



the road to **wellbeing**

A TOOL FOR MANAGING THE STRESS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

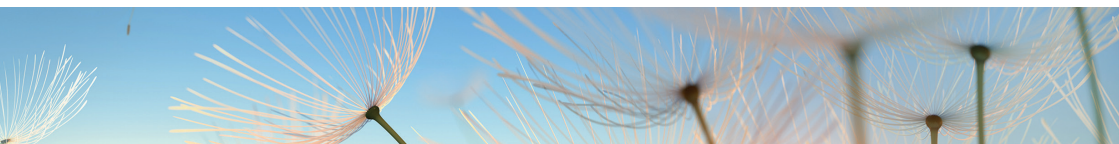


Table of contents

Introduction3

Are you feeling stressed?4

Why are we all so stressed?5

When stress is too much.....6

Different types of stress7

Your body’s response to stress8

The stress response9

Flight or fight response.....10

The stress curve11

Sources of stress.....12

Which way now?.....14

Help sheet15

Dealing with problem situations.....16

When we’re stressed.....17

Helpful ways to cope.....18

Healthy lifestyle and wellbeing.....19

What about sleep?20

Seeking help22

Summary23

Relax!.....24

Useful contacts (local)32

Useful contacts (national).....35

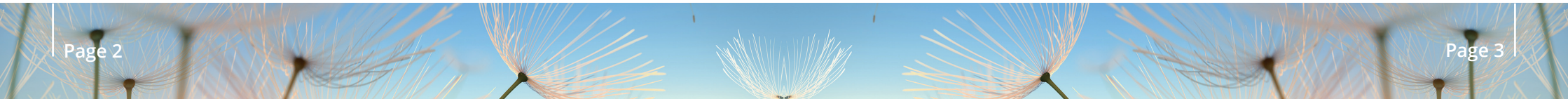
Introduction

This self-help booklet is divided into sections and it is aimed at helping you gain a better understanding of:

- **What stress is.**
- **The signs and symptoms of stress.**
- **The short and long term effects of stress.**
- **The sources of your stress.**
- **Alternative ways of dealing with stress.**

Everyone experiences stress at some point in their lives. It can affect all aspects of our lives and relationships with others, mainly because we haven't got the time or energy to deal with things or enjoy everyday activities. Stress can start to build up leading to exhaustion and ill health, which affects our ability to function properly. This booklet is designed to help you recognise early signs and symptoms and will help you find ways of dealing with it.

Managing stress should be a part of your overall lifestyle and not just an activity to help you handle high levels of stress.



Are you feeling stressed?

Very often we do not recognise or take notice of the fact we are stressed. It is much easier to recognise stress in other people than in ourselves and to ignore our own warning signs of stress overload.

We may also show we are stressed in different ways, or experience feelings or symptoms that are different.

You may like to ask those who know you best if they can tell when you are stressed, and what changes they notice in you.

It can be very difficult for us to admit to the stress we experience because many of us think this means we have failed in some way or that we cannot cope. This is not so, as the first important step in learning to manage our stress is being able to recognise our own symptoms when we become over stressed.

In being aware of our symptoms they can become our warning signs which remind us to act early and prevent a build-up of serious problems.



Why are we all so stressed?

- Missed the bus
- Can't pay the bills
- Feeling lonely
- Kids have been screaming all day
- Another row
- Feel bored
- Feeling unhappy at work
- Missed out on another promotion
- Looking after an elderly or sick relative
- The car broke down
- New baby
- Aches and pains
- Moving house
- Getting married
- Too many text messages
- Another all-night party next door
- Spending too much time on Facebook
- Nowhere to go
- Just lost your job
- Computer is playing up
- Feeling tired
- Not enough money
- Arguing with your partner
- Increase in financial obligations
- Too many emails to deal with
- Working long hours
- Can't find your mobile phone
- Too many things to do and not enough time
- Long daily commute
- Credit card debt
- Starting a new job
- Feel like a failure

Just can't cope - it's all getting on top of you

When stress is too much...

Listed below are some common symptoms and long term effects of stress, some of which we all experience from time to time.

Learn to recognise your own warning signs.

Using the boxes below, tick off the symptoms which you experience and ask someone who knows you well if they agree with your list.

However, if you find that your symptoms are becoming such a problem that they seriously interfere with your everyday life **please consult your doctor**.

Physical symptoms

- ☐ Palpitations (thumping heart)
- ☐ Pains/tightness in the chest
- ☐ Indigestion/stomach pains
- ☐ Feeling tired all the time
- ☐ Having no energy
- ☐ Frequent headaches
- ☐ Sudden panic attacks
- ☐ Muscle twitches
- ☐ Aches/pains
- ☐ Rashes, itching or hives
- ☐ Frequent blushing/sweating
- ☐ Clenched fists or jaw
- ☐ Constipation or diarrhoea
- ☐ Need to urinate frequently
- ☐ Eating too much/too little
- ☐ Frequent colds/infections
- ☐ Blurred eyesight/sore eyes
- ☐ Feeling sick, dizzy or lightheaded

Emotional symptoms

- ☐ Swings in mood
- ☐ Increased anger/frustration
- ☐ Easily agitated
- ☐ Tearfulness
- ☐ Constant worrying
- ☐ Racing thoughts
- ☐ Feeling tense
- ☐ No enthusiasm
- ☐ Feeling nervous
- ☐ Feeling irritable/wound up
- ☐ Feeling helpless
- ☐ Feeling unable to cope
- ☐ Loss of confidence
- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed
- ☐ Frequent crying
- ☐ Feeling lonely/worthless
- ☐ Lacking in self esteem
- ☐ General unhappiness

Behavioural symptoms

- ☐ Being more accident prone
- ☐ Making more mistakes
- ☐ Poor work
- ☐ Increased smoking
- ☐ Too much alcohol
- ☐ Over use of drugs
- ☐ Problems in sharing
- ☐ Change in sleep patterns
- ☐ Sleep problems/nightmares
- ☐ Unable to relax
- ☐ Loss of sexual desire
- ☐ Loss of interest in appearance
- ☐ Too busy to relax
- ☐ Snapping at people
- ☐ Obsessive/compulsive behaviour
- ☐ Neglecting responsibilities
- ☐ Excessive gambling or impulse buying

Remember the symptoms listed above may also be attributed to causes other than stress.

If you are concerned about your general health please consult your doctor

Different types of stress

We all tend to associate stress with unhelpful feelings and situations. However stress is part of our normal human experience and can be a helpful response.

Helpful feelings associated with stress

Feeling motivated, excited, full of energy, on a high.

Helpful situations associated with stress

A new challenge, a new job, flying on a plane, a first date, passing an exam, going somewhere new, birth of a baby.

The amount of stress and type of stress we experience, helpful or unhelpful, very often depends on what we think, feel and do in particular situations. There may be situations listed above that you don't associate with helpful feelings, for example, for some people flying on a plane would be a very stressful situation with...

Unhelpful thoughts

I know the plane is going to crash

Unhelpful feelings

Constantly feeling sick at the thought of flying

Unhelpful behaviour

Drinking too much to calm your nerves to get on the plane

For others, they would find flying an exciting experience.

Remember that what is stressful to one person may not be for another.

Your body's response to stress

So far we have talked about stressful situations, but it is important to remember that:

Stress is not what happens to us, but how we respond to and deal with situations that are stressful for us.

In managing our stress it is important to understand why we respond or react the way we do. Sometimes life feels like a battle, or may feel like you want to run away, particularly when you feel under constant stress.

These emotions and feelings are part of our development as human beings. Looking back at our early development and our fight for survival, life was, in some ways, more straightforward although perhaps more dangerous. The threats we would have faced probably meant life or death decisions and there was a simple choice of fighting or running away, when for example, faced by a vicious tiger.

The reactions, battling (fight) or running away (flight) are instinctive and natural ways of behaving when under threat.

In modern everyday life the threats or demands we experience are not so clear, and often it is not appropriate to resolve stressful situations by fighting (arguing with your manager) or flight (running out of the house and leaving the noisy kids). Even though there may be times when we feel like doing both!

Although we live in different times and have different demands or threats, our bodies retain this natural, instinctive way of responding.

To be ready for whatever action, certain changes take place in the body (see diagram on page 9). These occur partly as a response to the release of adrenaline, which is a hormone, that helps to get us going and keep us going.

The stress response

What happens	How your body reacts	How you look and/or feel
Need more oxygen	You breathe faster	Breathlessness, inability to breathe
Need more energy	Stored sugar is released into your body as sugar and fat	Sluggish, tired
Need to transport food and oxygen faster	Your heart beats faster to pump blood around your body more quickly	Palpitations, heart thumping in your chest
Need to be alert	Less blood to your hands, feet and stomach	Look pale, butterflies in stomach, nausea
Heat created by extra activity	Your skin sweats to cool down	Wet palms, hot flushes, cold sweats

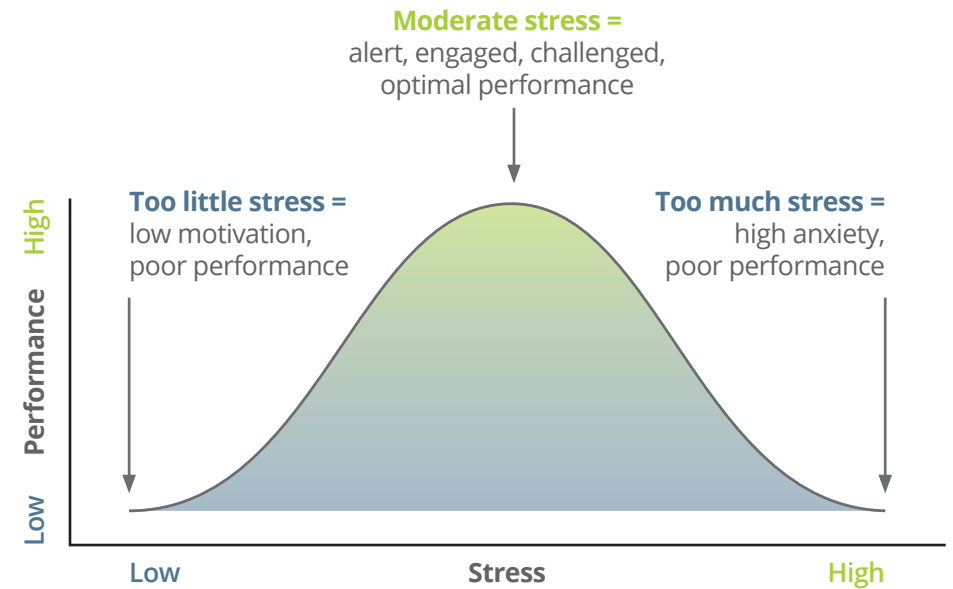
Flight or fight response



When no longer under threat our responses return to normal. Both fight or flight are physical activities and use up the effects of the adrenaline. So, if we don't respond physically to a threat or demanding situation, the adrenaline remains unused in the body, causing some of the unpleasant stress symptoms and the body takes longer to return to normal.

If we add another threat or demanding situation, which sparks the stress response again, stress becomes a constant state of over alertness that never winds down properly.

The stress curve



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So, we all need a certain amount of stress or stimulation to get us going and keep us going. Surprisingly, without any stress or stimulation life would be very dull and boring.

Problems occur when we get pushed over our optimum (best for you) stress level into stress overload, often without us realising. We push ourselves on and on in the mistaken belief that this will result in us doing better. Unfortunately the opposite is true.

If we ignore our personal warning signs of too much stress, we fall into a downward spiral of over tiredness, poor performance and exhaustion. Constant exposure to stress over a period of time can result in serious risk of ill-health, either mental or physical. The long-term effects of stress can contribute to conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, anxiety and depression.

Sources of stress

Relationships, Time, Illness, Study, Work, Finances



Sometimes it feels like everything is coming at you at the same time and it's all getting on top of you. When you don't know what to do, it can be helpful to think about where your sources of stress are coming from.

At some time or another, we all experience stressful events in our lives, for example:

- moving house
- marriage
- separation
- divorce
- pregnancy
- birth of a baby
- job loss
- retirement
- school/college ending or beginning
- the death, illness or disability of a family member.

Events like Christmas and holidays can also increase our stress levels.

Very often we don't recognise that we are heading for stress overload, because it is the build-up of many everyday hassles, rather than one major stressful event.

Some examples to help you think about your everyday sources of stress.

Environment

Travelling, traffic, the weather noise, shopping, nowhere to go.

Housing

Poor housing, not enough room, where you live.

Finances

Getting into debt.

Time

Not enough time or too much time

No time for yourself or others

Not giving yourself enough time.

Organising

Lack of organisation, losing things, disruptions, interruptions, making decisions.

Relationships

Family, partners, children, parents, elderly, friends, loneliness, others demands on you, communicating, others stress levels, no support.

Feelings

Your mood, tiredness, expectations of yourself, not valuing yourself or your needs, not feeling valued.

Work

In or out of work, overworked or underworked, working too many hours, feeling unhappy in your job, too many deadlines

School/college

Exams, bullying, not fitting in.

Communication

Finding it difficult to talk to people, difficulty with language, lack of confidence.

Which way now?

The road to recovery

Sometimes life's problems mount up and it's easy to lose sight of what you need to prioritise. It's also good to remember that many of the things that worry us are actually out of our control and that worrying is a waste of our time, which gets us nowhere but actually causes unnecessary suffering and loss of energy.



Once you are aware of the sources of stress you can begin to identify what it is that you are finding stressful.

Use the help sheet opposite to list the things that are causing you distress.

For those problems that are difficult to change you may need to come to terms with the fact that these issues may be around for a while, but that ultimately they will be resolved at some point in the future.

You may find 'Useful ways to cope' on page 18 may help.

The purpose of this task is for you to feel that you have your life back in a manageable order and have retained some control over what is happening around you. This can help reduce your stress levels and improve your ability to relax and sleep better!

Help sheet

Things causing distress

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8

Things that are easy to change

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Things that are difficult to change

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8

Dealing with things that cause you distress

When beginning to deal with things that cause you distress it's important not to tackle too much at once. Break them down into more manageable steps, making small changes along the way.

Looking at your list of easy things to change, you need to consider each of them carefully. It may help you to talk with a friend, partner or someone close to help you view each problem more clearly. You can use the note space on page 40 to jot down any important points.

- **ASK** yourself what it is about the things that cause you distress that are a problem e.g. the long commute to work.
- **DECIDE** what aspect of the problem is within your control - but be realistic e.g. it means getting home late every day.
- **THINK** about your responses in the situation, what you think, feel and do e.g. feeling anxious, uptight and tired.

Having answered or thought about these questions, you now need to explore possible solutions. It might be helpful to discuss solutions with someone else, don't immediately dismiss any suggestion you or anyone else has.

Consider each solution in terms of:

- What is best for you: what you feel comfortable attempting.
- What may happen if you try this particular solution - to help you see how it can work for you.
- How likely you are to succeed. In exploring each solution in this way, it will help you to choose solutions that are most likely to succeed. This will limit your chances of failure and the feeling that you have reached a dead end.

When you decide to make change(s), it is useful to discuss your intentions with those around you who may be affected. By doing this, you prepare them for change and it will help you to gain their support and co-operation.

When we're stressed...

When we are stressed it can feel like we are on a slippery road and are out of control. At these times we sometimes look out for things to keep us going such as alcohol, cigarettes, drugs (illegal or prescribed) or binge on food, sweets or chocolate. However, these things only make us feel better in the short term particularly such things as smoking, drinking or using drugs, you may have to increase your intake to gain the same effect.



In addition, turning to these things can actually be damaging to your health in other ways. It is best to find ways to replace these with other more healthy and helpful ways of coping - see pages 18-21 for some suggestions.

You must remember that your stress won't go away overnight. It has probably taken weeks, months or even years to get to an unacceptable level.

Helpful ways to cope

Be aware of your own stress warning signs

Act early to reduce your stress levels.

Get enough rest and sleep

Learn to recognise when you are tired and take time to rest and refresh yourself.

If you are ill

Don't carry on as if you are not. Give your body a chance to recover.

Exercise regularly

It releases tension, uses up adrenaline and makes you feel more relaxed.

Teach yourself to relax

If done daily it will help you to prevent a build-up of tension.

Take time out to enjoy yourself

Have fun, do something for yourself because you enjoy it. Have a laugh.

If you cannot change something, learn to accept it

Talk to someone you can trust

Gain support and understanding.

Don't be afraid to say no!

Trust others to do the job well.

Prioritise

Decide what is important and do jobs one at a time.

Agree with someone

Co-operate with others rather than competing.

Life doesn't need to be a constant battle

Remember the answer lies with you.

Healthy lifestyle and wellbeing

Making small changes to your lifestyle can have an impact on the way you think, feel and look.

Five ways to wellbeing

To improve your mental wellbeing practice these actions regularly:

Connect...

With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

Be active...

Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Get off the bus one stop earlier than usual. Cycle. Play a game. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy; one that suits your level of mobility and fitness. Take a walk, go cycling or have a kick about in a local park. Find an activity that you enjoy and make it a part of your life.

Take notice...

Put a plant on your desk. Notice the changing seasons. Take time to 'clear the clutter' from home or work. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Try visiting a new place. Take a different route to or from your work.

Keep learning...

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things can be fun and make you more confident.

Give...

Do something nice for a friend or a stranger. Volunteer your time for a cause you are passionate about. Spend time with someone who you know has been having a difficult time. Join a community group. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and will create connections with the people around you.

What about sleep?

Sleep is important for your health and wellbeing. Everyone has problems sleeping at one time or another. You may have difficulty sleeping, sleep too much or wake up tired. When you are worried about something, this can affect your sleeping pattern. People also worry about not getting enough sleep, which in turn leads to sleeplessness. In general, people tend to sleep for an average of eight hours although this does vary for everyone and can be between 5-10 hours.

Why is sleep important?

The main function of sleep is to rest and repair your body and mind and renew your energy. A lack of sleep affects your brain's ability to function properly resulting in the effects of poor sleep, such as feeling tired, irritable and having difficulty in concentrating.

What affects sleep?

- Medicines: Check if any tablets you are taking affect sleep.
- Physical health problems: If you feel unwell or are in pain this can keep you awake.
- Surroundings: If your bed and bedroom are uncomfortable i.e. your mattress, or the temperature in your room.
- Ageing: As you get older you tend to sleep less and less deeply.
- Feeling stressed: If you are anxious or worrying about problems.

Getting a good night's sleep

- Go to bed and wake up at a regular time. Don't lie in for more than an hour on weekends.
- Exercise regularly but not too close to bedtime.
- Your surroundings should be cool, dark, quiet and comfortable. Switch off electrical appliances including those with a bright screen (laptop, smart phone).
- Take a warm bath and have a milky drink or a cup of herbal tea (caffeine free).
- Use relaxation exercises: visualise a pleasant scene or try some of the exercises on page 25.
- If you can't get to sleep after 30 minutes, get up and do something relaxing.
- Reduce your intake of caffeine in food and drink such as chocolate, coffee and tea especially within six hours of bedtime.
- Avoid having a heavy meal just before bedtime.
- Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol close to bedtime. Although alcohol may help you fall asleep, it will affect the quality of sleep.
- Don't worry about not getting enough sleep.

Remember to:

Eat healthily

- Make an effort to eat regular balanced meals and try not to skip breakfast.
- Add more wholegrain foods, nuts, seeds, beans, lentils, fruit, vegetables and oily fish to your meals.
- Be aware of foods that can affect your mood. such as. caffeine, alcohol, sugary foods and processed foods.

Drink in moderation

- Drinking too much alcohol to deal with problems can make you feel worse as well as having a bad effect on your health.
- Drink in moderation and find other ways of dealing with your problems.

Keep active

- Try to be active daily and do at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity such as cycling or brisk walking every week, and strength exercises on two or more days a week that work all your major muscles.
- Any activity that makes you breathe heavier than normal and makes you feel slightly warmer, will be of benefit.
- Find something you really enjoy, as you are more likely to keep doing it.

Avoid Smoking

- Smoking is often used as a way of coping with stress. however in the long term smoking increases stress and anxiety.
- Find other ways of dealing with your problems which tackle underlying causes.
- Stopping smoking is the one thing you can do to dramatically increase your chances of living a longer life.

Useful websites

www.nhs.uk/change4life

Helping you to change your eating, drinking and activity habits

www.nhs.uk/livewell

Healthy living for everyone

www.lets-get.com

Supporting you to make simple healthy lifestyle changes

Seeking help

Everybody needs help from time to time, so ask for support whether it's from friends, family, a doctor, a support group or helpline.

There are a variety of organisations that can help. However, if you feel that you are unable to cope with your stress yourself, then seek professional help and go to see your practice nurse or doctor. In order to help they will try to find out what is bothering you.

Self help

Friends and family

Confide or speak to someone such as a friend or family member.

Helplines/organisations

Seek support from a helpline or organisation that deals with problems such as housing, bereavement etc. (see pages 35-39).

Support groups

People with common experience of difficulties who get together to support each other through sharing. Find out what groups are available in your area.

Websites

Living Life - www.lltff.com - Offers free online courses around low mood and stress.

NHS Choices Moodzone - www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression - Helps you cope with stress, anxiety and depression.

Apps

Well Mind - A free NHS mental health and wellbeing app designed to help with your stress, anxiety and depression.

It may be helpful to look at your tick list (see page 5) and what symptoms you have experienced.

At the back of this booklet, you will find useful websites and help lines which you may like to contact for yourself.

Professional help

There are many people your doctor can refer you to such as:

Primary Care Mental Health Workers

Trained to deal with mainly mild problems such as anxiety or depression.

Psychologists, Psychotherapists, Counsellors

Specialists who provide talking therapies to help with difficulties, through understanding and exploring ways of coping.

Psychiatrists

Doctors with additional training to understand mental health problems who can also prescribe medication.

Summary

Having worked through this booklet, you may have expected that all your worries would be over and you would be living a stress free life! However, this booklet is only a starting point, managing stress in our lives is something we all have to work at every day, including:

Understanding the stress in your life

Both helpful and unhelpful.

Learning to recognise when you are stressed

Getting to know your personal warning signs will remind you to act early to try to prevent stress overload for yourself.

Identifying where your stress is coming from

Try to deal with things that are causing you distress. Explore possible solutions but be realistic about what you can control. Ask for help when you need it.

Making time for yourself

It is important to make time for yourself such as – relaxing, exercising, etc.

Whichever way you choose, you can start to take control



Relax

Teach yourself to relax

PLEASE NOTE:- If you have any health problems or concerns seek advice from your doctor **BEFORE** attempting any of the following exercises.

Some of these exercises may not be useful or suitable for people with severe and enduring mental health problems.

Introduction

These exercises will help you to learn relaxation skills to calm your mind and body.

Relaxation techniques

Deep breathing exercise

Find a quiet place to sit. Try to make your surroundings as comfortable as possible - consider dimming the lights or closing the blinds or curtains. Make sure you are warm.

Check that you are breathing correctly by placing one hand on your stomach and the other hand on your chest.

As you breathe in, your hand on your stomach should rise. As you breathe out your stomach should fall. The hand on your chest should not move.

Then:

- 1 Sit quietly with your eyes closed
- 2 Breathe in to a count of four
- 3 Hold your breath for a count of four. If you find it uncomfortable holding your breath for that long, start with what's comfortable for you
- 4 Breathe out slowly for a count of four, sighing as you do so
- 5 Sit for a few minutes concentrating on your pattern of breathing.

Repeat as required.

Five minutes relaxation in a chair exercise

You can use this technique anywhere you feel comfortable and won't be interrupted. It will help you learn to recognise tension throughout your body and how to release it by tensing and relaxing each of the major muscle groups. With practice you will come to know the difference in how your muscles feel when they are tense or relaxed.

Ideally, you should be able to relax anywhere. To help you learn this technique you could ask someone to read the instructions out slowly and calmly for you to follow; or you could make your own recording by reading the instructions out loud.

1. Preparation

Make the room comfortable for yourself and if possible use a chair with arms.

2. Seating

Sit upright in the chair with the small of your back supported by the back of the chair (use a cushion for support if it helps). Make sure your feet are flat on the floor with your hands resting in your lap.

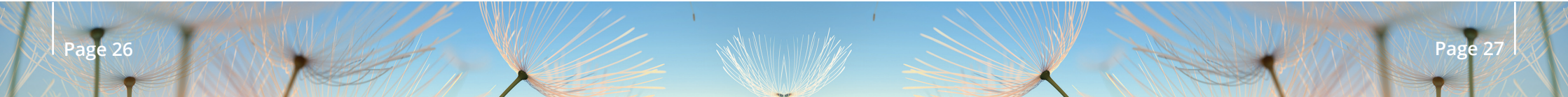
3. Technique

- Close your eyes
- Listen to the sounds around you - you may hear the voices of people talking nearby, doors banging or traffic. Notice what sounds you may be drawn to - such as the ticking of a clock. You may even be drawn to the sound of your own breath.
- Focus on your breathing. Do not alter your breathing pattern; just breathe normally for a few minutes.
- Now take a deep breath in and hold for a few seconds, breathing out with a sigh, letting go and releasing any tense feelings from your body.
- Using the instructions in the table opposite, go through each of the muscle groups, tensing and relaxing them and noticing how your muscles feel when they are tense and when they are relaxed. As you go through the programme, repeat each exercise once, making sure your teeth are not clenched and your tongue lies loosely and is not pushed up against the roof of your mouth.

- When you have completed this take a deep breath in and hold for a few seconds breathing out with a sigh. Do this twice more 'with a sigh' letting out any remaining tension.
- Enjoy this time of rest and relaxation. Sit for a few minutes concentrating on the sound of your breathing. You may find thoughts coming back into your mind. You may even find that you have released some of the thoughts that worried you.

Muscle group	Tensing procedure		
Feet and legs	Push both your feet down into the floor	Hold it for a few seconds	Relax
Stomach	Pull your stomach muscles in	Hold it for a few seconds	Relax
Arms	Place your hands flat on your thighs and push down	Hold it for a few seconds	Relax
Shoulders	Hunch your shoulders up to your ears	Hold it for a few seconds	Relax
Face			
Forehead	Frown	Hold it for a few seconds	Relax
Eyes	Screw your eyes up	Hold it for a few seconds	Relax

When doing these exercises make sure your teeth are not clenched and your tongue is lying loosely and not pushed up against the roof of your mouth.



Focusing the mind exercise

Once your body is relaxed it is useful to focus your mind. This can help you to feel more relaxed and distract you from the things which may be worrying you.

To begin with concentrate on the natural rhythm of your breathing. Try not to engage with worrying thoughts or internal chatter. Notice the rise and fall of your breath – slowly breathing in and out. After a few minutes try to think of an image that makes you feel good.

Such as:

- Lying on a beach
- Being in a favourite place
- The swaying of a tree in the wind
- Sitting in your garden

Imagine every little detail, the sights, sounds, scents and colours of your image.

If thoughts or worries come into your mind, return your focus to your image time and time again. Take time to enjoy exploring the image in your mind and the feeling of relaxation.

When you are ready, prepare yourself to open your eyes - listen to the sounds you can hear around you, imagine the room you are in and where you are sitting. Then start moving your hands and feet followed by your arms and legs. Now, slowly open your eyes and have a stretch or a yawn, if you want to.

It will be helpful to practice this procedure once a day while you are learning the skill of relaxation. Once you are familiar with this process you will not need to go through all the exercises in the table on page 27 but can select the exercise(s) which corresponds to your particular area(s) of tension.

Mindfulness

It can be easy to rush through life without stopping to notice much about what is happening around you. Try to pay more attention to the present moment - to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you - this can improve your mental wellbeing.

Some people call this awareness “mindfulness”, and you can take steps to develop it in your own life.

Becoming more aware of the present moment means noticing the sights, smells, sounds and tastes that you experience, as well as the thoughts and feelings that occur from one moment to the next. Here are some exercises that you might like to try:

The mountain meditation exercise

Step 1: Sit down in a comfortable position and focus on your breath going into your stomach. Allow yourself a few minutes to settle into your sitting position breathing in and breathing out.

Step 2: Imagine in as much detail as you can the most beautiful mountain you know, if you cannot imagine or picture the mountain see if you can get a sense of it. See if you can imagine its shape and size, its solid base rooted in the earth and how it reaches up to the sky. Notice how still it is. Notice if your mountain is in a winter or summer scene. This scene changes from day into night and night into day. Throughout the ever changing seasons the mountain stands firm and still whether there are storms or sunshine.

Step 3: See if you can imagine bringing the image of this mountain into your own body. Whatever image appears or sense you have of the mountain just sit and breathe with this. Perhaps you have a sense of strength or stillness from focusing on the mountain, notice these feelings as you breathe in and as you breathe out.

Step 4: Continue to imagine that you are the breathing mountain, still, calm and strong, simply being yourself accepting who you are in this moment. Stay focused on your breath and the image or sense of the mountain for 10 minutes. Say to yourself – as I breathe in I feel calm and still, as I breathe out I feel strong and peaceful.

Three minute breathing exercise

Step 1: Sit comfortably with your back straight and feet on the floor, shoulders relaxed and hands down by your side. Or you can do this standing with your feet shoulder width apart. You can have your eyes open or closed. In your mind ask yourself what are my thoughts? How do I feel in body and mind right now? Allow thoughts and feelings to come and go (or view them as passing events) without concentrating on them too much.

Step 2: Now focus on your breathing, begin to notice each breath moving in and out of your body.

Step 3: Once you are more aware of your body and breath, notice any aches, pains or tension in your body and then focus on your breathing. Imagine your breath expanding around the whole of your body and breathing into any areas of tension. When you notice that your thoughts or feelings have drifted, gently bring your attention back to your breathing. Finally when you are ready bring your attention back to the present moment.

Source: The first exercise has been adapted from the book: Mindfulness: A practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world by Mark Williams & Danny Penman; and John.dwyer.com. The second exercise has been adapted from a meditation created by Jon Kabat Zinn founder of the Centre for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care & Society and Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction.

Self-massage to relax tension in the face exercise

1. Stroke your forehead upwards into the hairline with alternate hands.
2. With fingertips gently smooth forehead from centre towards the temples and with circular movements apply a little pressure.
3. Massage jaw line using circular movements with your fingertips.
4. Massage shoulders and neck by kneading, pressing and stroking with both hands.

Source: SHANTI Asian Women & Stress Project, Coventry Health Promotion Service 1999

Practising mindfulness exercises can help you to stay more focused on the present moment, which will help you to handle stress and the ongoing changes in your life.

Useful websites

www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/mindfulness.aspx

www.bemindful.co.uk

www.franticworld.com

Complementary therapies

Complementary therapies aim to treat the 'whole' person and can be useful in helping to cope with stress, although some of them can be expensive. Here are a few examples:

Aromatherapy - Use of essential oils drawn from nature for healing through massage and the sense of smell i.e. drops added to a bath or vaporised into the air.

Meditation - Helps the mind to relax by focusing on an object, picture, religious symbol or a phrase. Some people find praying daily a good way of achieving peace and calmness.

Yoga - Consists of physical movements, postures and breathing exercises to benefit the mind, body and spirit.

Relaxation - Any method or activity that decreases the effect of stress on your mind and body. See the exercises in this section for practical techniques you can learn for yourself.

Massage - A simple way of easing aches and pains through a combination of movements: stroking, rubbing, kneading.

If you decide to consult a complementary practitioner privately, it is advisable to ask if they are registered with any national association, for example the Institute for Complementary and Natural Medicine which administers the British Register for Complementary Practitioners. This means that the practitioners have to abide by a code of ethics in their training and practice.

Useful contacts (local)

Addictions

Beating Addictions

Providing concise, informative articles based on the most up-to-date research.
www.beatingaddictions.co.uk

Alzheimers

Alzheimer's Society

United against dementia.
0300 222 1122
www.alzheimers.org.uk

Bereavement

Cruse (Dudley & Wolverhampton Branch)

Offering support after the death of someone close.
0808 808 1677
www.cruse.org.uk

Carers

Dudley Carers in Partnership in Mental Health (DCIP)

Campaigns on behalf of those caring for people with mental health problems.
www.dihc.nhs.uk/service-users-and-carers

Drugs

Cranstoun

Cranstoun provides services for adults and young people facing difficulties with alcohol and other drugs, domestic abuse, housing and criminal justice.
www.cranstoun.org/help-and-advice/

General

Citizens Advice Dudley & Wolverhampton

Provides free, impartial, independent and confidential information and advice on a wide range of issues, such as benefits, debt, employment, housing, energy advice and more.

0808 278 7919

www.citizensadvisedudleyandwolverhampton.org

Dudley Council for Voluntary Services (DCVS)

An independent local voluntary organisation that supports, promotes and develops local voluntary action.

01384 573381

www.dudleycvcs.org.uk/

Let's Get Healthy Dudley

Supporting you to make simple healthy lifestyle changes, including stopping smoking, losing weight, eating healthily and getting active.

0800 061 4962

www.lets-get.com

Mental health

Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Help in a crisis. Free 24/7 mental health support line for Black Country residents.
0800 008 6516 or text 07860 025281

Dudley Talking Therapy Service

Supporting people suffering from anxiety and depression who are registered with a Dudley borough GP.

www.dihc.nhs.uk/talking-therapy

Rethink Mental Illness

Supporting people with mental health issues to get through crises and to live independently.

0300 5000 927 (advice and information)

www.rethink.org

The Samaritans

If something's troubling you, then get in touch. 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
116 123

www.samaritans.org/

Young people

Kooth.Com

Free, safe and anonymous online support for young people.
www.Kooth.Com

The What? Centre

Providing advice, information and counselling for young people aged between 9 and 25.

01384 885 488 (Dudley) and 01384 379 992 (Stourbridge)

www.thewhatcentre.co.uk

Useful contacts (national)

Addictions

Addictions UK

For help in overcoming addictions.

0800 1 40 40 44

www.addictionsuk.com

Action on Addiction

Bringing help, hope and freedom to those living with addiction.

020 3981 5525

www.actiononaddiction.org.uk

Beating Addictions

Providing concise, informative articles based on the most up-to-date research.

www.beatingaddictions.co.uk

Anxiety

Anxiety UK

Supporting people living with anxiety.

03444 775 774

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Alcohol

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

Providing help with drinking problems.

0800 9177 650 (helpline)

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Al-anon Family Groups

Providing support to anyone whose life is, or has been, affected by someone else's drinking.

0800 0086 811 (helpline)

www.al-anonuk.org.uk

Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's Society

Working to improve the quality of life of people affected by dementia.

0333 150 3456 (helpline)

www.alzheimers.org.uk

Bereavement

Child Bereavement UK

Rebuilding lives together.

0800 02 888 40

www.childbereavementuk.org

Cruse Bereavement Care

Somewhere to turn when someone dies.

0808 808 1677

www.cruse.org.uk

Hope Again (part of Cruse Bereavement)

Supporting young people living after loss.

0808 808 1677 (helpline)

www.hopeagain.org.uk

Carers

Carers Direct

A guide for people who have care and support needs and their carers and people planning for their future needs.

0300 123 1058 (helpline)

Carers Trust

A charity for, with and about carers.

0300 7729600

www.carers.org

Carers UK

Making life better for carers.

020 7378 4999 (helpline)

www.carersuk.org

Children

Barnardo's

Offering help to children whatever the problem.

www.barnardos.org.uk

Childline

A private and confidential service for children and young people up to the age of 19.

0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

NSPCC

Protecting children across the UK.

0808 800 5000

www.nspcc.org.uk

Debt

Business Debtline

Giving free, impartial and confidential debt advice to small businesses and the self-employed.

0800 197 6026

www.businessdebtline.org/

The Money Charity

Being on top of your money means you are more in control of your life, your finances and your debts, reducing stress and hardship.

020 7062 8933

<https://themoneycharity.org.uk/>

Step Change Debt Charity

Providing free advice on debt problems.

0800 138 111

www.stepchange.org

Depression

NHS Choices

Depression is more than simply feeling unhappy or fed up for a few days and this site will give you guidance on what you can do.

Go to www.nhs.uk and search for 'five steps to mental wellbeing'.

Eating disorders

Beating Disorders Association

Providing helplines, online support and a network of UK-wide self-help groups to help adults and young people in the UK beat their eating disorders.

0808 801 0677

www.b-eat.co.uk

Gambling

Gamblers Anonymous (UK)

A fellowship of men and women who share their experiences, strength and hope with each other so that they may solve their common problem.

0330 094 0322

www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk

Gamcare

For those affected by problem gambling.

0808 8020 133

www.gamcare.org.uk

General

Health & Safety Executive

Tackling work related stress together.
www.hse.gov.uk/stress

Mental health

Mental Health Foundation

Dedicated to finding and addressing sources of mental health problems.
www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Mind

Making sure anyone with a mental health problem has somewhere to turn for advice and support.
0300 123 3393
www.mind.org.uk

NHS Choices

Looking at the five steps that we can take to improve our mental wellbeing.
www.nhs.uk/livewell/emotionalhealth

Royal College of Psychiatrists

A professional body responsible for education, training, setting and raising standards in psychiatry.
www.rcpsych.ac.uk

Samaritans

Someone to talk to any time you like, in your own way, and off the record – about whatever's getting to you.
116 123
www.samaritans.org

Men's health

C.A.L.M. (Campaign Against Living Miserably)

Dedicated to preventing male suicide, the single biggest killer of men under 45 in the UK.
www.thecalmzone.net

Men's Health Forum

Offers online support and advice for men of all ages.
0330 097 0654
www.menshealthforum.org.uk/

Older people

Age UK

The country's largest charity dedicated to helping everyone make the most of later life.
0800 6781602
www.ageuk.org.uk

Parenting

Family Lives

Listening, supportive and non-judgemental access.
0808 800 2222
www.familylives.org.uk

Young Minds Parenting

For anyone worried about a child or young person's behaviour or mental health.
0808 802 5544
www.youngminds.org.uk/parents

Relationships

Relate

The UK's largest provider of relationship support.
0300 100 1234
www.relate.org.uk

Self-help

Living life to the full

Free online courses covering low mood and stress.
www.lltff.com

Young people

Frank

Friendly, confidential drugs advice.
0300 123 6600
www.talktofrank.com

Hideout

Helping children and young people to understand domestic abuse.
www.thehideout.org.uk

Young Minds

Looking after the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.
www.youngminds.org.uk

Please use this space to make notes

“Find something to smile about each day”

June 2018

