

- Irritability or having a short temper
- Difficulty relaxing
- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Eating more or less than usual
- Changes in sleeping habits
- Using alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs to relax
- Aches and pains, particularly muscle tension
- Diarrhoea and constipation
- Feelings of nausea or dizziness
- Loss of sex drive



If you experience these symptoms for a prolonged period of time, and feel they are affecting your everyday life or making you feel unwell, speak to your GP. Ask them for information about the support services and treatments available to you.



WHAT CAUSES STRESS?

All sorts of situations can cause stress. The most common involve work, money matters and relationships with partners, children or other family members.

Stress can be caused either by major upheavals and life events such as divorce, unemployment, moving house and bereavement, or by a series of minor irritations such as feeling undervalued at work or arguing with a family member. Sometimes, there are no obvious causes. As a result, you may experience headaches, muscle tension, pain, nausea, indigestion and dizziness. You may also

breathe more quickly, have palpitations or suffer from various aches and pains. In the long-term, you may be putting yourself at risk from heart attacks and strokes.



RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are a great support in times when we feel stressed. However, from time to time the people close to you, be it a partner, parent, child, friend or colleague, can increase your stress levels.

Events such as ongoing minor arguments and disagreements, to larger family crises, such as an affair, illness or bereavement are likely to affect the way you think, feel and behave. This may consequently have an impact on your stress levels.

You can find out more about investing in healthy relationships at: [mentalhealth.org.uk/healthy-relationships](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/healthy-relationships)



WORK-LIFE BALANCE



The pressure of an increasingly demanding work culture in the UK is one of the biggest contributors to stress among the general population.

While current, average full-time working hours are 37 hours a week, a recent and dramatic rise in Britain's working hours suggests this is already on the increase. 20.1% of the UK working population work 45 hours or more each week.

The human costs of unmanaged work related stress is extensive. Feeling unhappy about the amount of time you spend at work and neglecting other

aspects of life because of work may increase your vulnerability to stress. Increased levels of stress can, if not addressed early enough, lead to burn-out or more severe mental health problems.

Mental health problems such as anxiety and depression are thought to be the leading cause of work absences, accounting for up to 40% of sick-leave. In 2008, mental health accounted for 442,000 cases of work-related illness with a related estimated cost of £13.5 million. As a result, mental ill health now accounts for a significant proportion of long-term sickness and early retirement, cited as the leading cause of illness for 20% of NHS employees.

MONEY

Money and debt concerns place huge pressure on us, so it comes as no surprise that they have a marked effect on our stress levels.

The effects of the cost-of-living crisis in 2022 has affected everyone in some capacity. A survey of 3000 adults commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation in November 2022 found that one in ten UK adults were feeling hopeless about their financial circumstances. More than one third were feeling anxious and almost three in ten were feeling stressed.

The combination of chronic stress and debt can result in depression and anxiety, and has been highlighted as a factor linked to suicidal thoughts and attempts. It's important if you are worried about your finances and debts that you do not try to deal with them alone. There's a lot of help and support available to you through organisations such as [StepChange.org](https://stepchange.org) and citizensadvice.org.uk.

You could also talk to your GP or a trusted health professional if you are worried about how debt is affecting your mental and physical health.



- **Get restful sleep.** Sleeping problems are common when you're suffering from stress. Try to make sure you get enough rest. For more tips on getting a good night's sleep read our guide 'How to...sleep better' at: [mentalhealth.org.uk/how-to-sleep](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/how-to-sleep)
- **Don't be too hard on yourself.** Try to keep things in perspective. After all, we all have bad days.



SEEKING HELP

It's okay to ask for professional help if you feel that you are struggling to manage on your own. It's also important to get help as soon as possible so you can begin to get better.

The first person to approach is your GP. They should be able to give you advice about treatment, and may refer you to another local professional. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Mindfulness based approaches are known to help reduce stress. There are also a number of voluntary organisations which can help you to tackle the causes of stress and advise you about ways to get better.