



# Looking after Yourself

*Standards and Monitoring Services (SAMS) is an independent trust established to assist in the development of better quality community based services.*

*As part of their work, they offer family/whanau carer support and training programmes, covering topics like; Managing relationships with professionals, negotiation skills, initiating change, different kinds of advocacy, managing challenging situations and impact on brothers and sisters.*

*SAMS facilitated the NZDSA forum in 2003 and we hope they will do so this year too.*

*If you or your Down syndrome support group would be interested in a support or training programme further details are available from [www.sams.org.nz](http://www.sams.org.nz) or (04)384-7010.*

*These notes on 'looking after yourself' are adapted from the SAMS resource manual with their kind permission.*

Stress is “the non-specific response of the body to any demand made on it”. This response is automatic and immediate, has a variety of causes and a variety of effects (see box).

Being a caregiver can be a significant cause of stress. A Canadian survey in 1995 showed that although 91% of caregivers thought they were coping well, 65% found their role stressful. Difficult aspects were feeling helpless, being alone, feeling guilty, time pressure and concerns about the person receiving care.

## Some symptoms of stress

### Mind

- ✓ Memory loss
- ✓ Difficulty in decision making
- ✓ Confusion
- ✓ Seriousness

### Body

- ✓ Headache
- ✓ Muscle tension
- ✓ Exhaustion
- ✓ Altered sleep patterns
- ✓ Cramps
- ✓ Pains
- ✓ Nausea
- ✓ Flushing
- ✓ Racing heart
- ✓ Frequent illness

### Emotional

- ✓ Irritable
- ✓ Impatient
- ✓ Frustrated
- ✓ Angry
- ✓ Worry
- ✓ Fear
- ✓ Nervous
- ✓ Depressed
- ✓ Isolated
- ✓ Clingy
- ✓ Increased eating/drinking
- ✓ Pacing
- ✓ Crying
- ✓ Fidgeting
- ✓ Blaming
- ✓ Yelling

# SAMS twelve commandments of stress management



## Mind

### 1) Explore your belief system

Assumptions we have (eg “I must put others’ needs before mine”) determine our behaviour and can cause stress. Clarifying beliefs and values may assist us gain perspective.

### 2) Have Realistic Expectations

This causes less pressure, reduces our sense of failure and increases our sense of self-control.

### 3) Set Achievable Goals

Instead of just responding to constant demands, it can be good to decide *what* we want to achieve and *how* we’re going to do this. Goals should be achievable, realistic, desirable and preferably measurable. Then we can plan, organize our resources and check our progress.

### 4) Reframe Situations

The same situation seen in a different way can change our attitude (so that we can see things in a constructive light) and give us more energy: eg. see a situation as a ‘challenge’ rather than a ‘problem’ or as ‘looking for additional support’ rather than ‘finding it difficult to cope’.

## Body

### 5) Eat well

We need well-nourished bodies so we have the energy to provide care.

### 6) Exercise

Stress places the body in a state of high alert, so it is ready to run away from danger. Exercise is an ideal way to let the energy out. Around half an hour of aerobic exercise on most days will ease stress and build up strength. Walking pushing a stroller is ideal.

### 7) Sleep

After enough sleep we wake naturally (not with the alarm!) feel refreshed and don’t want to sleep during the day. Most adults need 7-8 hours sleep each night. If you’re not getting enough sleep, make small changes in your sleep pattern; try going to bed 30 minutes earlier rather than sleeping later.

### 8) Relax

Natural ways to relax include sitting by a river, stroking a cat or going for a leisurely walk. Learned methods include meditation and techniques of visualization, posture and breathing. Situations often found relaxing are massage, a scented bath and listening to baroque music.

## Emotional

### 9) Laugh regularly

Laughter releases energy and relieves tension. Spend time with friends with a good sense of humour.

### 10) Build a support system

We need a network of people who appreciate the job we’re doing, so that when we link with them, we receive something from the experience. We may need to deliberately find or build this network, which can be formal or informal.

### 11) Enjoy leisure activities

We need to allow ourselves to let go and do something enjoyable and refreshing. If we want our giving to our children with Down syndrome to be effective we are required to give to ourselves.

### 12) Consider professional assistance

Sometimes the demands on our time and energy may be greater than our skills or resources. In this case it is healthy and a positive step to request professional assistance.