**Stress**

**Most people feel stressed sometimes and some people find stress helpful or even motivating. But if stress is affecting your life, there are things you can try that may help.**

Support is also available if you're finding it hard to cope with stress.

**Symptoms of stress**

Stress can cause many different symptoms. It might affect how you feel physically, mentally and also how you behave.

It's not always easy to recognise when stress is the reason you're feeling or acting differently.

Physical symptoms

* headaches or dizziness
* muscle tension or pain
* stomach problems
* chest pain or a faster heartbeat
* sexual problems

Mental symptoms

* difficulty concentrating
* struggling to make decisions
* feeling overwhelmed
* constantly worrying
* being forgetful

Changes in behaviour

* being irritable and snappy
* sleeping too much or too little
* eating too much or too little
* avoiding certain places or people
* drinking or smoking more

**Things you can try to help with stress**

**Do:**

* try talking about your feelings to a friend, family member or health professional. You could also contact [Samaritans](https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/), [call: 116 123](tel:%20116%20123) or email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) if you need someone to talk to
* find out more about [10 stress busters](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/tips-to-reduce-stress/) – including [getting started with exercise](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/) and setting aside time for yourself
* use easy time-management techniques to help you take control
* use [calming breathing exercises](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/breathing-exercises-for-stress/)
* plan ahead for stressful days or events – planning long journeys or making a list of things to remember can really help
* consider peer support, where people use their experiences to help each other. [Find out more about peer support on the Mind website](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/peer-support/finding-peer-support/)
* listen to [free mental wellbeing audio guides](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/mental-wellbeing-audio-guides/)

**Do Not:**

* do not try to do everything at once – set small targets you can easily achieve
* do not focus on the things you cannot change – focus your time and energy into helping yourself feel better
* try not to tell yourself that you're alone – most people feel stressed at some point in their life and support is available
* try not to use alcohol, cigarettes, gambling or drugs to relieve stress – these can all contribute to poor mental health

**Further information and support**

* [Mind – managing stress and building resilience:](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/stress/managing-stress-and-building-resilience/) get advice to help you adapt and bounce back during difficult times
* [Every Mind Matters – get your free Mind Plan](https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-wellbeing-tips/your-mind-plan-quiz/): personalised mental wellbeing tips and advice to your email inbox
* [Every Mind Matters – self-help cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques](https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-wellbeing-tips/self-help-cbt-techniques/): learn how to manage stress and worry, and boost your mental wellbeing

**Where to get NHS help for stress**

**Referring yourself for therapy**

If you need more support, you can get free talking therapies like [cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-cbt/overview/) on the NHS.

You can refer yourself directly to an NHS talking therapies service without a referral from a GP.

[**Find an NHS talking therapies service**](https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-psychological-therapies-service/)

If you're under 18, or want to get help for someone under 18, find out how to get [mental health support for children and young people](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/mental-health-support/).

**\* Non-urgent advice \***

**See a GP if:**

* you're struggling to cope with stress
* things you're trying yourself are not helping
* you would prefer to get a referral from a GP

**\*\* Urgent advice \*\***

**Call 111 or ask for an urgent GP appointment if:**

* you need help urgently, but it's not an emergency

111 can tell you the right place to get help if you need to see someone. Go to [111.nhs.uk](https://111.nhs.uk/) or [call: 111](tel:%20111).

**\*\*\* Immediate action required \*\*\***

**Call 999 or go to A&E now if:**

* you or someone you know needs immediate help
* you have seriously harmed yourself – for example, by taking a drug overdose

A mental health emergency should be taken as seriously as a medical emergency.

[Find your nearest A&E](https://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Accident-and-emergency-services/LocationSearch/428)

Please remember:

* Do not drive to A&E. Ask someone to drive you or call 999 and ask for an ambulance.
* Bring any medicines you take with you.

**Causes of stress**

Stress is usually a reaction to mental or emotional pressure. It's often related to feeling like you're losing control over something, but sometimes there's no obvious cause.

When you're feeling anxious or scared, your body releases stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol.

This can be helpful for some people and stress might help you get things done or feel more motivated.

But it might also cause physical symptoms such as a faster heartbeat or sweating. If you're stressed all the time it can become a problem.

**Identifying the cause**

If you know what's causing your stress it might be easier to find ways to manage it.

Some examples of things that may cause stress include:

* work – feeling pressure at work, unemployment or retirement
* family – relationship difficulties, divorce or [caring for someone](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/support-and-benefits-for-carers/)
* financial problems – unexpected bills or borrowing money
* health – illness, injury or [losing someone (bereavement)](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/grief-bereavement-loss/)

Even significant life events such as buying a house, having a baby or planning a wedding could lead to feelings of stress.

You might find it hard to explain to people why you feel this way, but talking to someone could help you find a solution.

[Find out about the 5 steps to mental wellbeing](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/)

**More in**[**Feelings and symptoms**](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/)

* Stress
* [Anxiety, fear and panic](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/anxiety-fear-panic/)
* [Low mood, sadness and depression](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/low-mood-sadness-depression/)
* [Feeling lonely](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/feeling-lonely/)
* [Grief after bereavement or loss](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/grief-bereavement-loss/)
* [Anger](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/anger/)
* [Loneliness in older people](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/loneliness-in-older-people/)
* [Signs of an anxiety disorder](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/anxiety-disorder-signs/)
* [Hallucinations and hearing voices](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/hallucinations-hearing-voices/)

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