



**MEDICAL AND  
HEALTH SCIENCES**

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## **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

**Project Title:** Stress Management with a Virtual Health Coach

- Supervisor: Dr Elizabeth Broadbent
- Researcher: Kate Harland

You are invited to take part in a study that explores the usefulness of a virtual health coach in helping people with stress management.

This project is being carried out by Kate Harland, a master's student in the Department of Psychological Medicine at the University of Auckland, and Professor Elizabeth Broadbent (Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Auckland), who will be supervising the project.

**It is important that you read this document carefully so that you can make an informed decision about whether you would like to participate.**

**Purpose of the study:** The aim of this study is to explore the usefulness of a virtual health coach in helping people with stress management.

**Your rights as a participant:** Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw from this research project at any time during the procedure and until two weeks after completing the final questionnaire without giving a reason and without any negative consequences. If you withdraw from the study, your data will be removed. If you are a student of the researchers, we give our assurance that your participation or non-participation in this study will have no effect on your grades or relationship with the University and that you may contact your academic head should you feel that this assurance has not been met.

**Eligibility:** We are recruiting participants who are aged 18 years or over and who self-identify as stressed. You should be able to understand, read, and write in English. You also will need your own connected device, such as a computer, mobile phone, or tablet, to complete this study.

**Procedure:** If you choose to participate, we will ask you to attend an online consultation with a virtual health coach in which you will receive a stress management plan. This session should take no longer than 15 minutes. Your plan and treatment resources will be provided on a separate website where you will be asked to enter your participant ID number so that you may

access these materials. We ask that you follow your treatment plan, using the provided resources, for 15-30 minutes every day for 4 weeks.

Participants will be asked to complete brief, online questionnaires at 3 stages. Prior to your consultation, we will ask that you complete a demographic questionnaire and an assessment of your stress-levels. This should take no longer than 10 minutes. Immediately after the consultation, we will ask about your trust in and satisfaction with your virtual health coach. This should also take no longer than 10 minutes. After 4-weeks, we will email you to complete follow-up questionnaires regarding your stress management plan and to reassess your stress-levels. We will ask you to answer these questions with careful consideration, but this should only take up to 15 minutes of your time.

The study will take place completely online. You are encouraged to talk with whānau or support people before participating if appropriate.

**Benefits:** Benefits for your participation in this study include learning about stress management techniques.

**Compensation:** As recognition of your time and assistance with this study, all participants will be entered into the draw to win an iPad.

**Risks and Discomforts:** The procedures outlined in this protocol are non-invasive. They do not involve greater than minimal risk, harm or discomfort than may be encountered in daily life. Participants must be aware that the virtual health coach will ask you about your stress, which may potentially cause distress.

Please also be aware that taking part in the study does not guarantee a reduction in stress. This tool should not be relied upon to replace current techniques and support structures that you may have in place. The study is not intended for individuals who have been diagnosed with mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.

**Digital Humans:** Your virtual health coach is a digital human, an interactive, animated human that can understand and respond to conversations and emotions. Your health coach has been designed and programmed using software provided by Soul Machines Ltd.

You will be required to enable your camera and your microphone so that you may interact with your virtual health coach. No data will be collected during your consultation with the virtual health coach. Soul Machines Ltd will not store, access, or use any data collected that is throughout this research.

**Data Storage:** All data will be stored in electronic format by the researcher. Data will be stored on a password protected computer and backed up by a server. The access to these files will be restricted to the researcher and the supervisor only. Consent forms will be stored in a password encrypted file and will be kept for a period of six years.

**Confidentiality:** All answers provided in questionnaires will remain strictly confidential and no information that could personally identify you will be used in any report on this study. After completion of the study, all confidential data, will be kept for a minimum period of six years to allow for publication and analysis, after which time it will be securely and confidentially disposed of. Research publications and presentations from the study will not contain any information that could personally identify you.

This study will ask for your email address and your mobile phone to contact you regarding the follow-up questionnaire you must complete 4-weeks after your consultation. Up to two reminders to complete these follow-up questionnaires will be sent via text message. Contact details (i.e., email address and phone number) will be saved in a separate file to questionnaire data. Only the researcher and the supervisor will be able to access this file. All data and contact details will be deidentified and labelled as a number from 1—155.

**Results:** A summary of the results of this study will be sent to you if you wish. As it takes some time to analyse the results of studies, it may be more than a year after your participation that you receive this information.

**We appreciate the time you have taken to read this invitation. If you have any further questions, please contact:**

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**Cultural Support:** If you require Māori cultural support, talk to your whānau in the first instance. Alternatively, you may contact the administrator at Emerge Aotearoa for a cultural support worker by emailing [info@emergeaotearoa.org.nz](mailto:info@emergeaotearoa.org.nz).

For concerns of an ethical nature, you can contact the Chair of the Auckland Health Research Ethics Committee at ahrec@auckland.ac.nz or at 373 7599 ext 83711, or at Auckland Health Research Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142.

“Approved by the Auckland Health Research Ethics Committee on 12/04/2023 for three years. Reference number AH25691.”