mindful meditation on a daily basis reduces stress and stress-related symptoms.

Adverse experiences can interfere with our ability to remain ‘present’, so we may find ourselves focusing on negative events, painful memories or worrying about the future. When we find ourselves dwelling on the past or painful memories, we are depriving ourselves of the necessary resources to deal with the present. Mindfulness can help us discover the resources we need to cope with stressful events in the present.

Building on positive experiences can alleviate or ease the burden of stressful and difficult moments.

*This advice was compiled with the help of our psychological and psychometric screening partners I.M.E.Q. You can watch their video at: <https://youtu.be/4NAjL8cGN4g>*

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## CREW HEALTH PROGRAMME

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The Club was the first to launch a crew health scheme in 1996 due to increasing crew illness claims and a lack of accountability of clinics. Since 1996, the Crew Health programme has become one of the Club's leading loss prevention initiatives. The aim of the programme is to reduce the volume and value of crew illness claims which are caused by a pre-existing illnesses or disease. These underlying conditions often impact on the crew member's fitness for service and can endanger not only the health of the seafarer but also the onboard safety of other crew.

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Sophia joined Thomas Miller in 1992 and from 1994 worked as a claims handler dealing mainly with French and Spanish Members. In 2004, Sophia became the Crew Health Programme Director. Sophia has undertaken a large number of clinic audits, implemented the standard medical form and clinic guidelines. She has also lead the scheme through the largest period of growth and development with a doubling of approved clinic facilities and a four fold member increase. Sophia is a Director of Thomas Miller & Co. Ltd.

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Saidul Alom joined Crew Health from the European Region Service Team in 2004. Saidul provides administrative support to the Crew Health programme and is responsible for liaison with the approved clinics on financial billing matters and ensuring prompt payment of all clinic fees

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### **Stuart Last**

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Stuart joined Thomas Miller in 1998 as a claims trainee for UK P&I Club's Greek Members. In April 2005 Stuart joined Crew Health as the Team Administrator. Stuart is responsible for co-ordination of Member entries and administration for the clinic approval process.