



# STRESS



**A SELF-HELP GUIDE TO STRESS  
AND STRESS MANAGEMENT**



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# What is stress?

There is no medical definition for stress. Stress is unique and personal to every individual.

However, stress usually refers to a situation or a feeling:

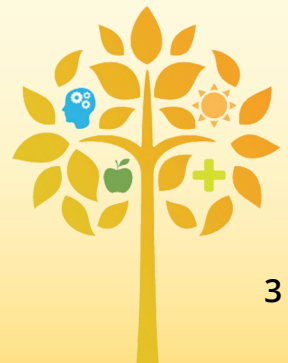
- **Situation:** circumstances which are demanding and put pressure on us or we feel we have little control over the outcome. “This is so stressful”.
- **Feelings:** how we emotionally respond to pressures and demands or how we cope in certain situations. “I am so stressed”.

## Causes of Stress

Everyone will feel stressed at some point but there is no root cause of stress. Different things can cause different people to become stressed.

However, some of the following are commonly linked to stress:

- Lots of change
- Financial problems
- Relationship problems
- Feeling a lack of control
- Bereavement
- Health problems
- Work demands/pressure
- Conflict in the workplace



# Signs and Symptoms of Stress

When we perceive a potential threat our bodies go into a stress response called fight or flight. Adrenaline and cortisol are released into the body and this stress response can have an impact on your body, how you feel, how you think and how you behave.

Here are just some of the symptoms:

## Physiological

- Problems with sleep
- Muscle tension
- Headaches
- Shallow breathing / hyperventilation
- Digestion problems
- High blood pressure
- Being tired all the time

## Emotional

- Worried and anxious
- Angry and irritable
- Down and depressed
- Uninterested in life

## Cognitive

- Negative thinking
- Unable to make decisions
- Vonstantly worrying
- Going over and over the same thoughts

- Intrusive thoughts
- Difficulty concentrating

## Behavioural

- Avoiding situations
- Snapping at others
- Crying or being tearful
- Using alcohol, drugs or other maladaptive behaviours such as: gambling, shopping, social media, gaming, more
- Eating more or eating less
- Being restless
- Isolating yourself
- Impulsive or reckless behaviour



# How to Manage Stress

Just as there is no universal definition of stress, no route cause and no single universal symptom, there is no one way to manage it. Finding a way to manage your stress is personal and unique. However, because stress is linked to situations and feelings, it can be helpful to try to manage external pressures and develop emotional resilience.

Here are some techniques that you can consider when trying to manage stress.

## Identify triggers

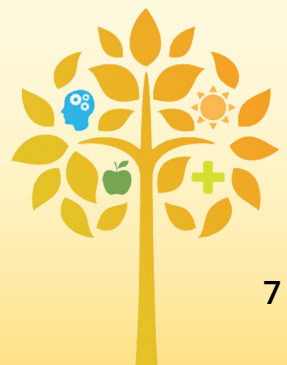
If you try and identify what triggers you to feel stress, then you will be able to anticipate problems and find ways to solve them. This is a good way of being prepared. Maybe it is a certain time of year, a long term problem, a recurring event, a certain person or related to a certain area of your life.

## Organise your time

By organising your time you can feel more in control, reducing demands and pressure can free up more time to look after yourself.

Tips for organising your time include:

- Make lists of tasks to be completed.
- Give priority to more important or pressing tasks.
- Give yourself time limits. If you give yourself the goal of working on one thing for a certain amount of time it allows you to focus your energy. You don't need to complete the task in this time, just do as much as you can. If there are tasks that are never ending sometimes it's difficult to even begin.
- Outline small achievable goals.
- Take it one step/task at a time. Try not to keep thinking about everything all at once because you will become overwhelmed.
- Try to pick one task and just focus on this. Once it is completed you will feel satisfied with your accomplishment and the pressure will reduce.
- Ask people for help. Everyone is human and we all need help every day. Do not feel ashamed or guilty about asking for help.



## Address some of the causes

If you are able to identify some of the root causes of your stress, you will be able to take steps to improve them. Remember, you cannot control everything. All you can do is control yourself and your reaction. Therefore, taking some practical steps to resolve and improve areas that may cause you stress will help you to feel more in control and that you are an active agent.

Some very simple examples include:

- If your stress is related to financial problems such as debt you can take time to research organisations that can advise and help you. Alternatively you can call the Wellbeing Hub who can go through suitable options with you.
- If your stress is related to work you could speak to your team leader or line manager or supervisor about how to reduce pressure.



## Use your support network

One of the most important and helpful ways to manage stress is to reach out to others. It has already been mentioned that everyone feels stress at some point.

By reaching out to people you trust, you will find that you are not alone and that others can support you. Sometimes something as simple as feeling listened to can relieve stress and pressure.

Find support from family, friends, work colleagues and/or team leader or line manager, your GP, the Wellbeing Hub or other organisations such as help services.

The most important things to remember are that reaching out for help and support is a healthy way of coping when stressed. You are not alone and there is no shame in seeking support.



## Look after your physical health

Our body and mind are connected and when one is suffering it affects the other. Therefore, if you are feeling stressed it is important to take extra steps to look after your body as best as you can.

It can be difficult when you are stressed but it is important to try:

- Having a healthy and balanced diet, making sure to eat regularly.
- Try to be active and exercise, it will help your body to release tension.
- Try and get enough sleep.
- Do not overuse alcohol, drugs or exercise, unhealthy food or adrenaline activities as a way of coping.



## Self-compassion

One of the most important things to remember at all times and particularly when you are stressed, is to be kind to yourself.

You are just one human on this earth trying your best.

Ways of being self-compassionate include:

- **Regularly doing things you love:** you deserve to have fun and be happy, so remember to make time for your hobbies and interests.
- **Recognise your achievements:** when we are stressed and have a lot of demands we think about everything that we haven't done or all of the problems we face. Take time to recognise all of your previous achievements and some of the problems you have already overcome.
- **Relax:** make sure you take time to relax your body and mind. Find effective techniques for doing this such as mindfulness exercises, going for a walk or listening to music.
- **Forgive yourself:** life is a process of learning, so you can't always get it right.
- **Accept the things you cannot change:** you cannot control and change anything apart from yourself and your situation. Focus on what you can do in the here and now.



## How to contact us

This can be for a referral, support or advice; for yourself, a colleague or your team member

### Telephone

You can call the Hub team on **0300 123 9193**

Monday to Friday 09:00 - 17:00 hours.

### Email

you can email us at **wellbeinghub@secamb.nhs.uk**

### Intranet

You can access further information about Wellbeing on our Intranet pages.

<https://secamb.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet/staff/support/healthandwellbeing/Pages/default.aspx>

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