

# Ways to reduce and manage stress

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**Stress is something we have all experienced, especially recently, and it is something that can manifest frequently in our everyday lives. From work to family life, stress can be a common factor of modern living.**

Ranging from lots of little inconveniences to major world-shaking events, stress can build up over time and have a negative impact on our overall physical and mental wellbeing.

However, there are great ways to manage it and live contentedly alongside our potential stressors. With International Stress Week happening from the 1 - 5 November this year, there is no better time to tackle stress head-on for a happier, balanced and fulfilling life.

It can be difficult to pinpoint exactly what stress is. We have all found ourselves in 'stressful' situations or know that we are feeling 'stressed' but defining stress completely can be a tricky concept. Generally, stress is our reaction to being under pressure, either from external factors or perhaps the pressure we put on ourselves. Either way, stress is associated with a lack of control, and a feeling of being 'out of our depth' may materialise in various mental and physical symptoms [1].

## Spotting symptoms

Some of the most common symptoms of stress can be seen physically as well as via our mood and behaviour too. For example, a persistent headache may be an indication of stress rather than an illness and so may be feelings of anxiety or angry outbursts. Bodily aches and pains, fatigue, stomach problems and even chest pains can be physical indicators of stress. Mentally, feeling restless, overwhelmed, sad or angry, and even unmotivated can also be signs you are under a lot of stress. As well as feeling physical and mental sensations, the way we act can be telling too. If you are angry or withdrawn and find yourself exercising less, drinking more, or forgoing what you enjoy, this could also be a sign you need to tackle the amount of stress in your life [2].

## Reducing stress

The good news is, there are many ways to help reduce stress in your daily life and you can start with something as simple as getting enough sleep. Getting into a decent nightly routine to promote good-quality sleep can help negate low energy levels, increase mental alertness, and brighten your overall mood which can help combat stress levels.

Another technique to mitigate stressful situations is to look at your time-management skills. Finding a good balance between home and family life means you will ultimately feel less pressure from either side, meaning the time spent with each will be more fulfilling and less stressful. Also, resolving tension inducing situations is a brilliant tool to lower your overall stress levels.

If something is left to fester it will only become more of an issue, so taking the time to solve problems and negotiate at work and home will help you feel more relaxed.

Crucially it's important to remember that it's always ok to ask for help. Whether it's your partner or a colleague, reaching out will often take some of the strain off and help you see a situation with a fresh pair of eyes. There is also always professional help available too if feelings of stress and anxiety become overwhelming [3].

## Managing situations

There are some instances where being in a stressful situation is unavoidable, but you can manage symptoms you may experience with some carefully cultivated coping strategies.

We know that eating healthy and exercising are great for us physically, but ensuring we consume the correct vitamins and minerals can also help us combat stress too. By eating the recommended nutrients, keeping fit and getting some fresh air with exercise, we will boost endorphins and lift our mood and feelings of overall wellbeing [4].

As well as taking care of ourselves physically, checking in mentally is a great way to manage stress, in the moment. By practising techniques that allow us to step outside of a stressful situation, we can come back more prepared and able to tackle the situation at hand.

Something like a guided meditation is a fantastic way to block out stressors and reconnect with yourself, helping you to calm down and regain control. If this is something you haven't mastered, just practising some deep breathing has a powerful impact on symptoms of stress too. If you breathe deeply for five seconds, hold for two seconds and release for five further seconds, this triggers your parasympathetic nervous system, which tells your body it's ok to relax and can help manage symptoms of stress and anxiety.

Connection is also a great way to combat stressful situations. By talking to a friend, you can escape the isolating elements of a difficult time and being part of a community such as a social club or a team sport will give you a level of support and another tool in your arsenal for defending against stress.

Keeping your connections offline as much as possible too may be a good idea if you are feeling overwhelmed. Social media can be a fantastic tool, but it can also lead to negative feelings and may see us spiral when we already don't feel great [5].

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1. [How to Manage Stress](#), Mind, November 2017.
  2. [Stress Symptoms: Effects on Your Body and Behaviour](#), Mayo Clinic, March 24, 2021.
  3. [7 Ways to Reduce Stress and Keep Blood Pressure Down](#), Harvard Health, March 25, 2020.
  4. [How to Manage and Reduce Stress](#), Mental Health Foundation
  5. [5 Tips to Manage Stress](#), Mayo Clinic, December 10, 2018.