

# Stress and wellbeing in Australia survey 2014: *Key findings*



Now in its fourth year, the Australian Psychological Society *Stress and wellbeing in Australia survey 2014* measures the stress and wellbeing levels of Australians and provides a year-on-year comparison of how they are faring.

The survey aims to provide insights that will benefit the psychological and physical health of Australians.

## How stressed are Australians?

Australians are faring slightly better than last year; however, levels of wellbeing are still lower than the first survey in 2011, and stress and distress levels are higher than those reported in 2012 and 2011.

## Stress and distress

- One in four Australians reported moderate to severe levels of distress this year.
- The highest levels of stress and distress were reported by young Australians (18-25 and 26-35 year age group).
- Older Australians, aged 66 and above, continued to report significantly lower levels of stress and distress.

**More than one in five (22%) reported mental health issues as a source of stress.**

## Wellbeing

- In contrast to previous years' findings, men reported significantly higher levels of wellbeing than women.
- Older Australians (66 years and above) continued to report significantly higher levels of wellbeing compared with other Australians.
- Australians aged 18-25 and 46-55 reported the lowest levels of wellbeing.

## Mental health

- Almost two in five Australians reported experiencing some depression symptoms, with 13% of these reporting depression symptoms in the severe to extremely severe range.
- More than one quarter of Australians reported experiencing at least some anxiety symptoms, with 13% reporting severe to extremely severe levels of anxiety.
- Similar to previous years' findings younger adults continued to report significantly higher levels of depression and anxiety symptoms compared with older Australians.
- This year men reported significantly higher levels of anxiety than women.



**Almost one in five (17%)**

**Australians reported that current stress was having a strong to very strong impact on physical health.**

## What is the impact of stress?

- Stress continues to affect the mental and physical health of Australians.
- Consistent with previous years findings, just over seven in ten Australians (72%) reported that current stress was having at least some impact on physical health, with almost one in five (17%) reporting that current stress was having a strong to very strong impact on physical health.
- Similar to findings in 2013, almost two in three Australians reported that current stress was having at least some impact on their mental health (64%), with almost one in five (19%) reporting it was having a strong to very strong impact.
- More than one in five (22%) reported mental health issues as a source of stress.
- For people aged 46 and over, personal health issues were the leading cause of stress.

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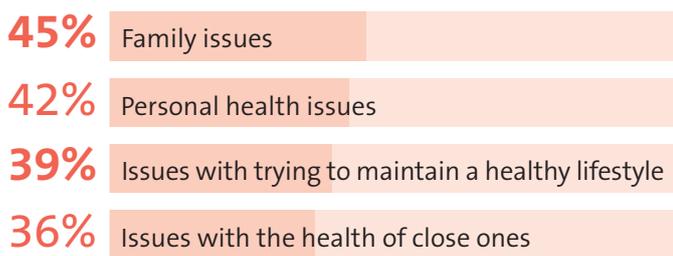
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## What's causing stress?

Financial issues remain the leading cause of stress for Australians, with nearly half of all participants (49%), citing it as a cause of stress, followed by:



**Financial issues were the top source of stress for men (44%) and women (53%).**

## Other findings:

- Financial issues were the top source of stress for men (44%) and women (53%).
- Women were significantly more likely than men to be concerned about most sources of stress including, financial issues, family and relational issues, health issues – self or close ones, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
- Men were significantly more likely than women to identify issues regarding the current political climate as a source of stress.
- Men and women reported similar levels of concern about issues with the economy, workplace, the environment and personal safety issues.
- Concern about relationship issues was highest amongst those aged 18-25 and 26-35.
- Issues around personal safety were also highest amongst those aged 18-25 and 26-35.

## SPECIAL FEATURE 1: Maintaining a healthy lifestyle

The struggle to maintain a healthy lifestyle has emerged as a key source of stress for Australians. To investigate this issue in more detail Australians were surveyed about their attitudes, activities, strategies and the barriers to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important to the majority of Australians, with four in five (79%) agreeing it is important.

Many Australians are actively trying to improve their health: 87% of Australians had made an effort in the past 12 months to maintain a healthy lifestyle, with the most common reasons being because it's the right thing to do (97%), to feel better about themselves (95%) and to reduce stress (90%).

Australians reported the social benefits of pursuing a healthy lifestyle, with 66% agreeing that maintaining a healthy lifestyle provided opportunities to get together with others.

**Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important to the majority of Australians, with four in five (79%) agreeing it is important to them.**

### Benefits of a healthy lifestyle

The benefits of a healthy lifestyle are clear. People who had made efforts to be healthier — e.g., eating healthily, exercising regularly and getting adequate sleep — reported significantly higher levels of overall wellbeing and lower levels of stress and distress, and significantly lower levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms than those who didn't engage in those activities.

### What helps people achieve their healthy lifestyle goals?

A number of strategies and activities helped people achieve their healthy lifestyle goals. Australians reported believing in their own ability to take action (85%) and having the desire to change (83%) supported their lifestyle goals.

Identifying and managing triggers (71%) and changing one's mindset about healthy and unhealthy behaviours (75%) also emerged as key psychological factors cited as helpful in supporting lifestyle change.

### Barriers

Despite most people feeling it is important to maintain a healthy lifestyle, they reported a number of barriers to being healthier.

Unexpected life events (63%), loss of motivation (61%), expense (60%) and lack of time (59%) were the chief barriers reported.

Family demands (51%) and work demands (48%) were also barriers.

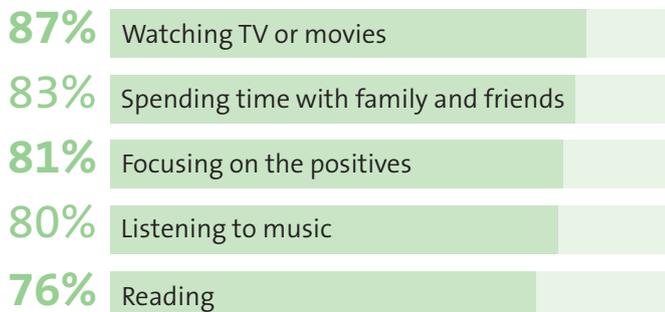
However, three in ten Australians (32%) reported a lack of knowledge about how to maintain a healthy lifestyle as being a barrier.

While many people seem to be able to start a health regime, many also found it hard to maintain their regime, with four in ten Australians (43%) reporting that not getting back on track after a relapse had prevented them from maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

## How do Australians manage stress?

Australians manage stress in a range of ways, using activities to relieve stress as well as strategies to change their thinking and behaviour, including thinking positively, adjusting their expectations and avoiding stressful people and situations.

### Top five ways of managing stress:



### Most effective strategies:



### Seeking help

Family, friends and GPs remain the most popular choices from whom to seek help.

One in seven Australians (13%) sought help from a psychologist or other mental health professional in the past 12 months.

## SPECIAL FEATURE 2:

### Obesity

The survey also took a closer look at the experience of people with obesity.

Australians with obesity report less success in achieving a healthy lifestyle, being more likely to believe that they were doing a poor to fair job compared to non-obese Australians.

Australians with obesity reported significantly lower levels of overall wellbeing than non-obese Australians and they were more likely to report that stress was having an impact on their physical health.

**Maintaining a healthy lifestyle was also less important to people with obesity – especially compared to people in the non-obese group; as was exercise – they rated maintaining a healthy lifestyle less important and engaged in less exercise.**

They also struggled with their health more: they were significantly more likely to rate personal health issues (55% obese vs. 37% non-obese) and issues with trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle (48% obese vs. 37% non-obese) as sources of stress.

They also reported more physical health problems. They were more likely than those without obesity to be suffering from one or more chronic health conditions.

Loss of motivation (69%), unexpected life events (68%), too expensive (64%), lack of time (60%) and physical injury or illness (57%) were the top five barriers to maintaining a healthy lifestyle for obese people.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle was also less important to people with obesity – especially compared to people in the non-obese group; as was exercise – they rated maintaining a healthy lifestyle less important and engaged in less exercise.

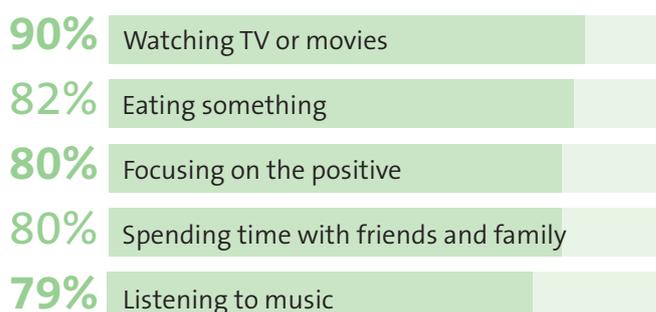
### Managing stress

Significantly more Australians with obesity sought help to manage their stress in the past 12 months from general practitioners and mental health professionals than non-obese Australians.

To manage stress, Australians with obesity were more likely to report eating something and sleeping more than the non-obese group.

Australians with obesity were also less likely to report doing something active, something relaxing, or something spiritual. They were also significantly less likely than the non-obese group to report that doing something active was an effective way of managing stress.

### Top five ways of managing stress for people with obesity were:



## Workplace stress and wellbeing

Issues in the workplace remain a key cause of stress for Australians, with two in five working people (44%) identifying work as a source of stress.



**Work was also implicated in health outcomes, with nearly half Australians (48%) citing 'work demands' as a barrier to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.**

- Levels of workplace wellbeing were similar to last year but still **significantly lower** than in 2012 and 2011.
- Australians also reported significantly lower levels of satisfaction than findings reported in both 2012 and 2011. They also reported **significantly lower** levels of work-life balance satisfaction than in 2011.
- Working Australians reported similar levels of job stress to those reported in 2013 but **significantly higher** when compared to findings in 2012 and 2011.
- They also reported **significantly lower** levels of interest in their job than those reported in 2012.
- Working Australians also reported higher levels of likelihood of unemployment than in 2011.

Work was also implicated in health outcomes, with nearly half Australians (48%) citing 'work demands' as a barrier to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.



For access to the full *Stress and wellbeing in Australia survey 2014* report go to:  
[www.psychology.org.au/npw](http://www.psychology.org.au/npw)

### Resources

The APS website includes a number of resources that can assist individuals with stress or those trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Visit [www.psychology.org.au/npw](http://www.psychology.org.au/npw) to download resources.

### Getting help

To talk to an APS Psychologist contact the APS Find a Psychologist service by calling 1800 333 497 (toll free) or visiting [www.findapsychologist.org.au](http://www.findapsychologist.org.au).

### About the survey

The Australian Psychological Society in conjunction with an online research company conducted the survey with a representative sample of Australians (N=1553) and an oversample of people with obesity (n= 49), total 1602 (total 443 obese). \*The survey measured the stress and wellbeing of Australians as well examining people's behaviours and experience of trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

\*The national sample of the survey was representative of the Australian adult population (18 and above) for age, gender, geographical location and work status (matched on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data).

### About the APS

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) is the leading professional organisation for psychologists, representing more than 21,000 members. The APS is committed to advancing psychology as a discipline and a profession and it spreads the message that psychologists make a difference to people's lives, through improving psychological knowledge and community wellbeing.

[www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au)

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