

Struggling with stress?

What is stress?

Stress is the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure.

Pressure turns into stress when you feel unable to cope. People have different ways of reacting to stress, so a situation that feels stressful to one person may be motivating to someone else.

Many of life's demands can cause stress, particularly work ([/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/stress/beat-stress-at-work/](#)), relationships and money problems. And, when you feel stressed, it can get in the way of sorting out these demands, or can even affect everything you do.

Stress can affect how you feel, think, behave and how your body works. In fact, common signs of stress include sleeping problems ([/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/insomnia/](#)), sweating, loss of appetite and difficulty concentrating.

You may feel anxious, irritable or low in self esteem, and you may have racing thoughts, worry constantly or go over things in your head. You may notice that you lose your temper more easily, drink more or act unreasonably.

You may also experience headaches ([/illnesses-and-conditions/brain-nerves-and-spinal-cord/headaches/](#)), muscle tension or pain, or dizziness.

Stress causes a surge of hormones in your body. These stress hormones are released to enable you to deal with pressures or threats – the so-called "fight or flight" response.

Once the pressure or threat has passed, your stress hormone levels will usually return to normal. However, if you're constantly under stress, these hormones will remain in your body, leading to the symptoms of stress.

Managing stress in daily life

Stress is not an illness itself, but it can cause serious illness if it isn't addressed. It's important to recognise the symptoms of stress early. Recognising the signs and symptoms of stress will help you figure out ways of coping and save you from adopting unhealthy coping methods, such as drinking or smoking.

There is little you can do to prevent stress, but there are many things you can do to manage stress more effectively, such as learning how to relax, taking

regular exercise (/healthy-living/keeping-active/) and adopting good time-management techniques (/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/stress/easy-time-management-tips/).

Studies have found that mindfulness courses, where participants are taught simple meditations across a series of weeks, can also help to reduce stress and improve mood.

When to see your GP about your stress levels

If you've tried self-help techniques and they aren't working, you should go to see your GP. They may suggest other coping techniques for you to try or recommend some form of counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy.

If your stress is causing serious health problems, such as high blood pressure, you may need to take medication or further tests.

Mental health issues, including stress, anxiety (/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/anxiety/) and depression (/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/depression/), are the reason for one-in-five visits to a GP.

Recognising your stress triggers

If you're not sure what's causing your stress, keep a diary and make a note of stressful episodes for two-to-four weeks. Then review it to spot the triggers.

Things you might want to write down include:

the date, time and place of a stressful episode

what you were doing

who you were with

how you felt emotionally

what you were thinking

what you started doing

how you felt physically

a stress rating (0-10 where 10 is the most stressed you could ever feel)

You can use the diary to:

work out what triggers your stress

work out how you operate under pressure

develop better coping mechanisms

Doctors sometimes recommend keeping a stress diary to help them diagnose stress.

Take action to tackle stress

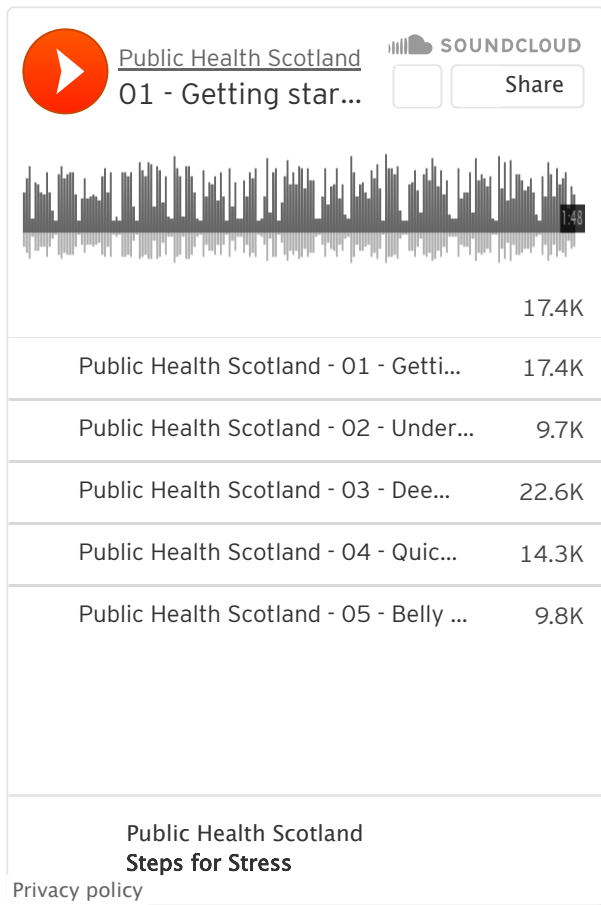
There's no quick-fix cure for stress, and no single method will work for everyone. However, there are simple things you can do to change the common life problems that can cause stress or make stress a problem. These include relaxation techniques, exercise and talking the issues through.


Breathing and relaxation exercises

Many people find exercises that focus on breathing and muscle relaxation to be helpful in relieving stress. The playlist below will help you to understand how stress works and start feeling better. These exercises can be done anywhere and are designed to help you feel more relaxed in general, as well as helping you feel calmer if you are becoming stressed.

This playlist is free to download, and you can also stream it using the Soundcloud website or app. You can download and listen to individual tracks if there are particular exercises that work best for you. If you're listening to it for the first time, it's best to start from the beginning.

Steps for Stress



Public Health Scotland  SOUND CLOUD

01 - Getting star... Share

17.4K

Public Health Scotland - 01 - Getti...	17.4K
Public Health Scotland - 02 - Under...	9.7K
Public Health Scotland - 03 - Dee...	22.6K
Public Health Scotland - 04 - Quic...	14.3K
Public Health Scotland - 05 - Belly ...	9.8K

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To access a BSL version of this playlist, click here (</healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/stress/breathing-and-relaxation-exercises-for-stress#bsl-breathing-and-relaxation-playlist>) .

Find out more by checking out these 10 stress busters (</healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/stress/10-stress-busters/>) .

Get stress support

Because talking through the issues is one of the key ways to tackle stress, you may find it useful to attend a stress management group or class. These are sometimes run in doctors' surgeries or community centres. The classes help people identify the cause of their stress and develop effective coping techniques.

It's always better to talk about your anxieties or stresses sooner rather than later. You may wish to phone a helpline such as Breathing Space (<http://breathingspace.scot/>) (0800 83 85 87, open 6pm-2am Monday to Thursday and 24 hours at the weekend, from 6pm Friday to 6am Monday) where their advisors can listen and help you figure out ways of coping.

Ask your GP (</scotlands-service-directory/gp-practices/////>) for more information if you're interested in attending a stress support group. You can also use the search directory to find emotional support services in your area (</scotlands-service-directory/>).

Steps to deal with stress

If you're dealing with stress, click below to download 'Steps to deal with stress: a simple guide to stressing less and enjoying life more'. This leaflet has a lot of information about simple changes you can make to reduce stress and feel calmer.

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Source: [Health Scotland](#)

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