

## 5 self-care strategies to help reduce stress

1. Establish your priorities - be it in work or daily life
2. Complete your own stress bucket to identify your stressors and how to manage them
3. Reach out to family and friends
4. Spend time exercising or out in nature
5. Once a week, try to set time aside for a hobby you love or try something new



[mentalhealthinuk.org/bucket](http://mentalhealthinuk.org/bucket)



**HEAD**  
**STRONG**

# Headstrong 2023-24



# What is stress?

- **Stress is a heightened sense of pressure**
- **It can affect any person at any stage of life**
- **Stress occurs due to a range of factors such as undergoing life changes, being under pressure and facing uncertainty**
- **Only the person experiencing stress can determine whether it's present and how severe it feels**

Visit [mentalhealth-uk.org/stress](https://www.mentalhealth-uk.org/stress) for advice on managing stress



# How to spot the signs of stress

Stress can manifest itself physically and emotionally. It can also affect our behaviour and thinking.

Physical symptoms include:

- Muscle aches, dizziness, chest pain, nausea and headaches

Emotional symptoms include:

- Feeling irritable, overwhelmed, angry, restless and scared

Behavioural symptoms include:

- Avoidance, changes in eating habits, using alcohol

Cognitive symptoms include:

- Racing thoughts, memory lapses, indecisiveness

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# How to talk about stress & support others

- **Actively listen**
- **Validate how they're feeling by trying to understand and recognise their experience**
- **Help them try to uncover and talk about their triggers**
- **Ask the person what they think might help reduce the pressure they're experiencing**
- **If you can, offer practical help with the causes of stress**
- **Support them to seek professional help**



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# Stress tip #1: just breathe

Breathing exercises are a useful technique to help you relax. The 4-5-8 method is very simple:

- Start by sitting up straight in a comfortable position or lying down.
- Slowly breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds. If you can't breathe in through your nose, use your mouth.
- Hold your breath for 5 seconds.
- Breathe out slowly for 8 seconds.

Repeat this cycle 10 times, or as many times as you want. While you do it try to concentrate on your breathing. You can alter the seconds to suit you.

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## Stress tip #2: be mindful

Mindfulness is about being in touch with the world around you and noticing what's happening in the present. Next time you feel stressed try this exercise:

- Choose an everyday task that helps you engage your senses like brushing your teeth
- Concentrate on how the brush feels in your hand, the sensation of it brushing your teeth, the feeling of your feet against your bathroom floor, the smell and taste of the toothpaste.
- Notice how much you experienced in just 2 minutes.

Being mindful can benefit day-to-day wellbeing but it doesn't always work for everyone. Explore other relaxation techniques to see what's right for you.

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## Stress tip #3: sleep well

Sleep can affect how you feel physically and mentally. There are some easy steps you can take to improve your sleep:

- To start with, create a regular sleeping pattern and a restful environment for consistency and calm.
- Watch what you're eating and drinking.
- Keep a sleep diary to track your sleep patterns.
- Write down your thoughts. Try allocating specific 'worry time' or 'planning time' early in the day.
- If you can't sleep, get up and do something else to help you feel sleepy.

Visit [mentalhealth-uk.org/sleep](https://mentalhealth-uk.org/sleep) or [mentalhealth-uk.org/stress](https://mentalhealth-uk.org/stress) for more advice on managing sleep and stress



## Stress tip #4: stress bucket

The stress bucket is a simple tool to help us think about the ways we can release stress:

- Start by imagining there's a bucket you carry with you which slowly fills up when you're stressed.
- Sometimes you may feel strong enough to carry a lot of stress. But sometimes we need to find techniques to help lighten the load.
- Identify the activities that help you reduce stress. This could be anything from good time management to talking to someone you trust.
- Make an action plan for how to keep those activities going when other pressures build up.
- Download our stress bucket tool at [mentalhealth-uk.org/wellbeingtips](https://mentalhealth-uk.org/wellbeingtips)

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