

Wellbeing toolkit

Coping with change

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Whether it's a new job or a new way of working, something difficult or something positive, change can be tough and may take its toll on our mental health.

This is especially true at the moment. After a turbulent year of uncertainty, changes to our lifestyles and health worries on top of that, it is a recipe for stress.

Though we don't have control over the situation, what we can control is our reaction.

Often, being aware of and understanding the processes behind our reaction can help us better control it.

That's why in this factsheet we'll be looking at why it's hard to accept change, the different stages of the change curve and lastly techniques for coping with change-related stress.



In this factsheet

- Why is it hard to accept change?
- Understanding the change curve
- How to cope with change-related stress

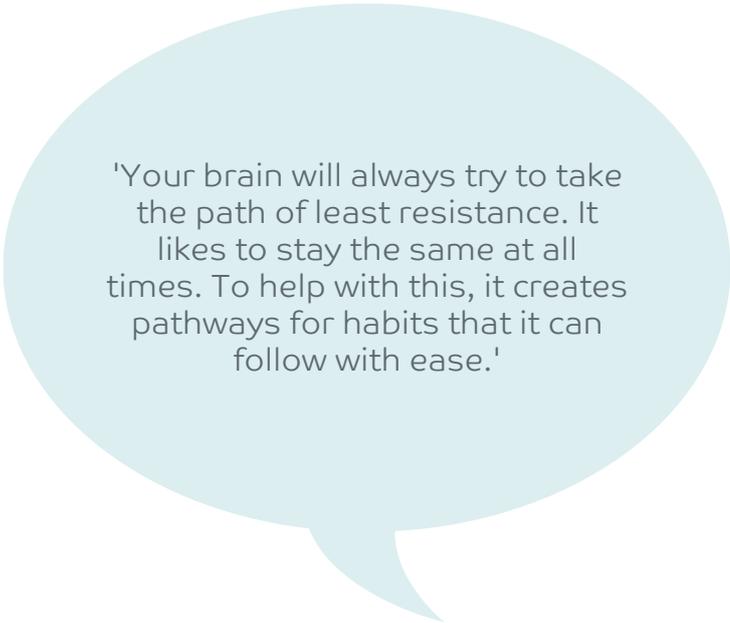
Why is it hard to accept change?

1 in 3 people would avoid change if they could.

Research, conducted by organisational psychologist Jim Bright, confirms that for many of us, the prospect of change is a worry rather than a welcome development.

A large part of this is because our brains are wired to expect familiarity.

Clinical psychologist Dr Sophie Mort explains:



'Your brain will always try to take the path of least resistance. It likes to stay the same at all times. To help with this, it creates pathways for habits that it can follow with ease.'

Two thirds of us feel uncertain about the future.

Change unsettles us because that sense of familiarity is no longer there - we have to re-evaluate.

On top of this, our brains are also averse to loss. Once we invest time and effort in a person, a project or a way of life, our brains try to prevent us from losing that.

We are programmed to choose options that involve the least change. That's why change feels so challenging when it happens.

As we get older, it can also be more difficult to deal with change because we have experienced life a certain way for longer.

Understanding the change curve

Change can often feel scary: things that were familiar to us are now different, and it can seem hard to accept and adapt to a new way of doing things.

Psychologists and other researchers have been unpicking the way our brains respond to change for many years.

Though specific changes will be personal to you, research has shown that our response to change usually follows a particular pattern called 'the change curve'.

The change curve maps out six different and distinct phases we go through after a change.

How quickly we go through each phase, however, will be different for each person.



Shock/Denial: blaming others

The first stage of the change curve is our immediate reaction. We may feel shock or denial when facing big changes and may blame others in the fallout from the initial situation.



Shock/Denial: blaming self

It's typical to move from blaming others to blaming yourself. The change is still happening and emotions are running high as we try to get through the confusion change can cause.

Stages 1 and 2 can go on for some time, and we sometimes move back and forward between them.

We won't be able to accept the change until we can move beyond stages 1 and 2.



Doubt: uncertainty & confusion

In stage 3, the shock has died down, but doubt and uncertainty begin to grow. This stage involves asking questions, expressing doubts and rethinking the change. It represents the beginning of the journey beyond denial and towards acceptance.



Problem solving

Everyone is relieved to reach the problem-solving stage as this is when people start to embrace change. Denial and doubt take a backseat to creativity as we build new ways of doing things.



Acceptance: rationalisation

This is the time when we begin to accept the change, focusing less on what's been lost and starting to explore the implications of what's changed.



Moving on

At this stage, people feel better about the change and can face the future with hope and purpose. What was a change at first has now become your new normal.

How to cope with change-related stress

At times of change and stress, it's easy to let your wellbeing take a backseat.

But the first step in being able to cope with change-related stress is by listening to and meeting your own needs.

There are lots of small, daily things you can do to give you the best chance of changing your life or coping with constant change.

Stay active

There are two parts to staying active: getting enough exercise and avoiding too much sedentary time. The NHS recommends that adults get 150 minutes of exercise a week - that's about 20-30 minutes a day. Try searching YouTube for an at-home workout that you like, or go for a walk at lunch time. Avoid too much sedentary time by taking regular breaks from work or watching tv.

Stay in touch with your support network

We're social creatures so being isolated from others is really difficult. Take the opportunity to meet up for a picnic in a park with friends or make time to video call your loved ones. Having that support from friends and family is essential for our mental health.

Talk to others about how you're feeling

When we try to keep worries to ourselves they can go round and round in our heads, increasing our stress levels. Sharing how you feel about change isn't necessarily about asking others for advice; talking it through can allow you to come to realisations yourself or understand what is needed.

Be conscious of negative thought patterns

With so much uncertainty and change happening around us, it's easy to get stuck in negative thought patterns. There are lots of different types of negative thought patterns - take a look at this article from Healthline : ['5 Ways to Stop Spiraling Negative Thoughts from Taking Control.'](#)

Avoid unhealthy coping mechanisms

When we're feeling a bit low or stressed, it's easy to turn to supposed 'quick fixes' like alcohol or smoking. Whilst these things might help us feel better for a moment, they can have a negative impact on our physical and mental health - remember, alcohol is a depressant. Make sure your routine includes positive ways to boost your mental health so that you don't feel tempted by quick fixes.

Take control of your time

By planning out your day and making sure you include activities to support your wellbeing, you'll feel more in control and can take a proactive approach to boosting your mental and physical health.

Practise mindfulness

Mindfulness is a powerful tool for coping with ongoing change in life. Mindfulness means taking notice of your thoughts and feelings and what's going on in the world around you to help you stay in the present. By focusing on the present moment, you're less likely to feel anxious or stressed. Professor Mark Williams, previously the director of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, describes mindfulness as "allowing ourselves to see the present moment clearly. When we do that, it can positively change the way we see ourselves and our lives."

Get the basics right

When we're overtired, it can be even harder to deal with stressful situations. Try keeping the time you wake up and go to bed consistent to make sure you're getting enough rest. Staying hydrated is also important: being dehydrated can affect everything from mood to memory. If you're struggling to drink eight glasses of water a day, try keeping a water chart or downloading an app to prompt you when you need to drink.

Wellbeing resources

This factsheet is part of our series of free resources aimed at helping teams look after their physical and mental health.

Take a look at our [HR Resources](#) and our [blog](#) for advice and toolkits to help look after your people and your business.