

WHAT HELPS WITH STRESS

Your mental wellbeing is just as important as your physical health, which is why you need to look after yourself properly. Living with stress all the time can increase your chances of becoming ill with depression or anxiety and of experiencing panic attacks.

Look After Yourself

When you're feeling stressed, you risk neglecting your physical needs, like eating properly and getting enough sleep.



Get Active

It might be the last thing you feel like, but doing different types of physical activity or exercise can distract you from whatever's bothering you.

Fresh air will help you relax and sleep better too.

Do something you enjoy, like:

- walking the dog
- riding your bike
- skateboarding or roller-blading
- going for a walk with friends or family
- taking part in your favourite sport
- doing activities at a club.



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Eat Healthily

What you eat can affect your mental wellbeing. Your eating habits can change when you're stressed, but not eating properly can make you feel worse and affect your concentration and energy levels.

- Try to have three meals a day with a couple of healthy snacks in between.

- Stay hydrated - drink plenty of water every day.
- Try to avoid high energy drinks as they contain lots of caffeine, which can make you feel more stressed and anxious.



Sleep Well

Stress can stop you getting enough sleep – and that can make you feel even worse.

Why not try the following:

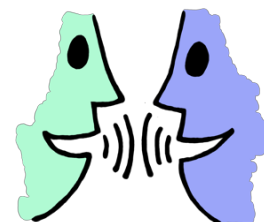
- Write your thoughts down just before you go to bed. It can help clear your head.
- Keep a pen and paper handy. Make a note of things that wake you up during the night.
- Try breathing exercises to reduce tension and worries that keep you awake.
- Try not to have your phone in your bedroom at night in case text messages wake you up or you stay up late using social media.

It's Good To Talk

It's hard to cope on your own and bottling things up adds to your stress, but talking about how you feel can put you back in control.

You might not like asking for help. You might feel that you don't want to burden other people. You might worry about what they will think and how they will react. You might even be afraid that they'll laugh at you.

But there are people who care about you, who will want to help you.



Who can you ask for help?

- Your family – parents or carers, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins
- Trusted friends – your own friends, or friends of the family, neighbours
- At school - one of the Mental Health Ambassadors, a Guidance Teacher, the school nurse, or any other trusted adult.

Remember, you can also call Childline - 0800 1111

Clear Your Head

When stress builds up, you need to distract yourself and give yourself a break from worrying. Everyone has their own way of clearing their head of the things that are bothering them. You know what makes you happiest and most chilled – or maybe you could try something new.

You could try:

- Listening to your favourite music – something slow to help you unwind, or a more upbeat track you can dance around to.
- Watching a TV programme or film you like – especially one that makes you laugh.
- Reading a book – escaping into a good story is a great way to switch off.
- Spending time with your pets – stroking a pet can calm you down.
- Losing yourself in a favourite hobby.
- Just being with friends and family can be fun and can take your mind off things.

Learn to Relax

If you can take time out every day to relax, it can stop stress building up and help you cope. Try these exercises. They can ease tension, calm you down and boost your concentration. You can do them just about anywhere –no one will notice.



Exercise 1 - Breathe

- Breathe in gently for 10 seconds, hold it for 2 seconds and then breathe out for 10 seconds.
- Repeat at least three times.
- Use a watch to time yourself or count the seconds in your head.

Exercise 2 - Island escape

- Close your eyes and imagine a peaceful place, like an island.
- Choose your own special place, then for a few moments imagine you're really there.

Exercise 3 - Move your body

Do each of these (or as many as you can manage) three times before moving onto the next one.

- Scrunch your toes tightly for a second, then relax.
- Bend your feet up so your toes leave the ground, then relax.
- Squeeze your arms into your sides, then relax.
- Hunch up your shoulders, then relax.
- Push down on the floor with your feet so your calves tense up, then relax.
- Clench your fists, then relax.
- Tense your thighs, then relax.
- Clench your bum, then relax.
- Tense your tummy muscles, then relax.



WHAT DOESN'T WORK

It's a myth that drugs, alcohol and smoking (tobacco or anything else) relieve stress and help you relax. You might get a temporary boost but they damage your physical and mental health and can actually increase stress levels.

Source: *Cool Heads, Stress Essentials*, NHS Health Scotland

