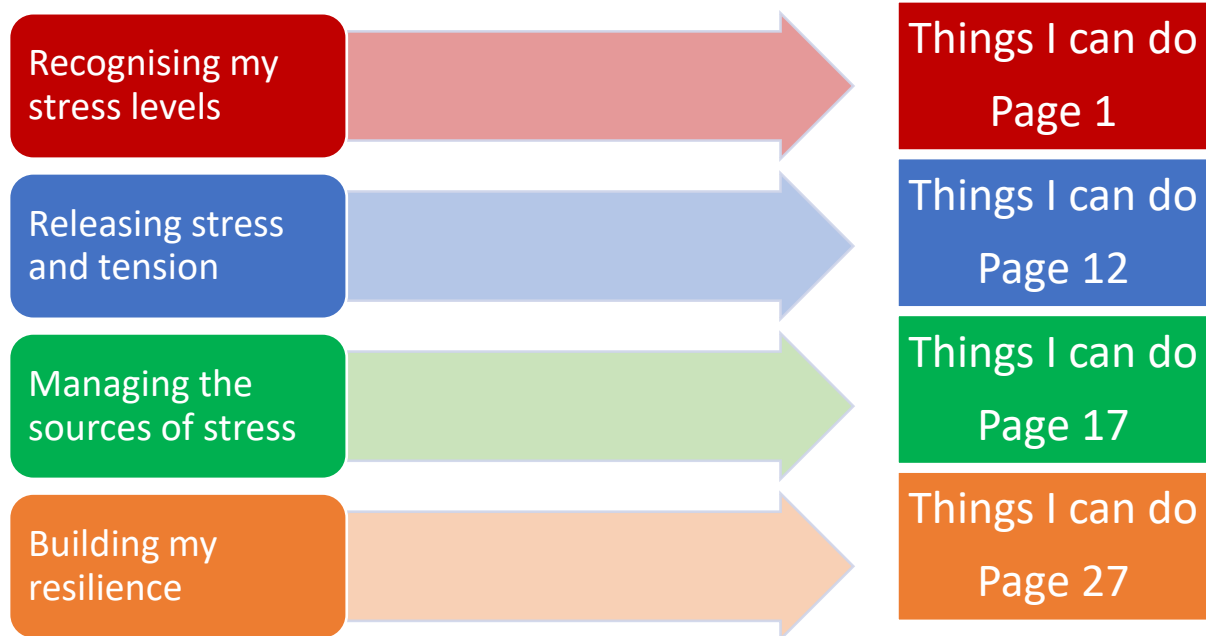




Getting to Grips With Stress

How to use this workbook

This workbook has been designed to help you recognise your own warning signs and know when to take action against stress. It helps you to build your personal toolbox of techniques and strategies that work for you for when you feel stressed



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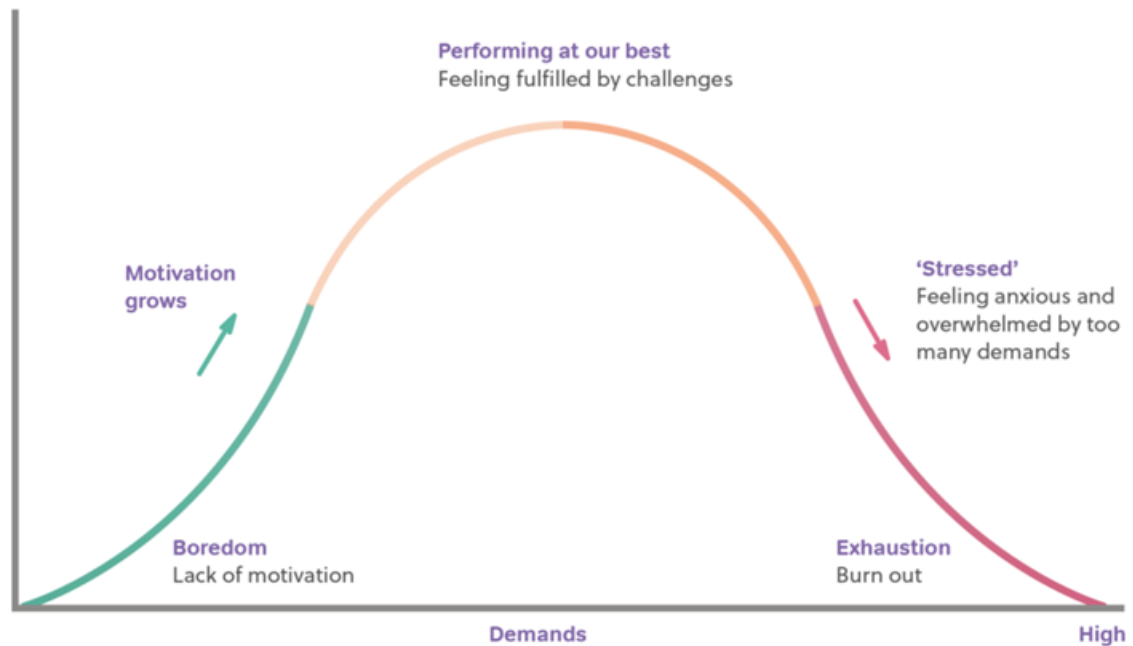
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What is Stress ?

Stress is what we feel when we feel under pressure. It is a perfectly normal reaction to something that our brain tells us is a threat and is something that all of us feel at some time or another. Sometimes it can even be helpful and can motivate us to get things done.

However, if we experience stress for a long time, it can make us feel overwhelmed and unable to cope. Evidence shows that prolonged stress can leave us feeling exhausted and be bad for our health.

The **stress curve** shows us how increasing amounts of stress impacts our life, moving from the green area when we can be bored and unmotivated to the red area where we feel exhausted and completely overwhelmed.



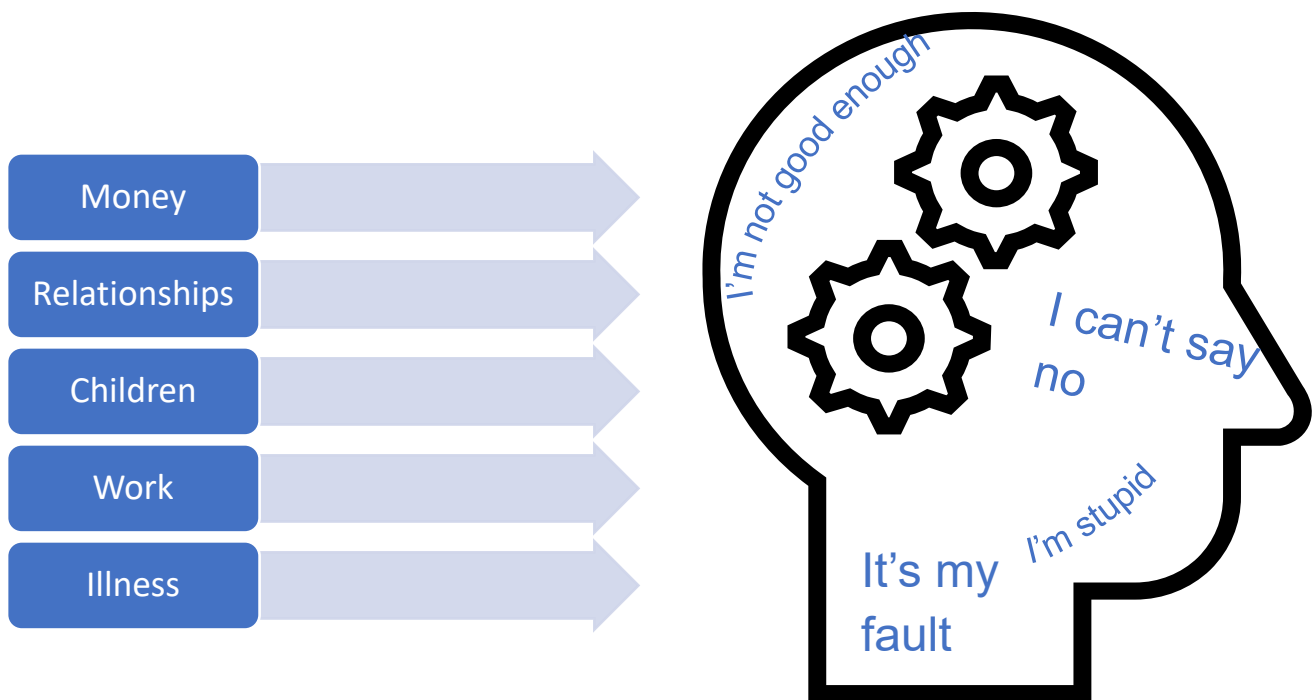
The amount of stress it takes to move you from green to yellow to amber to red will be different for everyone. It may even be different for you at different times of your life.

Where does stress come from ?

Stressors (things that make us stressed) are part of everyday life, but broadly they fall into two categories.

External stressors are things that are outside us (like bills, relationships, work, children, spiders). Some of these are within our control and some are not.

Internal stressors come from inside us and are the pressures we put on ourselves to be a certain way. This can be things like always needing things be perfect, finding it difficult to say no and for some people, memories of previous traumatic experiences can exert an influence long after the event itself



Try this ! What are the things that make you stressed ?

It can be useful to identify things that trigger our stress. It might help to write some of them down here

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

What does stress do to us ?

We may be most familiar with how stress makes us feel in our **body**, but if we think about it, stress also affects our **mood**, how we **think** and how we **behave**.

For instance, stress can make us more easily upset or irritable, it can make us snappy with people or avoid certain situations, and it can make it hard to concentrate or remember things.

We will all have our own stress profile.



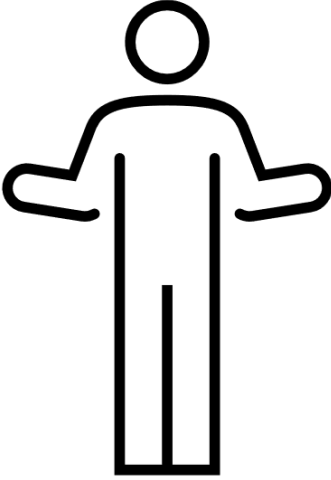
All these factors can influence and interact with each other, so sometimes stress can feel like a vicious circle



It's important to note that stress can change the way we think. When we are stressed it can be harder to think clearly and creatively, making it more difficult to solve problems and make decisions

How does stress affect me?

Take a few minutes to think about how stress affects you. You can use this to identify your own stress warning signs.

<p>My Body</p> 	<p>My Mood</p>
<p>The way I think</p>	<p>The way I behave</p>

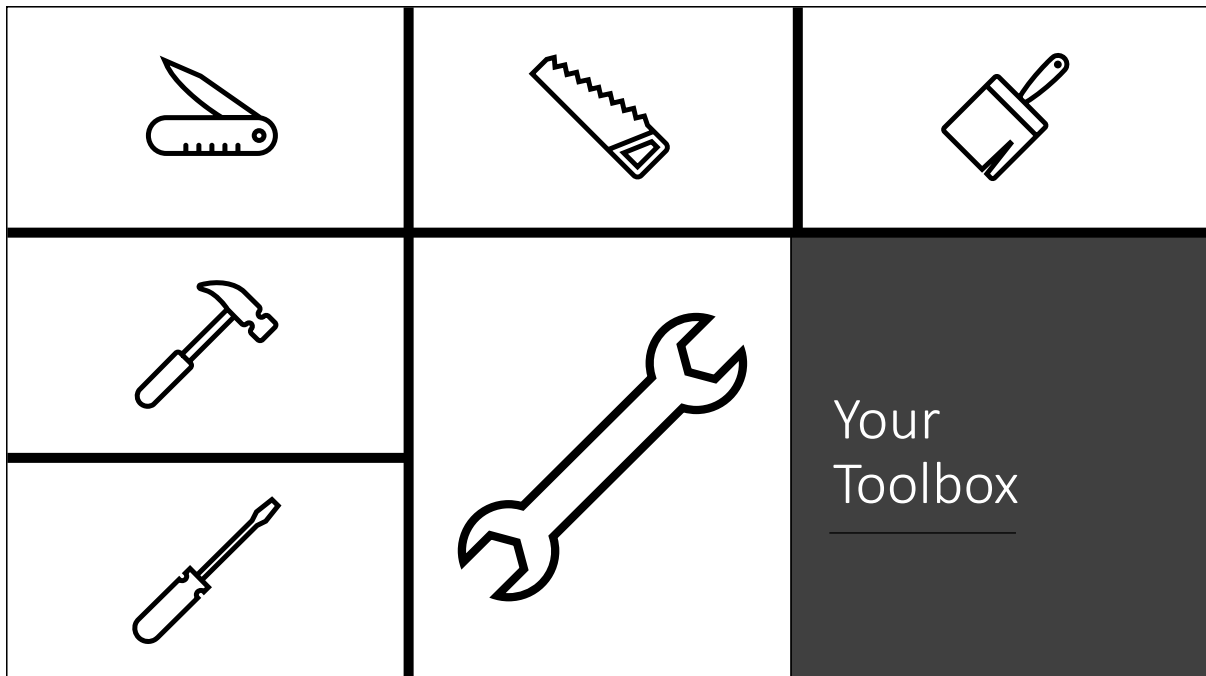
Try This ! What are my stress warning signs ?

You can use this worksheet as a traffic light system to remind you when to take action on stress

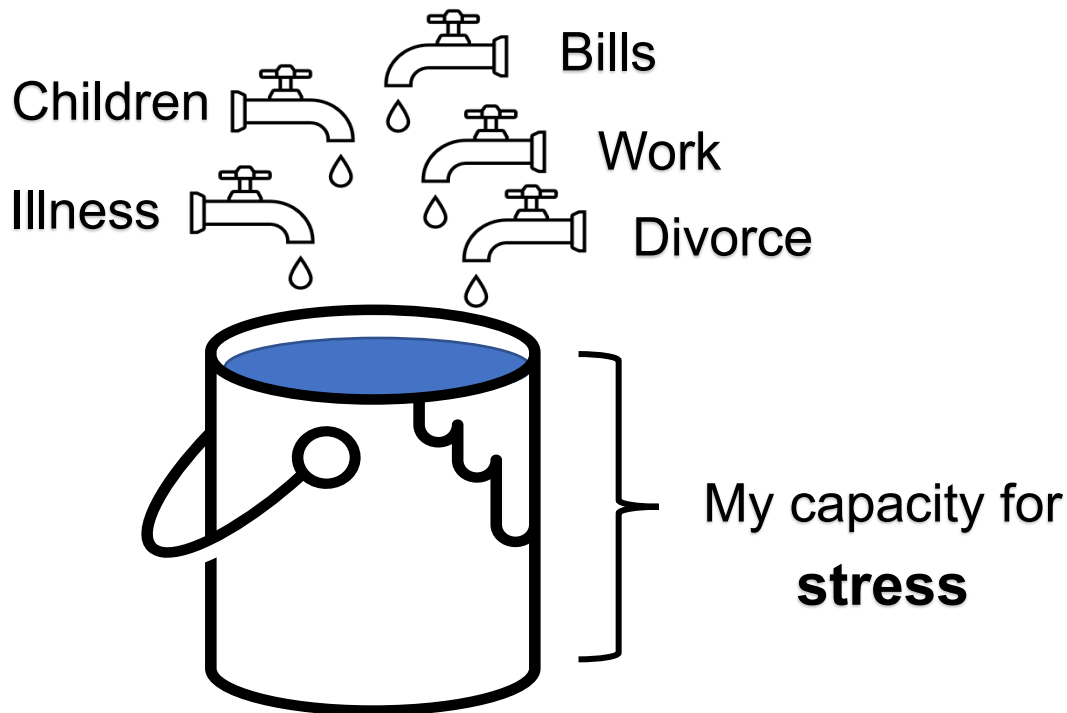
What are my warning signs ?	How I feel in my body	How I feel emotionally	How my thinking is affected	How I am behaving
<p>GREEN</p> <p>I'm OK.</p> <p>Keep looking after my wellbeing</p>				
<p>AMBER</p> <p>I'm feeling a bit stressed.</p> <p>Time to act and pay more attention to my wellbeing</p>				
<p>RED</p> <p>I'm feeling stressed.</p> <p>Time to do something straight away</p>				

Build your toolbox

When you have worked out your stress profile, you can build your own toolbox of techniques and strategies that you can use when you recognise that you are in your amber or red zone, as well as things that help you stay in your green zone



The Stress Bucket model



This is a useful way to think about stress and our ability to handle it.

We can think of our capacity to deal with stress as a bucket and the things that we find stressful in life as taps pouring water into the bucket.

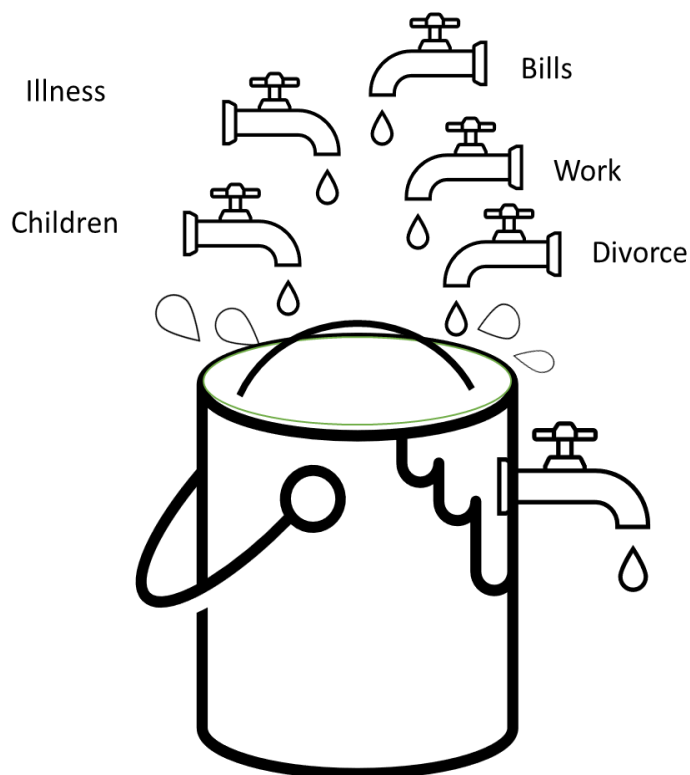
When the bucket is not full, it doesn't overflow.

If the taps are turned full on, the bucket will fill up and eventually water will splash over the side.

If you think of the water as stress, sometimes we are able to contain it quite well, whereas other times it completely overwhelms us.

We are all born with different sized buckets and different capacities for stress, and we may even find that our own capacity for stress varies at different times of your life.

So what do we do about it ? There are three ways of stopping the water from overflowing



Open a tap on the bucket

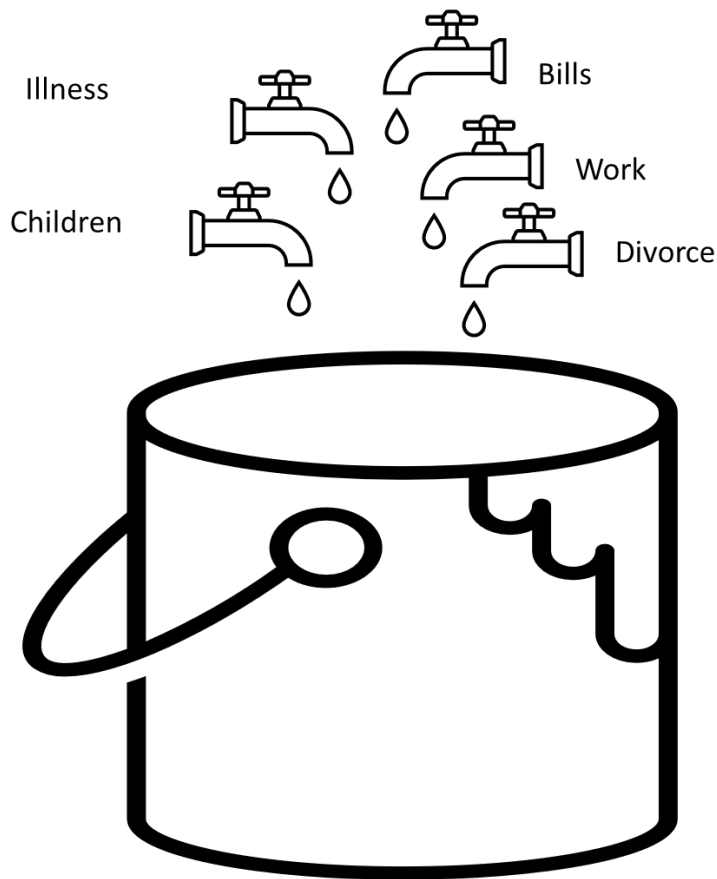
This section will talk about things you can try to reduce the feelings of stress when you are beginning to feel overwhelmed.

Put on a lid

This section will look at tips and strategies you can try for managing the things that stress us.

Make your bucket bigger

This section looks at tips and strategies you can try to increase your capacity for dealing with stress.



Opening the tap – Releasing the tension when you feel stressed

Allow yourself to take a break and do something calming and absorbing

We will all have our own things that we enjoy and help us unwind. When we are stressed it is easy to forget about finding time to do the things that give us joy.

Our wellbeing is promoted by having a balance between the time we spend on **work, leisure and self-care**.

Everybody's mix will be different, but it is good to try and make sure we find time in our lives to look after ourselves and recharge our batteries.

Being totally absorbed in something benefits our wellbeing because it can help us put stressful, negative thoughts out of our head for a while. It can also improve our confidence and help us to focus.

As they say when you're on a plane – put your own oxygen mask on first !!

Some suggestions for helpful things to calm and absorb you

- Read a book
- Do something you enjoy, like baking or knitting
- Listen to music or a podcast
- Play with the kids
- Colouring or painting
- Make something
- Do a puzzle

Get some exercise.

Exercise is good for reducing stress and also makes our heart, lungs and muscles stronger and reduces our chances of life-limiting illnesses.

The good news is that you don't need to run a marathon or join a gym to get the benefits. Three 10 minute chunks of brisk walking a day will help you reach the recommended level of exercise.

There are many ways of getting active to try, and it is important that you find something that you enjoy and fits in with your lifestyle to make it sustainable. Some things other people have tried are

- Swimming
- Dancing
- Yoga
- Get on your bike
- If you like exercising with others, try a class at your local leisure centre
- Or join Compass for Walk-Talk-Walk on Friday mornings in Palmer Park
- Take the stairs, get off the bus early or even park further away from where you are going.
- Gardening

More ideas can be found at

[Sport in Mind https://www.sportinmind.org/](https://www.sportinmind.org/)

[Home - Reading's Leisure Services \(readingleisure.co.uk\)](http://readingleisure.co.uk)

Try this ! How many forms of exercise can you think of ?

There are many ways of being active. Try listing one for each letter of the alphabet

A

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

I

J

K

L

M

N

O

P

Q

R

S

T

U

V

X

Y

Z

Practice a breathing exercise

Sometimes when we are stressed we change how we breathe. By focusing on our breathing, it gives us a way of anchoring ourselves back in the present when thoughts are spinning round in our head.

There are many breathing techniques out there, but this is a simple one you might like to try.

Try these audio guides to breathing and relaxation exercises from NHS Scotland

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/stress/breathing-and-relaxation-exercises-for-stress#audio-breathing-and-relaxation-playlist>

Try this ! Controlled Breathing

If you're lying down, place your arms a little bit away from your sides, with the palms up. Let your legs be straight, or bend your knees so your feet are flat on the floor.

If you're sitting, place your arms on the chair arms.

If you're sitting or standing, place both feet flat on the ground. Whatever position you're in, place your feet roughly hip-width apart.

- Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, without forcing it.
- Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Breathe in gently and regularly. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5. You may not be able to reach 5 at first.
- Then let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again, if you find this helpful.
- Keep doing this for at least 5 minutes.

Practice a relaxation exercise

When we get stressed, we hold a lot of tension in our bodies. Relaxation exercises help us focus on our bodies and release the tension that has built up

Listen to some more relaxation techniques here

<https://www.cntw.nhs.uk/resource-library/relaxation-techniques/>

Try this ! Quick Muscle Relaxation

You can relieve tension in any part of your body just by tensing and relaxing each muscle in turn.

Sitting in a comfortable chair:

1. Close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing. Slowly breath in through your nose and out through your mouth.
2. Make a fist, squeezing your hand tightly.
3. Hold this for a few seconds, noticing the tension.
4. Slowly open your fingers and feel the difference – notice the tension leaving. Your hand is much lighter and relaxed. Enjoy this feeling.

If you have any physical injuries or conditions that may cause muscle pain, don't tense the muscle in that area.

After relaxation

Don't rush to get up after relaxation exercises. Sit with your eyes closed for a few minutes to avoid the possibility of feeling dizzy. Open your eyes and make sure you feel all right before standing up.

Maximise your chances of sleeping well

Sleep is an essential component of our wellbeing. When we are tired it is harder to concentrate on what we are doing and harder to keep our emotions in check. Practicing good sleep hygiene gives us the best chance for having a good nights sleep

Simple sleep hygiene

- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day
- Establish a wind-down routine before you go to bed
- Make sure your bedroom is cool, dark and comfortable
- If you are tossing and turning, get up and do something else
- Cut out caffeine at least 4 hours before bed
- Cut out screens (tablets and phones) an hour before bed
- Stay away from anything stimulating just before bed (social media, email)

Compass frequently offers a workshop on A Good Night's Sleep. Keep an eye on the prospectus for details

<https://www.compassrecoverycollege.uk>

Put a lid on – strategies for managing the things that stress us

Don't ignore them

When we have things in our lives that cause us stress, it is tempting to try and pretend they are not there and avoid dealing with them.

The bad news is that they generally are not going to go away on their own and the longer we leave them, the more difficult it is to sort them out.

A feeling of things being out of control is a major source of stress, so addressing our problems can actually reduce stress and make us feel more confident.

A

ction

C

hanges

T

hings

Focus your thoughts and actions on what you can control

In difficult situations, there will be some things we will not be able to change. Thinking about things that are out of our control can be overwhelming and leave us feeling hopeless, which raises our stress levels.

It is most effective to focus our energy on what we can control and try and let go of what we can't.

You may find that there are some things that seem out of your control at first, but can be broken down into smaller, practical steps that you can take action on.

More information here :

<https://www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk/media/10137/resilience-what-is-in-my-control.pdf>

“You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them.” – Maya Angelou

Your Circle of Control

To identify the things that we can change and the things we can't, it helps to put things into two circles

First, draw a circle and write down everything that is currently causing you to be stressed about a situation. This is your **circle of concern**

As you write them down, you will probably identify that some of them are things that you can do something about and some of them aren't.

Draw another circle and put all the things you can **take action** on by yourself in it. This is your **circle of control**

Focussing your energies on practical steps to deal with things in your circle of control will help you feel more in control and reduce stress.

Example: My Circle of Control – Applying for a job



It helps us to concentrate on what's in the inner circle. **Making a plan** for dealing with these things helps us feel more in control and will help reduce our stress levels

The circle of concern was developed by Stephen Covey in his book "7 Habits of Highly Effective People"

Set some boundaries

Sometimes we can feel stressed and overwhelmed because we have taken on too much.

Rather than automatically saying yes, it is better to be realistic about what we have time to do

Remember, if we are doing something when we are really stressed, we will probably not do it to the best of our ability.

Its important that we have time to look after ourselves.

Setting boundaries is very important as it can help you to feel less stressed and can provide you feel more capacity to cope with the challenges that you may face.

Setting Boundaries

[Setting Healthy Boundaries - YouTube](#)

Raising self esteem

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/raise-low-self-esteem/>

Some tips for saying No

- **Broken record**
If people push the boundary, keep saying no

- **No, not now**
Say no, but offer an alternative time

"I can't do it now, but I can do it on Friday"

- **No, unless**

Say no, but add a condition

"I can't do this work unless you free up my afternoon"

- **Not that, but this**
Say no, but offer an alternative

"I can't go with you to your appointment, but I can call you after to see how it went"

From :

https://london.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/hee_assertiveness_workbook_0.pdf

Tackle your problems

When we are stressed, it can be tempting to ignore our problems and hope they go away. But taking control and doing something about it will make us feel less stressed, even if it is difficult.

Make each step **SMART**

Specific. Be specific about what you are going to do

Measurable. Make sure you will know when you have finished the step

Achievable. Make sure each step is something you feel you can do.

Relevant. Do I want to do this for me ?

Time-bound. Say when you are going to do it

For example, try saying

“Tonight, I am going to switch off the TV and go to bed at 10pm”

rather than

“I’m going to start going to bed early”

Tips for dealing with your problems

- Think about what **resources** you have that can help tackle your problem.

This can be

- Your skills and strengths
 - Things/people you know
 - What has worked before
- **Split** big problems down into smaller, achievable steps. Focus on what you can control (see page 18). Try the Small Steps worksheet on page 23,
 - Make each step **SMART**. The My Problem List worksheet can help with that.
 - **Prioritise.** Work out which problems are most urgent and what steps need to be taken first
 - **Ask for help.** You don’t have to do this on your own !

Try this! My Problem List

My Problem	What steps can I take ?	When will I do it ?	Who can help me ?

Adapted from Steps to deal with stress: A simple guide to stressing less and enjoying life more (healthscotland.com)

Try this! My Small Steps Ladder

What do I want to be able to do ?

Break it down into smaller steps

Now think about what order you need to do things in

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

It doesn't have to be perfect – it just has to be good enough

Sometimes we want to do the very best we can and for things to be the best they can be. But sometimes the added stress we put ourselves under to make something just right doesn't result in any additional benefit.

Wanting things to be perfect can also lead us to set ourselves unrealistically high goals and we beat ourselves up when we don't achieve them.

It can help see what we think of as failure as an **opportunity to learn** by remembering the acronym **FAIL**

First

Attempt

In

Learning

We can learn from our mistakes and do better next time

Sometimes wanting things to be perfect can stop us asking for help from others because we don't believe they will do it as well as we do.

Good Enough – the Pareto Principle and Diminishing Returns

The Pareto principle is used in project management, but it is useful to remember in everyday life too.

It says that **80%** of the impact of what you do is generated by **20%** of your effort.

It means that after a certain level, putting more work into something brings diminishing returns.

So if we are feeling stressed about doing those last few extra bits, we can ask ourselves – will we get the benefit ?

Ask for help

You don't have to do it alone – people are here to help when you have a specific problem

Money worries

[Debt advice - Reading Borough Council - https://www.reading.gov.uk/housing/benefits-and-assistance/debt-advice/](https://www.reading.gov.uk/housing/benefits-and-assistance/debt-advice/)

[StepChange Debt Charity - Free Expert Debt Advice - .https://www.stepchange.org/](https://www.stepchange.org/)

[Communicare | Advice, information and support - https://www.communicare.org.uk/](https://www.communicare.org.uk/)

Housing

[Citizens Advice Reading \(rcab.org.uk\)](http://rcab.org.uk)

[Communicare | Advice, information and support - https://www.communicare.org.uk/](https://www.communicare.org.uk/)

[Launchpad \(launchpadreading.org.uk\)](http://launchpadreading.org.uk)

Parenting

[PACT \(pactcharity.org\)](http://pactcharity.org)

[Parenting and Family Support - Family Lives \(Parentline Plus\) | Family Lives - https://www.familylives.org.uk/](https://www.familylives.org.uk/)

Sexual violence

[Trust House Reading Trust House Reading - http://trushousereading.org/](http://trushousereading.org/)

Domestic abuse

[Berkshire Women's Aid \(BWA\) \(berkshirewomensaid.org.uk\) - Helpline 0808 801 0882 helpdesk@bwaid.org.uk](http://berkshirewomensaid.org.uk)

Relationships

[Relate - https://www.relate.org.uk/](https://www.relate.org.uk/)

Alcohol

[Alcohol support services | Drinkaware - https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice/alcohol-support-services](https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice/alcohol-support-services)

Drugs

[Drug & Alcohol Service - Reading | Change Grow Live - https://www.changegrowlive.org/drug-alcohol-service-reading](https://www.changegrowlive.org/drug-alcohol-service-reading)

Employment

[Citizens Advice Reading \(rcab.org.uk\)](http://rcab.org.uk)

[Communicare | Advice, information and support - https://www.communicare.org.uk/](https://www.communicare.org.uk/)

[Jobcentre Plus: How to contact Jobcentre Plus - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Being A Carer

[TuVida – supporting your life -https://www.tuvida.org/](https://www.tuvida.org/)

Bereavement

[Cruse Bereavement Support - https://www.cruse.org.uk/](https://www.cruse.org.uk/)

[Bereavement Counselling - Counselling Directory \(counselling-directory.org.uk\)](http://counselling-directory.org.uk)

Depression

[Depression Xpression – The mental health peer support group for Reading and Wokingham - https://depressionxpression.org.uk/](https://depressionxpression.org.uk/)

Make your bucket bigger – tips to build resilience and increase our capacity for coping with stress

Be kind to yourself when things are not going well

Research shows that people who are kind to themselves when things go wrong are generally more resilient to dealing with stress.

It's important to remember that **everyone makes mistakes**. It's part of being human. However, when things go wrong, it's easy to think that this is

Permanent – this will always go wrong for me

Personal – its me that is wrong, not the situation

Pervasive – Everything I do will go wrong

BUT there is an alternative way of looking at it. Mistakes are opportunities to learn, so that next time, things will go more smoothly.

Try this ! Some ways to practice self-compassion

- Talk to yourself as you would a dear friend who was going through the same difficulties.
- Challenge those negative thoughts ! One technique for doing this is to
 - **CATCH IT** - notice the negative thought
 - **CHALLENGE IT** – Put the thought on trial. What is the evidence against it ?
 - **CHANGE IT** – replace with a more helpful thought

Find more information at

[Catch it, Check it, Change it \(bbc.co.uk\) - http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/health/factsheets/catch.pdf](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/health/factsheets/catch.pdf)

Try This! Catch It – Challenge it – Change it

CATCH IT - notice your negative thought. What is it ?

CHALLENGE IT – Is it really true ? What is the evidence to support or challenge these thoughts? Is there something you have overlooked?

CHANGE IT – Is there another more helpful and balanced way of thinking?

Being optimistic is a skill we can learn

Its easy to think that we are born an optimist or a pessimist, when it is in fact more useful to see optimism as a skill that we can learn, just like cooking or playing football.

Research has shown that we can practice being optimistic – one simple way is to try the “The Three Good things” exercise.

Three Good Things

Each night for a week, just before you go to bed, think of good things that have happened to you that day. They don't have to be big things – simply someone saying hello might be one of them.

Then write them down (and it is important you do write it down rather than just think about it)

1. Give the event a title (e.g., “I saw George in Asda and we had a chat”)
2. Write down exactly what happened in as much detail as possible, including what you did or said and, if others were involved, what they did or said.
3. Include how this event made you feel at the time and how it made you feel later when you looked back on it
4. Explain what you think caused this event. You may want to focus on what you did to make this good thing happen (even if its something as simple as “I decided to go to shopping in Asda”).

Try this ! Three Good Things for a week

Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

Stay Connected

Having people we can talk to about our difficulties helps us manage them, but so does having people to go out and do things with.

It can be easy to withdraw when we are feeling stressed, but staying connected to others

- Builds our self-worth and gives us a sense of belonging
- Gives an opportunity to share positive experiences
- Provides us with emotional support when things are tough
- Allows us to support others in turn

Try these simple ways to maintain your connection to others

- if possible, take time each day to be with your family, for example, try arranging a fixed time to eat dinner together
- arrange a day out with friends you have not seen for a while
- try switching off the TV to talk or play a game with your children, friends or family
- have lunch with a colleague
- visit a friend or family member who needs support or company
- volunteer at a local school, hospital or community group. Find out how to volunteer on the GOV.UK website
- make the most of technology to stay in touch with friends and family. Video-chat apps like Skype and FaceTime are useful, especially if you live far apart