



# Steps to deal with stress

A simple guide to stressing  
less and enjoying life more

This resource may also be made available on request in the following formats:



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# Stress can affect anyone

Stress doesn't just make you feel bad, it can also be bad for your health.

The good news is there are steps that you can take to deal with it.

This booklet contains some practical ways for you to start dealing with stress right now, and to stop it building up in future.

Research shows that small steps can make a big difference, so keep on reading...

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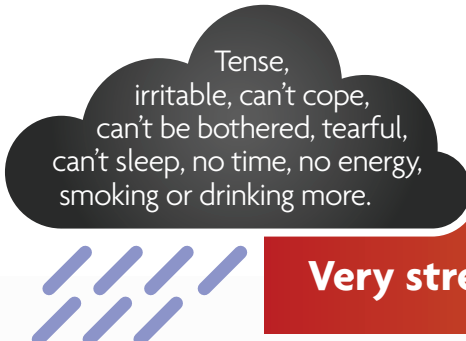
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# How are you feeling today?

The first step towards managing stress better is to realise when things are getting on top of us. Recognising a problem is the first step towards doing something about it.



Tense,  
irritable, can't cope,  
can't be bothered, tearful,  
can't sleep, no time, no energy,  
smoking or drinking more.

**Very stressed**

Following the steps to deal with stress in this booklet can help you move along the scale **from here...**

**Problems can pile up.** There's a long list of things that can cause stress: money worries, unemployment, problems at work, family and relationship difficulties, childcare,

physical health problems, the pressure of being a carer, bad experiences in the past, being bullied, harassed or discriminated against... and many more.



**No stress**

**...to here.** And if you already feel like this, keep reading for tips on how to stay stress-free in future!



Relaxed,  
coping well,  
in control,  
calm,  
enjoying life,  
happy.

# Why do I feel like this?

Our bodies usually cope well with short-term pressures, but too much stress for too long can make us unwell.

Most people can usually find the get-up-and-go they need to deal with a crisis.

But what if the crisis doesn't go away?

We can be so busy dealing with problems that we don't notice we're stressed. Our bodies have to keep on coping in the same way.

## **These are some of the signs of long-term stress:**

- being unable to get restful sleep so that we're tired through the day
- eating more 'comfort foods' which are full of fat and sugar
- having less energy to take exercise
- not feeling motivated to see people, or get things done

- memory and concentration can get worse
- our immune system weakens, increasing the risk of coughs and colds
- back pain, headaches and stomach and bowel problems are more common too.

**'It spirals out of control and before you know it, you're up the creek without a paddle.'**

Jenny, Glasgow



# Why ignoring stress doesn't work

**Facing up to problems actually reduces stress and increases our confidence.**

Trying to avoid dealing with stress might seem sensible, but it usually just makes things worse.

Common ways of avoiding stress include trying to block out problems by drinking too much alcohol, ignoring bills or spending too much money.

Reading this booklet could be the first step towards facing up to problems. It will help you think about the difficult situations you might have been trying to ignore. Or the unhealthy things you might have been doing to cope with stress.

It will give you some practical, useful steps that lots of other people have used to start dealing with stress.

## Take action now!

Before you read on, why not try some simple relaxation exercises (pages 38–40).

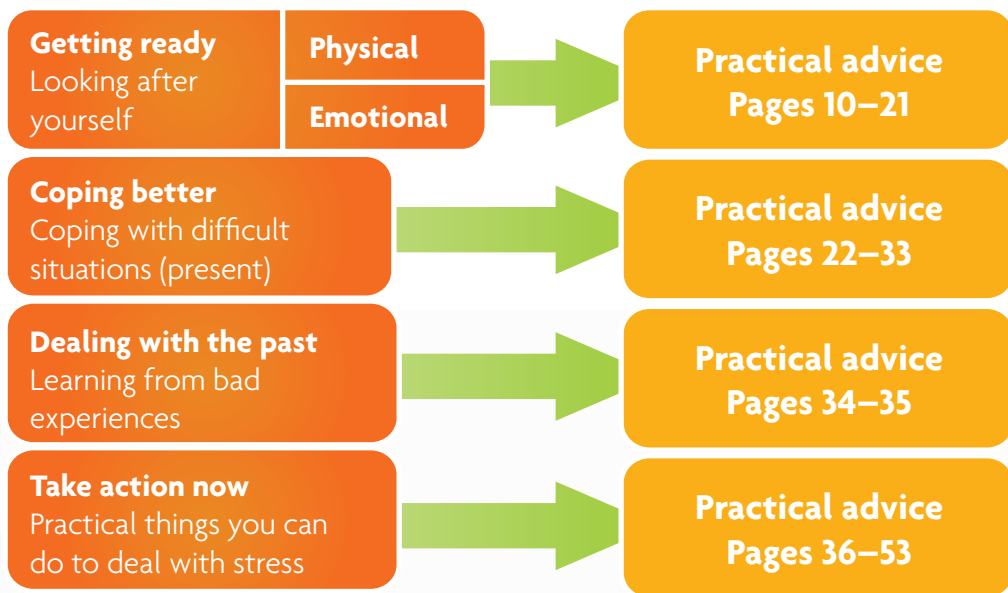
And now might be a good time to write down the things that are making you feel stressed. Use the 'My problem list' sheet (pages 46–47).

# Steps to deal with stress

This diagram shows the steps you can take to control stress. We'll cover all the steps within this booklet, and we'll also give you sources for further help.



Read the whole booklet through if you like – or just dip into whichever bits are best for your own situation.



# Getting ready

Dealing with stress can be hard work. To be able to take stress on, we need to look after ourselves.

- That means eating well, sleeping well, being active and cutting out things that are bad for us.
- It also means learning to take time out to relax and have fun, and trying to think positively.

So get ready to start dealing with stress by first looking after yourself.

Remember, you **can** change. Focus on the small steps that are most useful to you.

# Eating well

If we're stressed, it's more important than ever to eat well.

## Eating breakfast

Your granny was right, breakfast really is the most important meal of the day! Eating breakfast means you'll also be less likely to reach for unhealthy snacks before lunch. Choosing wholemeal toast, cereals or porridge helps to keep your energy levels up through the whole morning.

## Sitting down with other people

Families who eat together are more likely to sort out problems and enjoy each other's company. Whether it's with the kids, your partner or people from work, being sociable at mealtimes can be a good thing.

## Cutting down on tea, coffee and 'energy' drinks

These all contain caffeine – try cutting down if you feel anxious, panicky or sleepy.

## Getting your 5-a-day

We all know we're meant to get five portions of fruit and vegetables every day, but it can seem like a lot. Try making some small changes, like chopping a banana into your cereal, or adding some vegetables into your spaghetti bolognese. Even a glass of orange juice counts, so it can be easier than you think.

## Learning to cook

Cooking from scratch is a really healthy way to eat, as there will be less salt and more vitamins than in most ready meals and processed food. And learning how to do it can be fun. Watch some cooking programmes, get a recipe book or find a cookery class and give it a go.

For more hints and ideas on eating well, go to [www.takelifeon.co.uk](http://www.takelifeon.co.uk)

# Sleeping well

Good sleep is essential but can be the first thing to go when we're stressed. This can lead to us feeling even more stressed.

Here are some things you can try to get a better night's sleep.

## Your bedroom

- Don't have a TV, computer or games console in your bedroom – try to keep it as a calm place to relax.
- Cut out light – blackout blinds or an eye mask are good for this.
- Block out noise with earplugs.

## During the day

- Try not to take naps.
- Try not to think about sleep too much.
- Cut down on caffeine.
- Be physically active.

## Before bed

- Have a regular bedtime routine.
- Relax with a warm bath.
- Avoid heavy meals for at least two hours.
- Avoid alcohol for at least three hours.
- Switch the TV off half an hour before you go to bed.
- Set an alarm to avoid 'have I slept in?' panics. Surprisingly, having a regular wake-up time is more important than a regular bedtime. To avoid clock-watching make sure the clock is facing away from you.

## Can't sleep?

- Go to a different room for a while and do something that's not mentally challenging.
- Have a warm, milky, caffeine-free drink.
- Try a relaxation exercise (pages 38–40).
- Don't lie in or nap to compensate the next day.

## Still can't sleep?

Concerns often disrupt our sleep. Try thinking about them, and what you might do about them, during the day. Writing them down before you go to bed can also help you put them out of your head. You could try using the 'Problem solving' steps (pages 41–42) and the 'My problem list' (pages 46–47).

# Being active

We all know being active is good for us. But what activity, how often, and where?

Well the good news is that you don't have to join a gym. Walking briskly for a total of 30 minutes, five days a week will not only reduce stress levels, but will also help reduce your risk of heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

You don't have to do it all at once either. Three lots of 10 minutes works just as well, and makes it easy to fit into everyday life.

Try these other easy steps:

## **Friendly stroll**

Going for a walk with a friend is a great way to spend an evening and a lot cheaper than going to the pub. Joining a walking group is fun and sociable too – find one near you at [www.pathsforall.org.uk](http://www.pathsforall.org.uk)

## **Get out with the kids**

Chasing your kids around the garden or having a kick-about in the park is good for you and fun for them.

Swimming is also a great way to get exercise with the kids.

## **Leave the car**

When you pop out to the local shop for the paper, or you drop your kids off at school, why not walk instead of taking the car?

## **Stop the bus**

Get off the bus a couple of stops early on your way to work.



## **Get out at lunchtime**

Why not go to the shops or the park at lunchtime? The walk will also make you feel more awake in the afternoon.

## **Take the stairs**

Try taking the stairs instead of the lift or the escalator.

## **Gardening**

Gardening counts as exercise, and it's a great way to make yourself feel better about the weeding. Growing vegetables is great fun for kids.

## **Green spaces**

Research shows getting out to a green space can boost your mood. It's great for your kids too. So whether it's a walk round your local park or a climb up a hill, go for green!

## **Find a class**

There are loads of classes that you can join at your local sports or community centre.

They're great for relaxation and meeting people too.

## **Sign up for a charity run**

Either by yourself or with a group of friends. It's a great way to get fit and do something worthwhile at the same time.

## **On your bike!**

Kids and grown-ups can all feel the benefit of cycling. If you don't know where to go, ask your local bike shop.

## **Join a gym**

Yes, we know we said you didn't have to. But remember that most council-run gyms offer discounted memberships and leisure cards. And most gyms are full of people like you who are there to do a wee bit of exercise – not train for a marathon!

For more information on a range of activities in your area visit [www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/keeping-active](http://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/keeping-active) or [www.scottishdisabilitysport.com](http://www.scottishdisabilitysport.com)

# Relaxing and having fun

Taking a break from your hectic life – even a small one – can stop stress building up.

Being stressed can stop us doing the things we usually enjoy. But missing out on those things is also one of the causes of stress.

Are there things you used to love doing, but haven't done recently because of the pressure you're under? Making time to relax and have some fun is an important part of beating stress – even if you don't feel like it to start with.

## Some things others have enjoyed doing are...

- Going for a walk, with the dog if you've got one.
- Making time to play with your kids, at home or at the swings.
- Baking a cake, and sharing it with someone.
- Deciding to learn something new – for example, taking an evening class in something you've always wanted to do.

## Meditation and deep relaxation

Learning how to clear our minds takes practice, but it's a really good way to relax and de-stress.

Try the relaxation exercises in this booklet (pages 38–40).

Also look for meditation classes, books, CDs and DVDs in libraries or search online.

# Unhealthy ways to cope

People often drink, smoke or use drugs to relax. But instead of helping us cope, these things may make stress worse – and can damage health.

## Alcohol

Many people drink alcohol to relax, forget their problems and combat feelings of stress. However, the negative effects of alcohol are likely to increase stress. In the long run, drinking can reduce mental wellbeing and contribute to feelings of stress, anxiety and depression.

The risk of developing a wider range of health problems, including throat and breast cancers, also increases the more you drink on a regular basis.

To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level it is safest for men and women not to drink more than 14 units per week on a regular basis.

14 units is the equivalent of:

- 6 pints of beer
- a bottle and a half of wine
- half a bottle of spirits.

If you regularly drink as much as 14 units per week, it is best to spread this evenly across the week rather than drinking all at once. Having several alcohol-free days each week is a good way to cut down.

By making a choice not to drink any alcohol while pregnant or trying for a baby, you're helping to keep yourself and your baby stress-free and healthy.

To talk to someone in confidence about alcohol, call **Drinkline** free on **0300 123 1110** (weekdays 9 am–8 pm, weekends 11 am–4 pm).

# Drugs

## Street and prescription drugs

The effects of street drugs can be unpredictable, as can taking more of a prescription drug than you're meant to.

Using drugs in combination or with alcohol is definitely not a good idea and can lead to overdose.

Using drugs robs us of time and energy – things we usually don't have much of when stressed.

The damage they can do to our health, relationships and finances causes further problems and puts us in an even worse position to deal with stress.

For more help and information on drugs, call Know the Score free on 0800 587 5879 [www.knowthescore.info](http://www.knowthescore.info)

'It affects your mind, so obviously it's hidden away temporarily. The next morning when you wake up it's just back there again... It's a false economy.'

Dave, Dundee

# Smoking

It's a very widely held misconception that smoking helps you relax. It actually has the opposite effect on your body by speeding up your heart rate. You can test this effect for yourself simply by taking your pulse before and after you light up.

Also, think about how stressed you feel when you're somewhere you can't smoke.

## Better ways to cope

It's OK to be stressed sometimes – it happens to everyone.

What's important is to deal with it in positive ways, not in ways that damage our health, our relationships and our wallets.

In situations like this try breathing deeply in much the same way you do when you smoke. You might find this helps give you a feeling of calm.

For advice and information on stopping smoking, please visit [www.quityourway.scot](http://www.quityourway.scot) from NHS Health Scotland.

For hints and tips on how to stop smoking you can also contact **Quit Your Way Scotland's** national stop smoking helpline free on **0800 84 84 84**.

If we rely on drugs or alcohol to help us cope, we can find ourselves in real trouble.

Learning to relax, being more active, getting involved with others and talking or writing about how we feel are all better ways to cope.

# Change for good!

Making lasting changes to your health can be hard.  
Here are some steps that can help.

Choose what **you** want to change.  
Be **SMART** – set, and write down, goals that are:

## Specific

Rather than ‘get fit’, a better goal would be ‘to take a brisk walk after lunch on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays’.

## Measurable

Set goals that can be measured. ‘Get fit’ is hard to measure, but it’s easy to know if you walked for half an hour on Monday, Wednesday and Friday or not.

## Achievable

Start small and set goals that are within your reach.

## Relevant

Choose changes that make sense for you.

## Timely

Set a target date. Without one, it’s easy to put off making the change. And give yourself a (healthy!) treat when you achieve a goal.

**Remember, things won’t always go your way, but keep at it and you’ll find that you can start to make small changes for the better.**

# Positive thinking

Sometimes we find it easier to tell ourselves we can't do things, even before we've tried them. Becoming more positive can help us deal with stressful situations better.

## Small steps

We often think that in order to change we need to do something radical. However, the research shows that when people make small changes there can be a big difference to how they feel.

## Drop the label

Do you give up on things easily, or avoid certain situations because you label yourself as 'unsporty' or 'thick'? Be careful about using labels like these to describe yourself. They limit what you can and will do.

## Learn to be optimistic

Try not to say or think things like 'things always go wrong' or 'I never get it right'. There are usually lots of reasons why things go wrong. If you are making critical remarks to yourself be as specific as possible. See setbacks or failure as temporary, rather than permanent.

**Positive people are less likely to feel stressed.**

# Dealing with difficult situations

The next step in dealing with your stress is to deal with difficult situations that are happening to you right now.

- Everyone faces problems or difficult situations in their lives, and those problems can lead to stress.
- Sometimes situations are outside our control, and we may have to accept we can't change them.
- Stress can sometimes make problems seem worse than they are. This section helps to give you the confidence to cope better.



# Working on your problems

Taking steps to deal with your problems will make you feel better able to cope with them.

## Top tips include

- Divide problems into small bite-sized pieces and deal with them one at a time.
- Try to deal with problems as they arise so that they don't get worse.
- Prioritise what has to be dealt with now and what can wait.
- difficulties with children or parenting (pages 29–30)
- problems at work (page 44)
- discrimination or unfair treatment (page 44)
- family problems (page 44)
- the loss of a loved one (page 45)
- illness (page 45)
- caring for someone who's ill or disabled (page 45)
- domestic abuse (page 45)
- crime (page 45).

## Turn to the following pages for some suggestions on common problems:

- money worries (page 43)
- relationship problems (pages 27–28)
- unemployment or the threat of redundancy (pages 43–44)

Now might be a good time to try the practical problem-solving exercise (pages 41–42).

# Thinking straight

## Stress can make us think irrationally.

If we're worrying about our problems all the time, we might start expecting the worst, and become more pessimistic. And we might blow things out of proportion.

Stress can twist our thoughts so that we can't think straight, and that makes it more difficult to do something positive to deal with problems.

If you think this might be happening to you, think about these questions in light of your own worries:

**What's the worst that could happen?**

**What if someone else I know was in my shoes. What would they do?  
How would they react?**

**Are my thoughts based on real facts?  
Is there another way to think about things?**

Being optimistic can be hard when you're in the middle of a difficult situation, but trying to sort out fact from fiction in your head might help you think more clearly and cut worries down to size. It sounds daft, but hoping for the best can often mean that the best will happen.

## Take action now

You could also try the 'Three good things' exercise at the back of this booklet (pages 48–49). Research shows that focusing on the good things that happen can make us feel more optimistic.

# Talk about it, write about it

You don't have to solve every problem on your own.

Lots of us find it hard to start talking about difficult problems. Sometimes it's embarrassing to talk about feelings and sometimes we don't actually know exactly what's wrong. But sharing a problem can ease stress, even if you can't find an answer straight away.

## Who?

If you have a personal or emotional problem, the right person for you to talk to might be someone who knows you really well. But you have to be able to trust them to take you seriously and to keep your business private.

This might be difficult, especially if friends and family are actually part of the problem. If so, it might be better to speak to a professional person first. Call **Breathing Space** free on **0800 83 85 87** to talk confidentially about anything that's getting you down. Or speak to your GP for advice.

## What?

Sometimes it's difficult to know what the problem actually is. If your friend or your GP were to ask you 'what's wrong?' do you know what you would say? If you can't pin down the facts, you can still talk about feelings. If there's more than one feeling, try to say or list them all. For example, 'I just feel exhausted all the time' and 'I feel so angry I could just....'

## How?

If you think you'll have trouble saying what's on your mind, write it down on a piece of paper first. Sometimes this is enough to shrink your worries down to size. Try using the 'My problem list' (pages 46–47). Show your list and this booklet to the person you want to talk to if you think that will help.

# Planning ahead

Stressful times are sometimes unavoidable.  
Planning ahead can help us cope better.

## Learn to say 'no'

It's easy to keep saying 'yes' – especially to friends, family and work colleagues.

You can't do everything and look after yourself. Be realistic about how much spare time and energy you have.

## Hard times ahead

If you know you have a difficult time coming up like moving house or changes at work:

- arrange to get help if you can
- see what other responsibilities you can offload or put off
- pay extra attention to sleeping and eating well
- step up fun, physical activity and relaxation to compensate
- take some 'me time' each day to do things you enjoy, even if it's just for 10 minutes
- have a change of scene.

# Relationships

They're a source of support and help to keep us happy and well. But when relationships go wrong, they can cause lots of stress.

## Good communication

Strong relationships rely on good communication, whether they're with friends, partners or family members. Set aside a regular time to talk through important issues and let each other know how you're feeling.

## Positive and negative comments

During the conversations you have with your partner, friends or loved ones, think about how many positive and constructive comments you make (such as asking questions, being kind, listening or smiling) compared to the negative and destructive ones (hostility, anger, shouting, mocking).

People in good relationships make far more positive comments about their partner than they do negative ones. Check out with your partner how they think you respond to them.

People will get more out of their time with you if you can...

- look at them in the eye as you're speaking
- ask questions about what they're doing or feeling
- be interested in what they have to say
- try to be encouraging and positive
- celebrate their good news and successes.

## Arguments

Frequent arguments can damage relationships. Couple counselling from **Relationships Scotland** could get you talking more easily again – call **0345 119 2020** for details.

## Domestic abuse

You shouldn't ever be afraid of your partner. If they are using violence, threats or intimidation, that's domestic abuse. For advice and support, contact the **Domestic Abuse Helpline** free on **0808 2000 247**.

## Splitting up

Keeping on good terms can be especially important if you have children.

Family mediation from **Relationships Scotland** could help. Call **0345 119 2020**.

# Children and parenting

Family life can be rewarding but is a common source of stress.

## Babies and infants

Looking after babies and small children can be stressful, but remember, this stage doesn't last long.

- Try and find time for yourself – make sure you look after yourself and stay healthy.
- Sleep whenever you can.
- Take time to relax – you could do a quick relaxation exercise (pages 38–40).

## Postnatal depression

If you feel low, anxious or find yourself crying a lot, tell your doctor. Postnatal depression is common – around 1 in 10 mums get it.

It can be treated and most mums recover well.

Remember that with all the changes and pressures a baby brings, fathers can feel down too.

## Older children

Once they're fed, warm and safe, the best thing you can give them is your time.

Spending time with your kids is also a great way to get your mind off other worries.

## Behavioural problems

If you are worried about your child's behaviour speak to your GP.

## **Bullying**

Help is available. You should speak to your child's school. They have a duty to tackle bullying. This includes helping bullies to change their behaviour.

## **Looking after yourself**

Your child's needs are important, but so are your own. If your stress makes you ill you might not be able to help them at all.

Look after yourself by getting a little 'me time' each day to relax, have fun and enjoy life.

## **Losing your temper**

Children often don't understand the pressure you're under – or that they can put you under!

If you find yourself losing your temper a lot, it could be a sign that you need to take steps to control your stress.

**For advice and support on all parenting issues –  
call **Family lives** free on **0808 800 2222**.**



# Anxiety and depression

Living with stress all the time greatly increases the chances of becoming ill with depression or anxiety and of experiencing panic attacks.

## Anxiety

A little worry keeps us safe, but constant worrying isn't normal.

Trying the steps to deal with stress in this booklet can help with anxiety, but anxiety is often a deeper issue and you may need extra help. Speak to your GP.

## Panic attack

Pounding heart? Can't breathe?  
Feelings of dread?

You could be having panic attacks. They're common in people with high stress levels.

See your doctor as soon as you can to check out any physical health problems and to get help to deal with panic attacks.

Panic attacks are frightening and can make living a normal life very difficult, but they can be sorted. Visit [www.nopanic.org.uk](http://www.nopanic.org.uk) or call the No Panic Helpline free on 0844 967 4848.

## Depression

Ongoing stress can lead to depression which affects our energy and concentration, making life even harder and more stressful.

## Help for anxiety, panic and depression

- Try to get more physical activity.
- Talk through your problems with someone you trust.
- Call a confidential helpline like Breathing Space.
- Write about your problems.
- Speak to your doctor about how you're feeling.

Try calling a helpline like **Breathing Space** free on **0800 83 85 87**.

This is an advice line for people experiencing low moods, depression or anxiety and is available 24 hours a day at weekends (from 6 pm Friday to 6 am Monday) and from 6 pm to 2 am Monday to Thursday.

‘It’s a horrible feeling...as if a black cloud is over you really...and you can’t seem to progress or deal with things the way you want to.’

Saif, Edinburgh

## Further help for more serious mental health issues

### Support in Mind

For adults and young people with ongoing mental health problems – visit [www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk](http://www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk) or phone 0131 662 4359.

### Penumbra

Support services for people with mental health problems – visit [www.penumbra.org.uk](http://www.penumbra.org.uk) or phone 0131 475 2380.

### SAMH infolines

Support services and information on mental health issues – visit [www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk) or call free on 0141 530 1000 Monday to Friday, 9 am–5 pm.

## Thinking about suicide?

- If you are feeling suicidal you can contact **Samaritans** on **116 123** 24 hours a day, seven days a week. [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)
- If you are ill and feel it can't wait you can call **NHS 24** free on **111**.
- If you think you need an emergency ambulance you should dial **999**.

# Dealing with the past

Stress is often about the problems we face day to day.

But some people's problems have a lot to do with what happened in the past.

## For example...

- Someone who was hit as a child might find themselves stuck in violent relationships as an adult.
- Children who were sexually abused might have problems trusting people when they grow up.
- Someone who was bullied at school might be bullied at work.

Sometimes it's obvious how bad experiences in the past can make life difficult right now. But that connection isn't always easy for us to see ourselves.

## These contacts may help:

[www.survivorscotland.com](http://www.survivorscotland.com) for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

**Rape Crisis Scotland** – support for anyone affected by sexual violence. Visit [www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk) or call free on **08088 01 03 02** (minicom **0141 353 3091**).

It can be helpful to talk to a professional therapist who can help to work out the answers to problems like...

- ‘Why does this same situation happen to me again and again?’
- ‘Why can’t I stop it, when this is so bad for me?’
- ‘Why do I sometimes burst into tears for no reason?’

- ‘Years later, I still can’t cope with this bereavement.’
- ‘If I don’t keep a lid on my feelings, I feel like I might explode.’

If your problem seems a bit like this, try to talk about it with someone you trust (including your GP). Even if the best you can say is ‘I know I shouldn’t feel like this, but I can’t work out why,’ that can be a useful first step.

# Take action now

There are lots of practical, positive steps we can take to deal with stress.

- Doing relaxation exercises
- Working through problems
- Talking to someone
- Getting involved in the community
- Helping others

All of these can help, but starting with a relaxation exercise will put you in the right frame of mind to start dealing with your stress.

Paying attention to our breathing can be a good way to relax and focus our thoughts.

The two simple exercises to follow ease some of the immediate effects of stress – tense muscles, irregular breathing and poor concentration.

Try them every day for a couple of weeks and any time you feel stressed to see if you notice a difference.

# Relaxation exercise 1

Simple breathing exercise – comfortable stomach breathing.

**Sitting comfortably, breathe gently, slowly and evenly.**

Count in your mind, letting each count last about a second. Use a clock if you like:

1. Rest your hand on your belly button. Take a normal breath in and hold it as you count to five.
2. Breathe out slowly, relaxing your shoulders, face and body, as you count to four.
3. Breathe in slowly, letting your hand move outwards with your stomach, as you count to four.
4. Breathe out slowly and let your hand and stomach move inwards, as you count to four.
5. Breathe like this for five more breaths, focusing on your hand and stomach as they rise and fall, relaxing more with each breath.
6. Hold your breath like you did at the beginning and repeat the whole exercise again.

Notice the stretching sensation as you breathe in. As you breathe out notice the relaxation that follows. With practice, you may find you can breathe more slowly.

**Practise this exercise regularly so it's easy to use any time you feel anxious. You can also use it in bed to help you sleep.**



# Relaxation exercise 2

## Simple muscle relaxation exercise.

**When stressed, we carry tension in our muscles without noticing it. This exercise makes you aware of that tension so you can let it go.**

Sit or lie down and make yourself comfortable.

As you do this exercise, use the comfortable stomach breathing from Exercise 1.

1. Breathe in, clench your right hand, notice the tension in your hand and arm.

Breathe out, relax, notice the difference.

2. Breathe in, clench your left hand, notice the tension.

Breathe out, relax, notice the difference.

Notice how comfortably heavy your hands and arms feel when you let them relax.

3. Breathe in, clench your thighs and buttocks, notice the tension.

Breathe out, relax, notice the difference.

4. Breathe in, bend your feet up, notice the tension in your legs and feet.

Breathe out, relax, notice the difference.

5. Breathe in and point your toes, notice the tension in your legs and feet.

Breathe out, relax, notice the difference.

Allow the relaxation to deepen.

Notice the pleasurable sensation of heaviness in your legs and arms as you relax them.

(continues page 40)

6. Breathe in and 'shrug' your shoulders to your ears, notice the tension in your shoulders and neck.

Breathe out, relax, notice the difference.

7. Breathe in and lift your eyebrows, wrinkling your forehead, notice the tension.

Breathe out, relax, notice the difference.

8. Breathe in and squeeze your eyes closed, notice the tension around your eyes.

Breathe out, relax, notice the difference.

9. Breathe in and tense your jaw, notice the tension in your mouth and jaw.

Breathe out, notice how comfortable your whole face feels as you allow it to relax.

10. Continue to relax, breathing calmly, using comfortable stomach breathing.

**Practise this exercise regularly to make it easier to let go of tensions when you're under pressure.**

# Problem solving

Facing up to problems actually reduces stress and increases our confidence.

Find 10 minutes – and a pen – and let's have a go...

## 1. Get ready!

Do a relaxation exercise (pages 38–40) to help focus your mind, or go for a walk before you start. Even relaxing just a little bit is worth it.

## 2. Take a reality check.

Are your worries and fears realistic? Take a look at 'Thinking straight' (page 24). Problems still there? Move on to step 3.

## 3. Be clear what the problem is.

Write down everything that's bothering you on the 'My problem list' (page 46).

## 4. Well done! Now choose just one problem to work on.

Write it in the first problem space on the 'Steps I can take' list (page 46).

## 5. Break it down.

Think of small, specific steps to start sorting the problem. Write them under 'Steps I can take'. Look for sources of help and support to assist you (pages 43–45) as a starting point. Give each step a time when you'll do it by. Check off each step when you've done it.

(continues page 42)

## 6. Be realistic

Take one step at a time – steady effort is needed for lasting change. Congratulate yourself – look at the steps you’ve already taken. Be patient – give your steps time to work.

## 7. Keep at it

Fixed that first problem? Well done! Give yourself a reward and tick it off the list.

If your steps haven’t worked...

- Work on another problem – come back to this one later.
- Sleeping on it or talking to someone may help.
- Some solutions need ongoing effort – see ‘Change for good!’ (page 20) for more ideas.

Sometimes learning new things can be frustrating. Keep going and it will make you stronger. And learn from setbacks and mistakes – don’t dwell on them. This is the best way to improve. Remember, you **can** change.

When you are deciding what to do about your problems, some of these suggestions might be helpful:

### **Money worries**

- Talk to your bank or building society about how they can help you manage your money.
- If you face going into the red, warn your bank. An authorised overdraft is much cheaper than an unauthorised one.
- If you're having to choose which debts to pay off, and which to ignore, the [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) website has a handy advice sheet.
- Look for cheaper gas and electricity deals, and get help to keep your home warm by calling **Home Energy Scotland** free on **0808 808 2282**.
- Speak to **Citizens Advice Scotland** for free benefits, housing, financial and legal advice – visit [www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk) or call **03454 04 05 06**.

For confidential and impartial advice on all debt problems visit [www.nationaldebtline.org](http://www.nationaldebtline.org) or call the **National Debtline** free on **0808 808 4000**. You don't have to give your personal details and can remain anonymous if you wish.

### **Unemployment or the threat of redundancy**

Read your contract of employment to understand your rights to redundancy pay. The statutory legal minimum currently stands at one week for every complete year worked, up to a maximum of 12 weeks.

If you aren't able to line up another job straight away but are actively looking for work, you should be able to claim jobseeker's allowance. You may also be able to claim housing benefit and council tax benefit.

If your income has fallen you should also get your child tax credits recalculated. Visit your local job centre or go online at [www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus](http://www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus)

Check whether you have any payment protection insurance (PPI) for your mortgage, personal loans or credit cards. PPI covers your monthly repayments if you suffer an accident, sickness or unemployment (it's sometimes called ASU cover).

If you're struggling with your mortgage repayments, let your lender know as soon as possible. They may agree a reduced payment plan, or let you repay the interest only until you have another job.

## **Homelessness and housing**

For information on bad housing or homelessness visit Shelter Scotland.

**Shelter** provides free, confidential advice to people with all kinds of housing problems.

Visit <https://scotland.shelter.org.uk> or call **0808 800 4444** to speak to an adviser.

## **Problems at work, discrimination or unfair treatment**

Talk to your manager about reducing your workload, or getting extra training or help.

Speak to your union if you're a member or the **Equality and Human Rights Commission** at [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com) or on **0808 800 0082**.

## **Relationship problems**

Read pages 27–28 of this booklet for more information.

Contact **Relationships Scotland** who deal with couple counselling, family mediation and family support via [www.relationships-scotland.org.uk](http://www.relationships-scotland.org.uk) or on **0845 119 2020**.

## **Family problems**

If you are caring for a relative or loved one and need support call **Information Scotland** on **0808 011 3200**.

## Difficulties with children and parenting

- Read pages 29–30 of this booklet for more help.
- Contact **Family Lives** at [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk) or call free on **0808 800 2222** for confidential advice on any parenting issue. If you're a single parent looking for support call the **Lone Parent Helpline** free on **0808 801 0323**.

## Domestic abuse

- Don't suffer any longer. Call the **Domestic Abuse Helpline** free on **0808 2000 247**.
- Or **Scottish Women's Aid** on **0800 027 1234**.

## The loss of a loved one

- Try calling **Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland** on **0845 600 2227**.

## Illness

- Talk to your GP or call **NHS 24** for any health issue free on **111**.
- If you have a long-term illness, **NHS 24** or your GP will put you in touch with support services and groups.

## Caring for someone who is ill or disabled

- Is there anyone else who can help and give you a break?
- Call **Information Scotland** – support for anyone caring for a relative or loved one free on **0808 011 3200**.

## Crime

- Your local police station will give you advice and point you in the direction of support services, or try **Victim Support Scotland** at [www.victimsupportscotland.org.uk](http://www.victimsupportscotland.org.uk) or on **0345 603 9213**.

**'Still there's problems and there's always more but it's better now I'm chipping away at them.'**

Dineo, Edinburgh

# My problem list

Writing down your problems is a good place to start. Once you have written them down move on to the next page to work out what steps you can take to start to solve them. For some ideas see page 43.

Problem	Steps I can take	When?	Progress



Problem	Steps I can take	When?	Progress

# Three good things

Research shows that writing about three things that went well, and thinking about why each good thing happened, can increase our mood and help us to feel more optimistic. Try doing this once a week before you go to bed and see if it makes you feel better.

Use this sheet to get you started:

## Week 1

Three things that went well

1.

2.

3.

Why did they happen?

## Week 2

Three things that went well

1.

2.

3.

Why did they happen?

## Week 3

Three things that went well

1.

2.

3.

Why did they happen?

# Getting involved

A sense of belonging, having people to talk to and sharing experiences helps us stay happy and well.

Getting involved in the community helps us cope better when times are hard.

## **Belonging matters**

It's human nature to feel better when we're involved with others, especially if we are working towards something that's bigger than ourselves. This could be following your team, or volunteering to help others.

## **What can I do**

There's lots going on in your community. Check community centre and library notice boards and the local press to find out about groups and activities you can get involved with.

If there are problems where you live that need to be fixed, let your councillor, MSP or MP know about it. See [www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot) and local authority websites for contact details.

## **Online communities**

Search online using 'forum' or 'community' plus the interest of your choice – like 'bowling forum'. Or look for 'meet-up' websites that detail groups in your local area, for example.

Even saying hello to your neighbours can be a good start.

# Helping others

Helping others can make us feel better about ourselves and better connected to those around us.

## Helping friends and family members in need

This can be as simple as getting them to talk about what's happening and listening to their problems and worries.

- Try not to interrupt them.
- Don't feel you have to give advice or try to solve their problems.
- Friendly silences give people time to think.

Encourage them to seek help if they need it. They might find this guide useful – why not get them a copy?

## Volunteering

Voluntary work is work for a not-for-profit organisation, or work for someone who is not a family member, where only reasonable expenses are paid. Volunteering helps others and can improve our own situation.

There are thousands of things you can do in Scotland, such as:

- helping out at playgroups
- visiting elderly people or hospital patients
- working in hospital radio
- clearing canals or planting trees
- helping at animal sanctuaries
- working in a charity shop.

### **You can:**

- get the satisfaction of feeling useful
- brush up on your skills and learn new ones
- get out and meet new people.

Volunteers often go on to find paid work in the same kind of role.

Volunteering won't affect your Jobseeker's Allowance or Incapacity Benefit, go to [www.volunteerscotland.net](http://www.volunteerscotland.net) for more information.

Call **Volunteer Scotland** to find your local volunteer centre – **01786 479593** – or look up vacancies at [www.volunteerscotland.net](http://www.volunteerscotland.net)

## Further help

### **Self-help**

Self-help books, websites and leaflets can help you take control. Ask at your local library and search online.

### **Stress management classes**

Ask your doctor or at your local community centre.

### **Need to talk?**

Call the **Breathing Space** advice line in confidence free on **0800 83 85 87** or **Samaritans** on **116 123** and at [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

## See your doctor about stress and mood problems

The more information you give, the better they'll be able to help you:

- Be clear you think you're having problems with stress and mood.
- Say how you feel and how it's affecting your day-to-day life, work and relationships.
- Tell them about any physical symptoms – aches, pains, stomach upsets, difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much.
- Tell them about any troubling thoughts, especially if you've been thinking about death or taking your own life.
- Tell them about any difficult situations – it's helpful if your doctor understands what's going on in your life.

Making a list of what you want to say is useful – or tell a trusted friend and take them with you.

## Talking treatments

Talking treatments, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), help people work through and change the way they think and react. CBT is an effective treatment for mild to moderate depression, anxiety and panic attacks.

Ask your doctor about CBT, try it online at the Living Life website [www.lltff.com](http://www.lltff.com) or find CBT books at your local library.

## Counselling

Counselling helps people work through their thoughts, feelings and reactions.

For more information, go to the COSCA (Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland) website at [www.cosca.org.uk](http://www.cosca.org.uk)

For tips on how to become more motivated and to increase your feelings of wellbeing, go to the Positive Psychology resource section at The Centre for Confidence and Well-being [www.centreforconfidence.co.uk](http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk)

# Stressing less and enjoying life more

## find out how inside...

For more information and advice on dealing  
with stress, visit:

[www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing](http://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing)

If you use this booklet and would like to share  
your experience, we would like to hear from you.

Please email **[nhs.healthscotland-publicmentalhealth@nhs.net](mailto:nhs.healthscotland-publicmentalhealth@nhs.net)**

[www.healthscotland.scot](http://www.healthscotland.scot)