Stress

What is stress?

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What is Stress?

Stress is the body's natural response to challenges or pressures. It can be physical, emotional, or mental, and occurs when we feel that demands placed on us are greater than our ability to cope.

- In small doses, stress can help us stay alert and motivated.
- When stress is ongoing or overwhelming, it can negatively affect our health, wellbeing, and relationships.

Signs and Symptoms of Stress

Stress affects people in different ways. Common signs include:

Physical:

- Headaches, muscle tension, fatigue
- Changes in appetite or sleep
- Upset stomach, faster heartbeat

Emotional:

- Irritability, anxiety, or low mood
- Feeling overwhelmed or tearful
- Loss of motivation or confidence

Behavioural:

- Withdrawing from others
- Poor concentration or forgetfulness
- Increase in unhealthy coping (e.g., overeating, smoking, alcohol use)

Stress and Health

Prolonged stress can affect both the body and mind.

- It can weaken the immune system, making us more prone to illness.
- It may contribute to high blood pressure, heart disease, or digestive problems.
- It increases the risk of anxiety, depression, and burnout.
- Stress also impacts our ability to parent, teach, or support others effectively.

What Causes Stress

Stress can come from many sources, often called **stressors**. Common examples include:

- Workload or job pressures
- Family responsibilities and relationships
- Financial worries
- Health concerns (our own or a loved one's)
- Major life changes (moving house, bereavement, divorce)
- Daily hassles (commuting, deadlines, managing time)

For children and young people, stressors may include exams, friendship issues, or changes at home or school.

Managing Stress – Self-Help (Things We Can Control)

While we can't always control what happens to us, we can build coping strategies.

Healthy routines:

- Prioritise sleep and rest
- Eat balanced meals and stay hydrated
- Exercise regularly, even short walks

Mind and body:

- Practice relaxation (deep breathing, mindfulness, yoga)
- Limit caffeine, alcohol, and screen time before bed

- Keep a gratitude journal or positive notes

Connections:

- Talk openly with trusted friends, family, or colleagues
- Ask for help when needed—don't wait until things feel unmanageable
- Make time for hobbies and activities that bring joy

Practical steps:

- Break tasks into smaller, achievable steps
- Use to-do lists and set realistic goals
- Learn to say "no" when commitments become too much

Stress and Burnout

Burnout is long-term exhaustion caused by ongoing stress, especially at work or while caring for others. It often builds up slowly.

Signs of burnout:

- Constant fatigue and lack of energy
- Feeling detached or cynical about work or responsibilities
- Reduced effectiveness or productivity
- Loss of enjoyment in activities once found rewarding

Preventing burnout:

- Balance work and personal life
- Take regular breaks and holidays
- Maintain boundaries (e.g., switch off from emails outside work hours)
- Seek professional support early if stress feels unmanageable

Helplines and useful contacts:

NHS 111 or talk to a GP.

If you live in England, you can refer yourself for free NHS talking therapies without seeing a GP.

Samaritans has a 24-hour help line, open every day of the year

Time to Change also has personal stories on its website

Mental Health Foundation: Stress

Stress Management Society

Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)

A helpline for people in the UK who are down or have hit a wall for any reason, who need to talk or find information and support.

Open 5pm to midnight, every day of the year.

- www.thecalmzone.net
- **Helpline: 0800 58 58 58**
- Webchat: www.thecalmzone.net/help/webchat/
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Sane

SANE services provide practical help, emotional support and specialist information to individuals affected by mental health problems, their family, friends and carers.

SANEline is open between 4pm and 10pm, 365 days a year.

- Support Forum: www.sane.org.uk
- **SANEline: 0300 304 7000**
- **Textcare:** https://www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/textcare/

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Stress - Every Mind Matters - NHS

Stress

What Is Stress? Symptoms, Causes, Impact, Treatment, Coping

Coping with stress and burnout :: Keeping Well

This information has been written using the above websites, and is believed to be correct on the day of writing. This leaflet is not designed to take the place of advice from your GP.

Simon Scarborough, Sept 2025