

STEPS primary care mental health team, Glasgow

Controlling your Stress

Dr Jim White



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This booklet aims to help with the common problem of stress.

Part 1 will teach you about stress

Part 2 will help you get on top of it

"Where do I start? It's everything. I'm uptight most of the day; my confidence is through the floor. I can't concentrate. I fly off the handle for the least wee thing. I worry night and day. I can't sleep. I panic like mad. My head's bursting and all I want to do is hide away from the world. And that's just for starters"

Common signs of stress are:

worry	panic attacks
tiredness	feeling on edge
anger	poor concentration
poor sleep	unable to switch off
feeling worthless	waiting for the worst to happen
feeling hopeless	tearful
feeling irritable	drinking too much

When does stress become a problem?

Stress **should** cause concern when:

- 📌 you can't get rid of it even though you try
- 📌 it affects your day-to-day life
- 📌 it comes and goes for no reason
- 📌 there does not seem to be a good reason for it to be there

Once stress gets this kind of grip, you may feel that your mind is taken over by it. You may feel you are losing control of your life. You may feel you are cracking up. You might feel you can't cope with things that others seem to cope with.

Is stress a common problem?

Right now, in Glasgow, one in five of us has a problem with stress. Not just a fit of the blues; not just feeling a bit uptight. This is stress that is badly affecting the person's life day after day (and maybe that of their families as well). More people go to their GP with stress than with any other problem . This same figure is found right across the world. This makes stress one of the biggest problems in the world today. It also looks as if stress is a growing problem.

The stigma of stress

There is still, for many, a stigma about stress. People are, on the whole, not keen to admit to it. Often, people don't think it is stress. Many go to the GP to get help for a body symptom - headaches, upset stomach, heart racing, etc. Some feel quite angry if told it is stress.

You may have learned to put on a mask to hide stress. This often lets stress build up as often just talking about it can help. It also stops you from seeing how common it is. People often tell me that once they open up to friends, the friends tell them they have or have had similar feelings.

Most people would rather have a broken leg than stress. Too many of us still think of a broken leg as a 'real' problem while stress is 'all in the mind'. This suggests that all you need a good shake and that, if you really wanted to, you could get rid of it. There are three points to be made here:

No-one wants to have stress

The causes of stress are complex

The reasons that keep it going are complex

If all you needed were to give yourself a good shake, you would gladly have done so. Don't let anyone get on at you for having stress - ask them to read this instead. If they still get on at you then why worry about people who have such a simple view of life.

Imagine living with someone who pulls you down all the time. They never give you a pat on the back when things go well. They tear you to shreds when things go wrong. You may live with someone like that - *yourself*. Stop it now.

John

"I told my boss I was stressed out. She just about fell off her seat. She said she thought I was the most laid-back guy in the place. Yet inside I feel as if I'm falling apart"

Sam

"I'm so flat. I have no energy. I'm just dragging myself through each day. I find myself in tears for the least wee thing and I'm so snappy - this isn't me"

Who gets stress?

All of us can get stress. It is a very common problem. Try a few more questions:

During the last month, have you:

<input type="radio"/> found it hard to relax?	Yes	No
<input type="radio"/> found it hard to stop worrying?	Yes	No
<input type="radio"/> found that you worry about worrying?	Yes	No
<input type="radio"/> often been bothered by feeling down, depressed or hopeless?	Yes	No
<input type="radio"/> found it harder to get through the day?	Yes	No
<input type="radio"/> Often been bothered by little interest or pleasure in doing things?	Yes	No

The first three are to do with anxiety. The last three are more to do with depression. The more times you said 'YES', the more stress is affecting your life. But you also need to ask yourself another question – 'is this something with which you would like help?' If the answer to this is 'yes', then you are doing the right thing by reading this booklet.

Who is most at risk?

All of us can get stress. While it is very hard to work out who will get stress, two factors stand out:

 your sex

 social factors.

Your sex

Women seem to be more prone to stress than men (about twice as much). Is this because they are weaker? **No**. There are four points to be made here:

Women still often have the short end of the stick. They may work but still, on the whole, do more about the house and have more to do with the children than men. Upbringing may also play a part. Due to male pride, men may be more likely to hide stress.

Women also seem to be more in touch with their emotions than many men. This may help them see they have a stress problem. This means they are more apt to seek and accept help.

Men may also drink as a way of coping with stress. Men are twice as likely to have a problem with drink than women. Maybe more men start off with a stress problem, drink to try to control it and end up with a drink problem on top of the stress.

Men may be more wary of 'therapy' and may avoid seeking help for this reason. Men seem to like 'self-help' more.

Social factors that can lead to stress

- family problems
- poor health
- lack of control over your life
- poor housing
- job not secure

- work stress
- poor education
- not having support from others

- money problems
- being single, divorced, or widowed
- being a single parent
- bad neighbours
- not having a job

Jan

“Since the divorce, things have been hard. My ex-husband has caused a lot of problems and the kids seem to blame me for the split. Money is tight. I come home from work and have all the meals, washing, ironing to do. I don’t like to bother my family as they have their own problems but I never get a break. And there is no-one there for me now”

Zahoor

“We’re waiting for big changes at work. I am not sure if I will have a job this time next year. Since the last round of cuts, we have to work much harder and the bosses are always getting on at us. It’s not nice there these days”

Alec

“We’ve been trying to get out the High Flats for years. But we’re not having any luck. I don’t like the kids using the lifts at night (though it’s almost as bad during the day) but I can’t stop them living their life. On top of that, my dad is back drinking again and causing all sorts of trouble down at his bit. I’m the one who has to try to sort it all out. I’m just sick to death of the whole damn lot”

Common sense tells you that these factors would make any normal person more prone to stress.

But they do not tell the whole story

A great many people who do not have any of these problems still suffer from marked stress. At the same time, many people who do have a lot of social problems do not have stress. So there is no easy answer to why stress hits some but not others.

Rabia

“I should feel great. I’ve got no problems in my life. Yet I’m so flat and feel so sad so much of the time. And I don’t know why”

Jane

“I can be sitting in front of the TV and, for no reason, I just tense right up. I can’t sit at peace. I’m just all going. It comes out of the blue. I can get into a right state. I can’t seem to get rid of it on my own. It takes half the night before I feel OK”

As you learn about your own stress, you must consider any social factors. And remember, social factors affect all of us - rich and poor.



Thoughts, Actions and Body

Thoughts, Actions and Body

We can break stress into four parts:

WHAT YOU FEEL

The emotions that are found with stress

WHAT YOU THINK

What goes through your mind when you are under stress

WHAT YOU DO

How you act when you are under stress

HOW YOUR BODY REACTS

Physical symptoms you get when under stress

In order to get on top of your feelings, we must tackle Thoughts, Actions and Body signs of stress. Fill out the lists on the next few pages to find out what form your stress takes. Tick the boxes that apply to the way you feel most days of the week.



Stress can affect your feelings

You may feel uptight	
You may feel flat	
You may feel easily upset	
You may feel guilt keenly	
You may feel easily embarrassed	
You may feel low a lot of the time	
You may feel full of anger	
You may get jealous easily	
You may feel discomfort easily	
You may feel insecure	
You may have lost your sense of humour	
You may feel without hope	
You become more small-minded, petty and resentful	
You may feel tearful	
You may feel that stress brings out the worst in you	



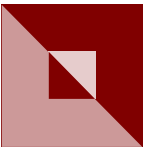
Stress can affect your thoughts

You may worry or brood about things you know you should not worry or brood about	
You may lose self-confidence	
You may feel your memory is poor	
You may feel very self-conscious	
You feel cut-off from others	
You may feel you are at the end of your tether	
You may find it hard to concentrate	
You may find it hard to relax your mind	
You may feel that you can't control your world	
You may have lost interest in a lot of things	
You may be easily startled	
You may not like yourself	
You may be waiting for the worst to happen	
You may feel easily confused	
You may feel you have no get up and go	



Stress can affect your actions

You may avoid doing things or going places as you fear you will not be able to cope with them	
You may be more quick tempered or angry	
You may be withdrawing from life	
You may be unable to sit at peace	
You may be making more mistakes	
You may try to 'play safe' more than usual	
You may try to avoid responsibility	
You may be drinking more than you should	
You may be smoking more	
You may be eating a lot more or a lot less	
You may be more tearful	
You may let other walk over you more	



Stress can affect your body

You may have a lot of aches and pains due to tense muscles	
You may be more prone to colds and flu	
You may feel drained of energy	
You may never feel 100%	
You may lose or gain weight	
You may get a lot of headaches	
You may feel your breathing changes when tense	
You may feel you have to push yourself through the day	
Your body may feel uptight much of the day	
You may find that your body reacts very easily to stress	
You may find to hard to get over to sleep or to stay asleep	

Look over what you just done – think about the main ways you are affected by stress. Think about what you could do about this.



Questions and Answers



Is stress a mental illness?

No. Stress is not a mental *illness*. It is the most common mental *health* problem. Far from losing touch, with stress, you are *too much* in touch with reality. You can't switch off even though you want to. But you know you are making too much of these concerns. In other words, you have *insight* - you know you should not be like this.

All of us know what stress is. We all get a fit of the blues from time to time. We all get uptight from time to time. So stress is a normal part of day-to-day life.

So you have too much of a normal feeling

Stress is not so much to do with cracking up. It is more to do with the *fear* that you will crack up. So this leads us to the next question:



Will stress lead to mental illness?

No. We are talking about two different problems.

What does tend to happen with stress is that as time goes on, more problems are sucked into it. So you might find that it started off as mild tension. Then you felt more and more depressed. Then you started to have panic attacks. Then you found the anxiety got much worse. Then your sleep got worse. Then you began to drink more. In other words, it may start as a single problem but it adds layers as time goes on.

So stress can get worse. It can come and go for no clear reason. The way it affects you can change for no good reason. But it *stays* a stress problem. You will not become mentally ill.



Is stress a physical illness?

No. You have seen that stress affects a large number of people. You have seen (and will see later on) that certain groups are more prone to it. They are more prone due to **social** not **physical** factors. While some people's nature may make them more prone to stress, it is clear that stress comes about through a complex range of factors. This means that there will never be a tablet that can 'cure' stress.

As stress often badly affects your body, it is tempting to think that it is physical. But all the changes in your body are normal **reactions** to stress. They do not **cause** it. The fact that your body reacts like this, shows that it is working in the way it should.

This does not mean that tablets can't help. They may help as part of a range of ways of coping. Your GP might suggest that you try them. This is your choice. Tablets might make it easier for you to get a handle on the stress. We have a booklet on anti-depressants that will tell you more – just ask for a copy or download it, free of charge, from www.glasgowsteps.com.



Is it just weak people who get stress?

No. Stress is the most common problem GPs deal with. Stress can affect all of us. Now that people talk more openly about it, we can see just how common it is. All sorts of people from all walks of life get stress.



Can stress be bad for you?

Yes. You may find that since you have become stressed, you seem to pick up all the bugs that go around. Stress does make you more prone to colds and flu. Stress can affect your immune

system. You take longer to recover from illness when you are stressed. Wounds heal more slowly. Pain is more intense with stress. Stress can make your blood pressure rise.

Keep this in context. Let us take heart attacks. Stress may play a role as part of a range of factors. Think of the risk factors for heart attacks. Being overweight. Being unfit. Eating the wrong foods. Having a family history. Smoking and drinking too much. You can do things to lessen your risk of most of these factors. Stress is just the same.

You must also look out for the way you **react** to stress as you may be getting into these big risk factors. Many people smoke more, drink more and eat badly when stressed. Doing these things can affect your health. Deal with these and you will do yourself a great deal of good.

So stress is not good for you in the long run. **But**. You can control stress and change most of the big risk factors. So think about exercise, healthy eating and sensible drinking. Don't be passive. You can control your health a lot more than you might think.



Will I have this for the rest of my life?

Depends. Even if you are a 'born worrier', you will be able to point to times in your life when you coped quite well. Stress is often caused by a range of factors. Some of these things may not be open to change but some will be. It is not just due to your nature. We know that if you lie down to stress, it will keep its grip on you. But you can learn ways to handle it better. It does not matter who you are or what your life is like. If you know what to do to help, you can get better. The self-help booklet will tell you how to help get on top of your stress.

Never give in to stress - fight it all the way.



What causes stress?

A complex problem

The causes of stress are complex. Just as no two people suffer stress in the same way, no two people get stress in the same way. Many people find it hard to work out why the stress problem started. One reason for this is that stress is often caused by more than one thing. It can be caused by a combination of:






Your nature

Some of us are born with a greater proneness to develop stress. This is due to our genetic make-up.







Nature: First few years of life

Those who had a lot of the common childhood fears seem to be more prone to stress in adult life, e.g.

-  fear of the dark
-  fear of strangers
-  fear of being left alone.

Nature: School age

Stress in adult life seems more common in those who:

-  took longer to settle at school
-  often complained of aches and pains
-  cried a lot
-  were irritable
-  were very shy
-  found it hard to deal with new situations

Nature: Adult years

Stress seems more common in those who:

-  get upset easily

- 👤 are often tense
- 👤 are prone to low mood
- 👤 are prone to worry
- 👤 often feel dissatisfied with themselves and others
- 👤 feel guilt keenly

Shades of grey

None of these is black and white – fears of the dark, worry, etc are normal. I am taking about fears that are much worse than would affect other children or adults and are seen by others as being a problem.



What happens to you in life

Childhood

<p>These may also make you more prone to stress as an adult:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Not having a stable, secure and loving upbringing○ Being wrapped in cotton wool by a parent○ Learning to cope with stress by avoiding facing problems <p>Having a lot of change in life – moving house, schools, illness (self or those close to you), parents separating, etc.</p>	<p>Helen</p> <p>'Things had been bad in the house for years. My mum and dad did not want to be with each other. When dad left, I thought it was for the best as we would get a bit of peace. Mum had a hard time for a while and, looking back, we were a bit neglected. There was not all that much love shown to us. I don't recall ever getting a cuddle. We still saw dad but the two of them used us like pawns in their war. If one said 'yes', the other said 'no'. You never knew where you stood. I think they saw us as just a hassle in their lives'</p>
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Adult life

Life Events

The more changes in life, the more prone most of us become to stress. Good events as well as bad can trigger stress. This is due to having to adjust to change.

Hassles

Many people with stress have a lot of hassles in their life. A hassle is a problem that is there day after day. It may be quite small. It may be hard to do much about it. It gnaws away at you. It could be a problem at work, at home, with neighbours, with debt, coping with illness.

Think of a torture where water slowly drips on your forehead hour after hour. The first hour may not be too bad. But as time goes on, each small drip gets to you more and more. Soon, you scream as each drip hits you. Hassles may work like this in stress. You can cope with them for so long but as time goes on, they start to grind you down.

Ruth

It's been one thing after another. We have had a lot of problems with my son this year at school. Add to that all the changes in my job over the last two years. It has just got a bit much for me over the last few months. I think it has worn me down"



How you interpret what happens to you

The problem with life events and hassles is that you will know someone who has had a lot of life events yet isn't stressed. Why? To explain this, we need to look at the way you **view** the events and hassles. Think of the reactions of two people who have just had the same life event - the end of a marriage. One is an 'active copier' and one is an 'avoidant copier'. Compare the way they react to the same event:

"THIS IS AWFUL, I never wanted this to happen but things were going from bad to worse. Now is the time to end it. I'm very fragile and tense now. I know the next year is going to be rough but I will have to cope with it as best I can and I know I will get through this"

"THIS IS AWFUL, I never wanted this to happen. It's all my fault. I just want to run away from all of this. I'll never marry again - it would just happen again. My life is always going to be a mess. I always screw things up. I'm a nervous wreck. I don't know what to do"

- **Which one is the active and which one the avoidant copier?**
- **Who do you think will get over the stress first?**
- **Who are you most like?**

You should see that the way you look on events in your life feeds stress. Stress then feeds the way you look at your life. This is the start of a vicious circle. We will look at this in the next section.

As we have seen, stress is often caused by a mixture of things that make you vulnerable - your basic nature, childhood factors and the coping skills you have at hand. These put you more at risk of getting stress. But it will take other things to trigger the stress, e.g. life events, hassles and the way you look at life.

You do not need to have all of these factors to cause stress. Many people with easy-going natures and who have had happy and secure childhoods also get stress. In their case, it may be that too many life events and hassles have caused the stress. It is also true that some people who do not see any of these things in their own lives still get stress. We have some way to go before we fully know what causes stress.

Joe

"I am stressed out and I don't have clue why. I had a great childhood. I always coped well. I have no problems - happy at home, good job, good money. Life should be great just now. No changes, no hassles yet I'm going off my head with this stress. I wish I knew why I'm like this"



What keeps stress going?

Once stress gets a grip, other changes make it worse:

Self-esteem drops / Self-confidence drops

You become more and more self-conscious

You feel threat from all sides

You doubt you can cope with things you coped with in the past. You may start to avoid them as a result.

Worry and brooding become second nature to you

Your body reacts easily to stress

You may feel that your back is to the wall: that problems keep hitting you and that you have no way to fight back

You may feel that stress brings out the worst in you

You may feel that stress changes your nature

The sense of control in your life weakens. In the past, you swam over the waves. Now the waves break over your head and all you can see are bigger waves on the horizon. You feel it is all you can do to keep your head above the water. To find out why this happens, we must look at the **vicious circles**:

We have looked at the way stress builds up and gets a grip. This is very important. If you see how stress feeds itself, you can see how to starve it. You will then see why the new skills you learn in the next section will help you do this.

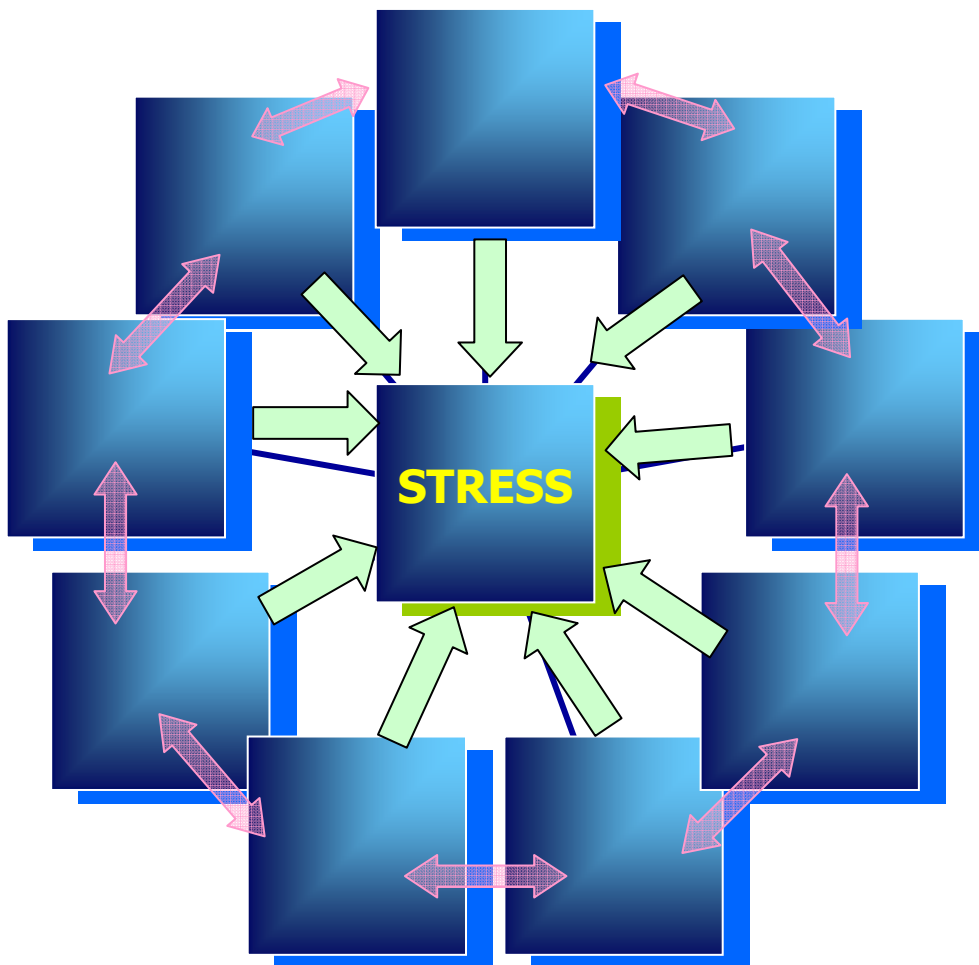


As you can see from the circle, stress is kept alive by the way it feeds itself. Poor sleep means you can't recharge your batteries. So you can't fight stress well during the day. Poor self-esteem means you might avoid doing things as you think you can't cope. This makes you more tense. You drink for some Dutch Courage. This makes you more prone to panic and so on.



Your vicious circle

This is the first building block for getting back in control. Spend some time of this, as it will guide you in your self-help. Look at the box below. The basic circle is there. I want you to add in all the problems that feed your own vicious circle. See what those close to you think.





Weakening the circle

What does your own vicious circle tell you? What things are feeding your stress? What can you do about them? The self-help section will teach you a range of ways to weaken your circle. But are there other ways to help? Talk this through with those close to you.

There is nothing magical about the way you control stress - the way you draw your vicious circle points the way to how you control it. So the more things in it you can tackle, the more you weaken it. You will get more and more a grip on the stress if you do this. It will come down because you are shutting off the fuel supply.

Use the blank pages at the back of this booklet to sketch out your ideas for controlling your stress.

Important statements

Stress is a very common problem. You have *too much* of a normal feeling. You should not aim to 'cure' yourself of stress. You should aim to control it.

Stress is often a mix of anxiety and depression. Anger, panic, sleep and drink problems are often involved.

Stress is not a mental illness. It will not turn into mental illness even if the stress is severe.

We can all get stress but, to a large extent, it depends on what happens to you in life.

Stress feeds itself because of the vicious circle involving T A B. So, it can keep itself alive.

Getting stress under control is a lot more complex than giving yourself a good shake.

Tablets can help but, in the long run, you should learn ways to get back in control.

Up until now, you may not have known how to combat stress. This book can help you. But it will need a lot of hard work on your part.

You can learn to spot the danger signs of stress. This will help to prevent problems in the future.

There is no magic cure - don't be impatient. It takes time to control stress.

Believe in yourself - you can do it.

Part 2: Self-help

This section divides into two:

Clearing the decks

This will help you get rid of some of the things that may help keep your stress alive

and

Three levels of self-help

This section shows you a range of good ideas you can use to control stress.



Clearing the decks

As you start to fight stress, you must get rid of the things that might be making you worse

A graphic featuring a red-to-white gradient circle on the left, partially overlapping a blue-to-white gradient circle on the right. A vertical black line is positioned between the two circles, and a horizontal black line extends from the vertical line to the right, underlining the word 'Caffeine'.

Caffeine

Caffeine can help make you feel alert. It can help you concentrate. It can improve your reaction speed. It can help keep you going when you need to. But the effects of too much caffeine can be much the same as those of anxiety. It is a **stimulant** that affects the brain and central nervous system (CNS). Caffeine can be found in:

- **Drinks** such as coffee, tea, fizzy drinks like Coke, Fanta or Irn-Bru. Diet versions also have high levels.
- **Pain Killers** such as aspirin, some cold remedies and headache tablets.
- **Energy tablets and drinks** like Pro-Plus and Red Bull. **Chocolate** contains caffeine though at quite a low level.
- **Many** other products contain caffeine so check the packet before using.

Effects of too much caffeine: feeling nervous, irritable, feeling restless, agitated, shaky, headaches, muscle twitch, flushed face, upset stomach, increased heart rate, speeded up breathing, passing water a lot.

Taking 150mg of caffeine before you go to bed will make it harder to get to sleep and will affect the quality of your sleep (see the chart below to work out how much this is).

How much is too much?

Some people can take vast amounts of caffeine and are none the worse for it. A rough figure is more than 600 mg a day may cause problems but people who are anxious and prone to panic may react to **much** smaller amounts. So it is worth while to look at how much caffeine you take each day. The list will help you work this out.

Hot drinks	Per mug (in
Fresh coffee	140-210
Instant coffee	85-110
Decaff coffee	6
Tea	85-110

Fizzy drinks	Per can
Coke	36
Pepsi	38
Dr Pepper	36
Irn-Bru	33
Diet Irn-Bru	33

Chocolate	
Milk	22mg per 100g
Plain	72mg per 100g






Tablets	
Panadol Extra	65
Askit (per sachet)	110

Energy	
Pro-Plus energy tablets (each tablet)	50
Red Bull energy drink	80

If you think caffeine does play a part in your stress, you should get your daily intake down as much as you can.

Your body can get so used to caffeine that, if you just cut it out dead, you can get:

Withdrawal effects:

-  throbbing headache
-  tiredness or drowsiness
-  anxiety
-  depression
-  feeling sick

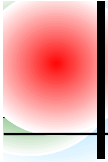
These feelings could last up to one week

If you think caffeine may affect you, you should:

- wean yourself off it slowly. This will stop withdrawal effects
- Slowly switch to **decaff** tea and coffee
- Slowly switch from fizzy drinks to caffeine-free drinks or pure fruit juice
- Avoid energy drinks and tablets
- Take as few pain killers, etc. as you can (ask your GP if concerned) or switch to ones with little or no caffeine in them (ask your chemist).

Do you need to do something about this?

Tick the box and make sure you come back to it



Alcohol

Many people with a drink problem start down that road by using alcohol to calm their nerves. Having a drink is fine but if you drink to cope with stress, you may start to depend on it. If you can't go to places or do things unless you have a drink inside you, you are on a slippery slope.

Symptoms such as nausea, sweating and shaking may be more to do with drink than stress. Drinking too much will mess up your sleep and make you more prone to stress the next day.

Drinking makes you more prone to panic attacks. Heavy drinking makes stress worse - **Stop it now.** If you think drink could be a problem, make sure you seek help from your GP.

Do you need to do something about this?

Tick the box and make sure you come back to it



The 'miracle cure'

Sorry - it does not exist. Stress often takes a long time to build up so it is not going to clear up overnight. No-one else can control your stress. To get on top of stress takes a great deal of hard work on **your** part.

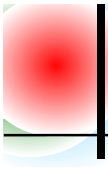
This handout aims to put you on the right lines. But, at the end of the day, it will be you, through your hard work, who controls the stress.

Though they can feel good at the time, there is no good evidence to show that hypnosis, acupuncture, aromatherapy, reflexology or homeopathy are of any use in the long run. **You** must learn to control the problems yourself.

These treatments don't teach you how to do this. This handout does.

Do you need to do something about this?

Tick the box and make sure you come back to it

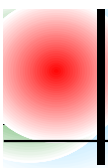


Reassurance

This may be nice in the short term but you can become dependent on it. If you ask 'Do I look all right?', 'Do you think this OK?' and so on, people will quickly get fed up with you. It does not work in the long run as you know they are going to say what you want to hear in any case. This can lead to friction and, hence, more stress. You have to feel strong enough to supply your own answers.

Do you need to do something about this?

Tick the box and make sure you come back to it

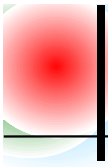


Self-criticism

If people under stress have one great skill, it is this. Try to get away from beating yourself up. If things go wrong, accept them. Learn from your mistakes and then get on with things. You have to learn to pat yourself on the back every time you try to combat your stress. This will help your self-confidence to pick up.

Do you need to do something about this?

Tick the box and make sure you come back to it



Avoidance

Common sense says that if doing something makes you more tense, you should avoid it.

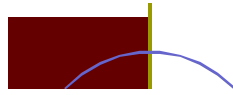
COMMON SENSE IS WRONG

Avoiding may help in the short term. In the long run, you just make the problems worse. You have to face up to stress in your life. This will be hard in the short term but, in the long run, will greatly help you get a grip on your stress.

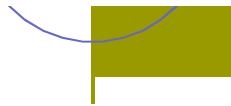
So the next time you are at the crossroads, you have the two choices. There is the easy (and wrong) choice where you avoid facing the stress. There is the hard (and right) choice where you face the stress. Steel yourself and take the right road.

Do you need to do something about this?

Tick the box and make sure you come back to it

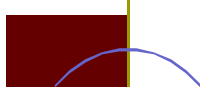


Self-help

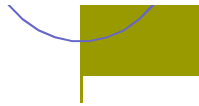


These self-help ideas will let you start to control your stress right now. I have put the ideas into three groups:

- ❖ Stress Control in 10 words**
- ❖ 22 ways to control stress**
- ❖ 8 quick control skills**



Stress Control in 10 words

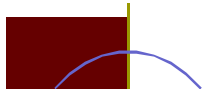


Face your fears (if anxious)

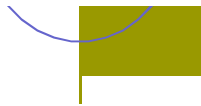
Be more active (if depressed)

Watch what you drink

This is the way to control stress in a nutshell. The following put some flesh on these bones. Tick the box if you feel the stress control idea would help you. Then go back to it and try it out.



22 ways to control stress



1) Deal with problems on the spot

Don't bottle up your feelings. They will just grow until they erupt. So if there are problems at, e.g. work, make sure that you deal with them on the spot.

2) Strong, confiding relationships

Stress often makes us hard to live with. This can cause problems with those close to us. But we know that strong relationships can help fight stress. So if there is a problem here, get to work on it.

3) Slow down

Don't do things at 100 miles an hour. Eat, walk and drive more slowly. If you don't get as much done as you would like then it is no big deal. There is always another day.

4) One thing at a time

Think of someone at work cradling a phone between his shoulder blade and ear. With one hand, he writes a letter and, with the other, searches through some papers. At the same time, he tries to grab a quick snack. He is overloading the system. If you make a phone call, make only the call and nothing else. The message: is don't keep too many balls in the air at the one time.

5) Must's and Should's

"I **must** see my mum today"; "I **should** offer to run the football team this year". Work out what you can cope with and be happy with this - "If I get through all the things I want to at home, I'll take a run down to my mums. If not, I'll see her through the week"; "I don't get a chance to relax as it is so it's daft to take on more pressure - someone else can take a turn"

6) Coping with ruts

If you feel your life is in a rut just now - same old routine day in and day out - then think about change. Plan your week-ends - do something different - go for a drive, visit friends, go for a long walk. Take up new hobbies. Look for challenges. If you can afford it, plan the odd week-end away. A change of scenery can help.

7) Divide problems up

If you face a huge problem and can see no way to cope with it, see if you can divide it up into 'bite sized' bits. Then tackle the bits one at a time.

8) Past experience

If you are in a jam, ask yourself if you have been in a similar jam before. How did you deal with it? If it worked, try it again. If it didn't, learn from your mistakes.

9) Eating

There *may* be a link between what you eat and how you feel. But it is hard to say just what the link is. There is still a lot to learn here. But I can suggest:

Try 'the Fighting Five' - vitamins A, C and E, zinc and selenium – to help stress. You get these in things like plums, kiwi fruit, dark green veg, seafood and sesame seeds.

To help low mood, eat bananas, turkey, cottage cheese and dried dates. Also try peanuts (not salted), fish and cheese.

You might reduce stress levels *in the short term* by taking a lot of carbohydrates (cereals, potatoes, rice, pasta, bread, etc.) and cutting down on protein (meat, fish). So, if you face a stressful day, plan to have this meal the night before. As you need a balanced diet, don't stick to this diet for more than a few days.

A high-carb breakfast may get you off to a good start in the day. Think about muesli.

If you feel down, think about Omega-3. This is found in oily fish such as mackerel. Try to cut down on high sugar foods such as cakes, biscuits and sweets. These may fuel anxiety.

Vitamin supplements can be dear and, unless your diet is very poor, will not help much. Taking too many vitamins can be as bad as taking too little.

Over the long term, try to eat more healthy foods - get away from fried and fatty food. Cut down on salt. Eat more fruit, veg and whole-wheat bread. Don't eat too much.

10) Look and sound relaxed

Other people will pick up how you are feeling by seeing your 'body language'. So try to look calm, e.g. don't sit on the edge of your seat, slow down your speech, relax your shoulders, don't fidget. Ask those close to you how you act when you are tense so that you know what changes to make. You will feel better if you know that, on the outside at least, you look calm.

11) Don't accept other people's targets

Do people expect too much of you? If you feel they do, **confront** this. Have a quiet word and try to sort this out. If you can't agree, say 'NO'.

12) Smoking

Some people find that smoking helps them relax. But smoking kills. It also floods the body with nicotine. This may feed stress. Try to stop. Think about joining a free NHS Stop Smoking course. Ask your GP about this.

13) Situations beyond your control

There are things in life that you can't change - people get ill, people die, people lose jobs. Bad things happen so learn to accept them. Stop hitting your head off a brick wall unless you think the wall can come down.

14) Build relaxation into your life

Put aside some time each day just for you. Go out for a walk, phone a friend, do the garden, read a book, watch TV, listen to music.

15) Prioritise

If you do have a busy life, you must decide what has to be done and what can wait. Put these in some order. Number 1 has to be done first thing, number 2 by 12 o'clock.....number 10 can wait till the end of the week. Keep revising your list.

16) Do the worst thing first

If you have a list of things to do, do the one you least want to do first. Once you get it out of the way, the rest of the tasks will seem easier to cope with. If you keep putting it off, it will prey on your mind and may seem a lot worse than it really is. Tie this in with your priority list above.

17) Don't try to be Superman or WonderWoman

Do you try to do it all? Cope all the time? Be the best? Why? The house and your job will still be there long after you are gone. Stick to your good points and learn to live with your faults. Don't try to be perfect. None of us is.

18) Confide in others

Seek out those you can trust and let them know how you feel. They may be able to see ways out of problems that you have not thought about. In any case, it will help to get things off your chest. It may also help you feel less isolated.

19) Other people's shoes

If you have a problem, think how you would react if a friend came to you with that same problem. What advice would you give them? Would that advice work for you?

20) Keep a structure to each day

You might find that stress invades most areas in your life. Try to put up barricades to stop it. It will help a lot if you keep a routine in your life even if you don't feel like it:

If you go to the football at the weekend, **keep going**

- If you visit your mother's house during the week, **keep going**
- If you go to the bingo twice a week, **keep going**
- As work is a big part of our week, try to keep going to it if you can.



If you are not at work, make sure you have a structure to each day. Try to get up early. Get washed and dressed straight away. Eat a breakfast. Try to get out the house (go for the paper). Eat at the usual times. Try to see people. Go to bed at a reasonable hour.

21) Tablets

Always discuss this with your GP. If you want to fight stress without pills, then that is fine. You might want to **combine** pills with self-help. Your GP might give you **diazepam** (valium) but usually for a few days only. You may take a **beta-blocker** such as Inderal and Propranolol. Your doctor may suggest you take **anti-depressants**. If you want to know more about these kinds of pills, ask us for a handout about them (or get it from our website – www.glasgowsteps.com . But pills on their own may not get you far – 'pills don't teach you skills'.

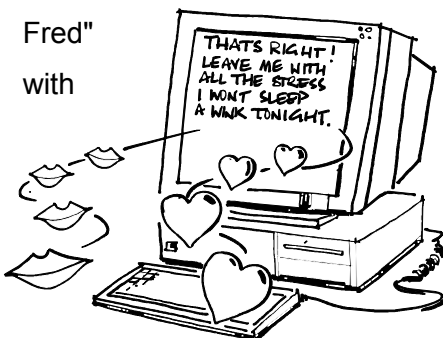


22) Kiss it goodbye

An office worker who spends most of the day in front of her computer told me this one. At the end of the day, she switches it off, kisses the screen and says "see you soon Fred" (her computer's name). This lets her leave her work

with

'Fred' and lets her relax at night.



Eight quick control skills



These skills, once you have picked them up, can have a quick impact on your stress. They can give you a sense that you now have a weapon with which to fight the stress.

Tick the box of the ones you think would help you. Then go back to them and work at them.

1) Mantras

Sit alone in a quiet, dark room. Try to clear your mind as much as possible. Think of a word or phrase e.g. :

"I am calm"
"Relax"
"I am in control"

Close your eyes. Slowly repeat the word or phrase in your mind over and over. Do this for ten minutes each day or when you feel stressed. If unwanted thoughts come into your mind, try to push them away.

2) Describe your setting

As soon as you feel your stress rise, describe (out loud if you want) something you can see in great detail, e.g.:

**"I can see a picture on the wall. It is in a dark wood frame. There is a boat on a loch.
There is a mountain at the back of the loch. There are trees at the front of the loch.
The sky is clear and it looks like it is sunset"**

If you are out the house, you can focus on, e.g. all the sounds you can hear.

You should do this in as much detail as you can as this will help push stressed thoughts out of your mind.

3) 'Worry time'

You put aside 15 minutes each evening. This is your time to worry about the things that have bothered you in the day. So if you start to worry in the morning, you stop and tell yourself to store it up for your 'worry time' that night. At the start of your 'worry time', you must think of what you have to worry about and then try to do so. Chances are you may not recall what it was. You may feel it is not worth the worry. Even if you do, you may find it hard to bring on worry.

4) So what happened?

Carry a note pad with you. Write down the things you worry about and rate the chances of them happening, e.g. 100% means it will happen, 60% - it might happen, and so on. Look through your diary a few days later and see if they did happen. Keep doing this. You might find that you can stop the worry more easily as you stand back and rate the chances.

5) Coping with tension headache

Try this if you feel a tight band round the front and back of your scalp. Change your posture - don't sit all hunched up. Get some support for the small of your back. Find the groove in the back of your neck. Curl up the fingers of both hands. Push them into the groove as hard as you can. Tilt your head back at the same time. Hold this for about one minute. Repeat this as often as you need to.

6) One goal a day

Try this if you feel you don't have a good structure to the day or if you don't get round to doing things.

Each night, work out a goal for the next day. This should be something you are **not** doing but **should** be doing. It might be something like:

- get up with the family
- cut the grass
- Hoover the hall
- meet a friend down the shops
- fill out a form

In other words, the usual things you would do if you felt well.

Try to make your goals precise – 'cut the grass' **not** 'do a bit in the garden'. This helps you know whether you have achieved what you set out to achieve. So, if the grass is cut or the hall hoovered, then you have achieved your goal and a pat on the back is in order.

The aim is for you to go to bed each night and being able to say to yourself that you have taken at least one step forward. This will build you up for your next goal.

7) Breathing retraining

This is a quick way to calm your body. It can also help prevent panic. Sit in a comfy chair and relax as much as you can. Take a slow normal breath (not a deep breath) and think "1" to yourself. As you breathe out, think, "*relax*". Breathe in again and think "2". Breathe out and think, "*relax*". Keep doing this up to 10. When you reach 10, reverse and start back down to 1. Try to put all else out of your mind. Try to see the numbers and the word 'relax' in your mind's eye.

Don't be put off if you can't do this straight away. You can boost the benefits of this by using:

8) Breathing from the diaphragm

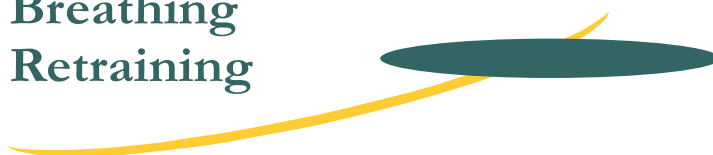
Place one hand on your chest and the other over your belly button. As you breathe in, the hand on your stomach should be pushed out while the hand on your chest should not move. As you breathe out, your stomach should pull in. Your chest should not move.



To help, breathe in through your nose, purse your lips and breathe out slowly through your mouth. If you are a chest breather, you may find this hard at first. If you can't get the hang of this, lie on your back on the floor and practise. You will find this easier.

Put these two together and do them twice a day. Once you get good at them, do them when you are at work, sitting on the bus, watching TV etc. The aim is to be able to do this no matter where you are. No-one will notice you doing them. In summary:

Breathing Retraining



Take a breath in and think "**1**"

Breathe out and think "**relax**"

Take a breath in and think "**2**"

Breathe out and think "**relax**"

Repeat up to **10** and then back down to **1**

Think only about your breathing and on the number and "**relax**" in the minds eye

Use slow normal breathing (10-12 breaths per minute). Breathe in through your nose. Purse your lips and breathe out slowly through your mouth

Use the diaphragm - as you breathe in, your stomach should push out while your chest should not move

As you breathe out, your stomach should pull in. Your chest should not move when you breathe out

Practise twice a day in different places

If you want to learn more about relaxation, go to the www.glasgowsteps.com site, and you can download, free of charge, relaxation to a CD, iPod, mp3, etc. A booklet on getting the best out of relaxation can also be printed

Other sources of help

Books

Overcoming Anxiety Helen Kennerley (around £8)

Mind over Mood Christine Padesky and Dennis Greenberger (around £17)

Manage your Mind Gillian Butler (around £17)

Depression: Why it happens and how to overcome it Paul Hauck (around £7)

The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook Edmund Bourne (around £15)

All of these books (and many others) are available, free, in the STEPS Healthy Reading section of all Glasgow libraries.

Websites

moodgym.anu.edu.au Good Australian site offering free computerised cognitive-behavioural therapy

bluepages.anu.edu.au Good site related to above offering a lot of information.

www.nopanic.org.uk offers self-help, phone helpline

www.phobics-society.org.uk Helpline offering support, advice and self-help along with on-line support

www.stresswatchscotland.org Good helpline offering support and advice. Links to local self-help groups

www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk Free phonenumber open from early evening till 2am. Advice and support. 0800 83 85 87

www.dascot.org Access to self-help groups, helpline and self-help. This is the website of Depression Alliance Scotland

www.glasgowsteps.com Our site offers a great deal of help for stress problems. Go to the service directory section which will show you a wide range of services that can help you

Tackling other problems

Many people find that having a problem with stress is only one problem among others. If you feel you would like to tackle problems such as poor sleep, low self-confidence, panic, etc., then STEPS might be able to help.

Ask at your GP practice for more information or take a look at our web site (www.glasgowsteps.com) to find out more.

Stress Control

If you feel that you would like to do more, come along to the Stress Control class at Langside Halls, Shawlands. It runs for six sessions on Monday afternoons or Thursday evenings. It is free of charge. You do not talk on the course – just listen and go off and work at what you have learned. The photo shows how Stress Control classes are set out. Stress Control aims to 'turn you into your own therapist'. A range of booklets are provided, free of charge, before the course starts.

See the STEPS brochure for more information, check out the dates on the website or phone Mary or Cathie on 433 4934 to book a place.

STEPS services such as Stress Control are only available to those with a GP in South East Glasgow. Other primary care teams offer similar services across Glasgow.