
SPOTLIGHT ON : STRESS AWARENESS

What is stress?

We all know what it's like to feel stressed, but it's not easy to pin down exactly what stress means. When we say things like "this is stressful", we might be talking about:

- **Situations or events that put pressure on us** - for example, times where we have lots to do and think about, or don't have much control over what happens.
- **Our reaction to being placed under pressure** - the feelings we get when we have demands placed on us that we find difficult to cope with.

There's no medical definition of stress, and health care professionals often disagree over whether stress is the cause of problems or the result of them. This can make it difficult for you to work out what causes your feeling of stress, or how to deal with them. But whatever your personal definition of stress is, it's likely that you can learn to manage your stress better by:

- [managing external pressures](#), so stressful situations don't seem to happen to you quite so often
- [developing emotional reillences](#), so you're better at coping with tough situations when they do happen and don't feel quite so stressed

Signs of Stress?

The most dangerous thing about stress is how easily it can creep up on you. You get used to it. It starts to feel familiar, even normal. You don't notice how much it's affecting you, even as it takes a heavy toll. That's why it's important to be aware of the common warning signs and symptoms of stress overload.

Cognitive	Emotional	Physical	Behavioural
Memory problems	Moodiness	Chest pain	Increase in alcohol/cigarettes/caffeine
Poor judgement	Irritability/aggressive	Rapid heartbeat	Isolating yourself from others
Unable to concentrate	Panic	Muscle tension	Sleeping too little or too much
'Brain fog'	Cynicism/negativity	Blurred eyesight or sore eyes	Being tearful or crying
Indecisive	Frustration	Indigestion	Loss of sense of humour
Self-doubt	Anxious/nervous/afraid	High blood pressure	Eating too little or too much

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Situations that can cause stress

Stress can be caused by a variety of different common life events, many of which are difficult to avoid. For example:

Personal	Friends and family	Work	Lifestyle
illness or injury	getting married or civil partnered	retiring	housing issues/homelessness
pregnancy and becoming a parent	going through a break-up/divorce	job uncertainty	problems with neighbours
bereavement	difficult relationships with family	starting a new job	worries about money
long term health problems	being a carer for a friend/relative	difficult work relationships	bills/arrears/debts

Is your colleague stressed?

"[See Me Scotland](#)" have developed an award-winning programme [Power of Okay](#) which focuses on making improvements on the way people think about mental health at work and to get those who are struggling, to talk. If you see a colleague who you feel may be suffering the effects of stress as described above:

- Ask if they are okay?
- listen to what they have to say
- let them know it's okay not to be okay
- ask them if they are getting support?
- encourage them to speak to others e.g. family, friends, line manager, HR etc

For more information to view the full version of the See Me's thought provoking campaign about 'the power of okay' click on the video link below:

* [Power of Okay – YouTube Video Link](#)

* [Power of Okay Part 2 – YouTube Video Link](#)

NB: these videos contain explicit language

Stress, Wellbeing & Workplace

Workplace stress can often be the result of a number of factors, including: high demands of the job, real or perceived lack of control concerning those demands, poor day-to-day organisation/communication, or an unsupportive work environment. A few small steps as

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well as maintaining a healthy work/life balance can help to take care of yourself and support your wellbeing at work. Here are a few tips:

- **Leaving work:** Are you often the last to leave work? Try to make this the exception and not the norm as it will quickly take its toll on your concentration, productiveness and health as well as your social life and relationships
- **Creating clear boundaries between work and home:** On the commute home try reading a book or listening to music to help you unwind and switch off. Try not to let work spill over into your personal life, and always make sure you have some time to relax prior to going to bed. Relaxing activities can help you to 'chill out', especially before bedtime so that we're not carrying that stress with you into your sleep
- **Manage your time and workload:** Identify your 'best time of day' and do the important tasks that require the most energy and concentration at that time. Make a 'To-Do' list, varying your tasks in the day between less and more interesting ones, and tiring jobs with less tiring ones. Try not to do too many things at once. Prioritise your work and if things are getting on top of you, remember to ask for help - this could be your line manager, a colleague and/or HR if you are feeling stressed, overwhelmed or isolated
- **Act positively and stay active:** Take regular breaks during the day. Have a change of scene, a short walk can make a big difference to how you feel, even if it's a simple walk round the office or maybe have a healthy snack. At the end of each day, sit back and reflect on what you've achieved, rather than spending time worrying about what still needs to be done. Whether in or outside of work, exercise can help manage the physical signs of stress
- **Relationships:** Connect with and make time for friends and family both in and out of work. Talking to them about your day and how you're feeling can help to put things in perspective

Treatment for stress

Stress isn't a medical diagnosis, so there's no specific treatment for it. However, if you're finding it very hard to cope with things going on in your life and are experiencing lots of signs of stress, there are treatments available that could help. These include:

- **talking treatments:** talking with a trained professional can help you learn to deal with stress and become more aware of your own thoughts and feelings. You can access this through the Council's EAP provider [Help EAP](#).
- **address the causes:** although there will probably be lots of things in your life that you can't do anything about, there might still be some practical ways you could resolve or improve some of the issues that are putting pressure on you. The [Advice Shop](#) in Bathgate can be a great source to discuss housing, benefits, energy and money and debt worries.
- **be active:** a way of improving your wellbeing and self-esteem is by taking regular physical activity. This doesn't need to be particularly intense for you to feel good,

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slower-paced activities such as walking can be very beneficial. For hints and tips on improving your overall fitness, click on to the [Physical Wellbeing](#) on the Council's Four Pillars of Wellbeing website

- **talk to someone you trust:** talk to your line manager, colleagues, HR , union representative or someone else who you trust if you are having difficulties coping with stress at work. This is not a sign of weakness; your wellbeing is important and the Council takes this seriously and is committed to improving your [Mental Wellbeing](#).
- **medication:** there are various medications available which can help to reduce or manage some of the signs of stress. Contact your GP in to discuss further. A useful video on how to talk to your GP about mental health issues is provided by Mind click [here](#) for the video link in YouTube.
- **complementary and alternative therapies:** certain complementary therapies may help you manage feelings of stress. These may include yoga and meditation, acupuncture, aromatherapy massage etc.