



EAP Newsletter

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Stress Awareness

Stress Awareness Month has been recognised every April since 1992. Its aim is to increase public awareness about both the causes and cures for our modern stress epidemic.

Millions of people around the UK experience high levels of stress. Not only is this increased stress impacting our mental health, but it is also impacting our physical health too. For instance, stress has been linked to heart disease, problems with our immune system, insomnia and digestive problems.

That being said, stress is completely normal and not always a bad thing. More than likely, you will have heard of the *flight or fight response*, this is stress.

This is how the body protects itself and gets ready for a harmful situation. When we feel threatened, a chemical reaction occurs in our body that allows us to act in a way to prevent injury. Many physiological changes happen during a stress response, your heart

rate increases, breathing rate quickens, muscles tighten, and blood pressure rises. This is your body's natural way of getting ready to protect itself and prepare you to either fight or escape the threat.

As previously mentioned not all stress is bad. Stress could be the one thing that saves you, for instance, allowing you to slam the brakes on a car to avoid a fatal collision. We can cope well the small bursts of stress however long-term stress can have a negative impact on our health and well-being.

One of the best ways to control stress is to recognise the signs of symptoms. But detecting the symptoms may be more challenging than most of us think. Many of us are so used to being stressed in our daily lives we often don't realise how stressed we are until reach a breaking point.



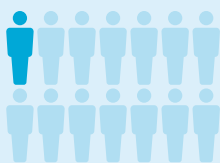
79% of UK adults feel stressed at least one day a month

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On average a typical UK adult feels stressed **more than twice a week**



49% of UK adults admit to feeling stressed five or more days each month



One in every 14 people in the UK say they feel stressed every single day

18 ↔ 24

18–24-year-olds feel stressed for more days a month than any other age group (9.82 days in a typical month on average)



Plymouth has the highest proportion of people in the UK who say they feel stressed **at least once a month (87%)**

Physical and mental signs of stress; spotting the signs

When you're under a great deal of stress, you may find that you're more emotional than usual, or get angry at the smallest things.

Here are some signs of stress to look out for in yourself (and others):

- ✔ Anxiety or nervousness
- ✔ Anger or irritability
- ✔ Difficulty concentrating or forgetfulness
- ✔ Depression or low mood
- ✔ Fatigue
- ✔ Withdrawn mood
- ✔ Feeling overwhelmed
- ✔ Difficulty sleeping
- ✔ Tearfulness
- ✔ Lack of confidence
- ✔ Lack of motivation
- ✔ A change in eating habits or appetite
- ✔ An increase in alcohol or drug use

Stress hormones also have an effect on your body too. Look out for some of these physical signs too:

- ✔ Muscular tension
- ✔ Headache
- ✔ Tense jaw
- ✔ Teeth grinding
- ✔ Increased perspiration
- ✔ Stomach ache
- ✔ Increased blood pressure
- ✔ Increased heart rate
- ✔ Increased sweating
- ✔ Dry mouth
- ✔ Heart palpitations
- ✔ More prone to infection
- ✔ Skin rashes
- ✔ Constipation
- ✔ Broken sleep



The biggest causes of stress

Lack of sleep and financial worries were the main causes of stress amongst UK adults in 2021. Other stressors include:



Being under lots of pressure



Not having much or any control over the outcome of a situation



Facing big changes



During times of uncertainty



Worrying about something



Having responsibilities that you're finding overwhelming

If you're feeling stressed today, try these 3 simple tips:



Get moving: Even a little regular exercise can help ease stress, boost your mood and energy, and improve your self-esteem. Aim for 30 minutes on most days, broken up into short 10-minute bursts if that's easier.



Practice a relaxation technique: Take time to relax each day and give your mind a break from the constant worrying. Meditating, breathing exercises, or other relaxation techniques are excellent ways to relieve stress and restore some balance to your life.



Don't skimp on sleep: Feeling tired will only increase your stress and negative thought patterns. Finding ways to improve your sleep during this difficult time will help both your mind and body.



Try this muscle relaxation technique

This technique will help you recognise and manage muscle tension in any part of your body by selectively tensing then relaxing each area in turn.

- ✔ Start by sitting or lying in a comfortable position where you will not be disturbed. Close your eyes and spend one minute focusing on deep breathing through your nose and out through your mouth.
- ✔ Every time you exhale gradually let your body relax and feel heavy.
- ✔ Although you can use this technique with any tense area in your body, some focus areas are the muscles around your jaw and the back of your neck and shoulders.
- ✔ Try squeezing your shoulders towards your ears for a few seconds feeling the tension and then, when exhaling, drop your shoulders down and feel the tension subside.
- ✔ Repeat this 2-3 times and feel your neck and shoulder muscles relax and feel lighter.

How to support someone who is stressed

We've all experienced a friend or a loved one feeling stressed, but how can we best support them? Here are 4 ways you can show your support.



Help them to spot the signs.

It's always easier to spot signs of stress in other people than it is for them to see it themselves. If you've noticed changes in someone's behaviour that suggests they're feeling stressed, don't let them bury their head in the sand over it. Try to reach out to them.



Listen.

Often just knowing that somebody is there to listen can make a huge difference. You don't always need to offer advice to your friend or loved one, just take the time to listen to them and remind them that you care.



Offer reassurance.

Try to remind your friend or loved one that this feeling won't last forever. Reassure them that there are people they can talk to, and you are there for them no matter what.



Offer practical support.

If there's a specific issue that's causing someone to feel stressed such as money worries, job loss or relationship problems, you may be able to help them find practical solutions that make the situation easier.

Remember no one should suffer alone. We have included some support services below that you could share with your friend or loved one.

- For mental health support: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/>
- Access support alongside your GP if you are struggling using NHS 111 or click on <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/urgent-support/>
- If you or someone you know is struggling with high stress, depression or suicidal thoughts, please call the Samaritans on 116 123. They are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week www.samaritans.org or text SHOUT to 85258 in the UK to text with a trained crisis volunteer.

Stress at work

Stress is one of the biggest problems employees admit to suffering from. The main causes of stress are usually due to workload, lack of job security or personal problems. Mental health in the workplace has an impact on the quality of work delivered, the number of sick days employees take and the general working atmosphere.

[Corporate health](#) is not just a buzzword. Its implementation is integral and necessary for mental health in the workplace. It's important to ensure your colleagues or team are working in a stress-free environment and have access to resources that can help alleviate stress.

Encouraging your team or colleagues to exercise and eat healthily are two of the best stressbusters around. Some ways employers or line managers can implement this include:

- ✿ Encouraging staff to take brisk walks during lunch breaks;
- ✿ Hiring a yoga instructor to come into workplace and give staff free yoga sessions once a month;
- ✿ Offer employees subsidised gym memberships;
- ✿ Give out free fresh fruit and other healthy snacks to employees;
- ✿ Offer participation in frequent [corporate mental health workshops](#).

Try this today: Cognitive reframing to reduce stress

Don't be put off by this term. Really this is just another way of changing the way you look at something. Take for example when your heart is beating fast, your mouth is dry and when you have sweaty palms – instead of thinking of this as fear, you could instead reframe it to tell yourself you're excited.

The frame through which we choose to look at something changes its meaning for us. Stress is present in all our lives, but depending on how we look at it, it can have a much greater or lesser impact. If we can learn to embrace the concept of stress as something normal, temporary, and expected, we can start to be more resilient.

It's time to engage with stress and view it more positively. This can encourage you to believe in yourself more and ensure you are resilient to deal with whatever is thrown at you.

And finally, our tip of the month; the one thing we ask you to do today if you do nothing else...

Practice gratitude: *With the world around us feeling uncertain, focusing our attention on our constants, or even small positives can really help to re-shape our thoughts, which overall has a huge impact on how we're feeling. Take the time, daily if you can, to reflect on three key things that you're grateful for. It doesn't have to be anything super positive or exceptional, it could be taking a moment to be grateful for the air in your lungs or the coffee in your mug.*