
STRESSED? START HERE

A clear, kind, evidence-based guide to what stress is, and what can help

Understanding Stress



Your body's alarm system

Stressed: You've already started helping yourself.

Stress is your body's alarm system. It evolved to protect you—helping you respond quickly to pressure or threat. Your heart beats faster, muscles tense, and your brain goes on high alert: the fight-or-flight response.

In short bursts that can be useful sharpening your thinking or helping you meet a deadline. But when the alarm stays on day after day, it starts to drain your body, mood, and health.

You're not failing. You're adapting.

Feeling overwhelmed doesn't mean you're weak or broken. It simply means your stress system has stayed switched on too long without enough recovery time.

Stress isn't just "in your head". It affects your whole system—sleep, digestion, memory, immunity, hormones, and emotional control. The good news? Your stress response is trainable. Just as your body can learn stress, it can learn to reset.

How stress shows up- in mind body and behaviour



Signs of overload

Stress touches everything — that's why it matters.

Brain & Mood

- Foggy thinking or racing thoughts
- Irritable, tearful, or flat moods

Body

- Heart working overtime
- Tense jaw, shoulders, or chest

- Upset stomach, sensitive gut
- Troubled sleep or low immunity

Behaviour

- Snapping at people you care about
- Avoiding tasks that once felt doable
- Using food, alcohol, screens, or caffeine to cope
- Feeling stuck, behind, or “never enough”

👉 **Remember.** These reactions are common - and reversible. They’re signs of an overwhelmed nervous system, not signs you’re broken.

What helps — according to the evidence

Small actions, big relief.

Research shows that tiny, consistent shifts beat grand overhauls. Choose one step today and repeat it tomorrow.

1. Move Your Body

- Physical activity lowers stress hormones and boosts mood chemicals.

Try This: a brisk 10-minute walk or dancing to two songs.

2. Breathe Differently

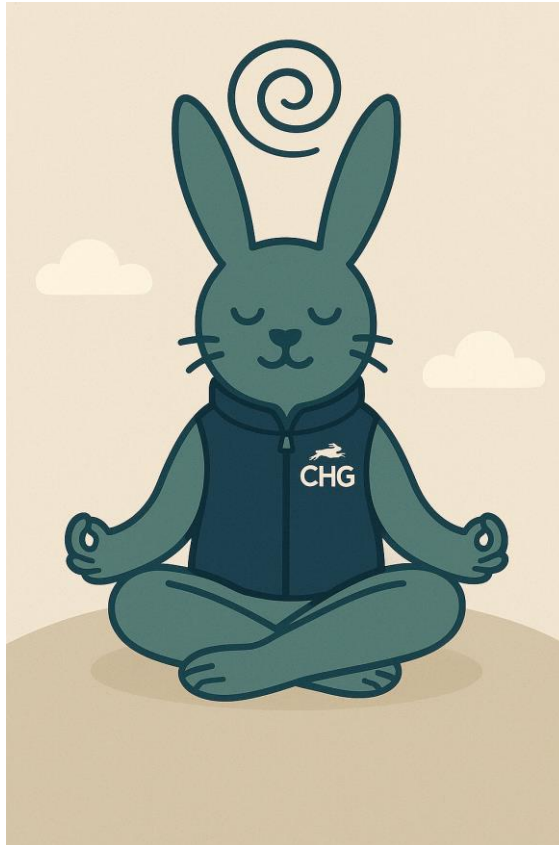
- Slow breathing activates your body’s “calm-down” switch.

Try This: 1-minute reset: Inhale for 4, Hold for 4, Exhale for 6.
Repeat 3–5 times, with long, gentle out-breaths.

3. Get Outside

- Sunlight and nature calm the brain’s stress circuits.

Try This: Eat lunch outdoors, stand in the natural light, or simply look at the sky.



A calm reset

4. Talk to Someone You Trust

- Social connection measurably lowers cortisol.
- Being heard regulates emotion—even when nothing else changes.

Try This: Call a friend and say, “Can I talk something through with you for 10 minutes?” You don’t need a solution- just a listener.

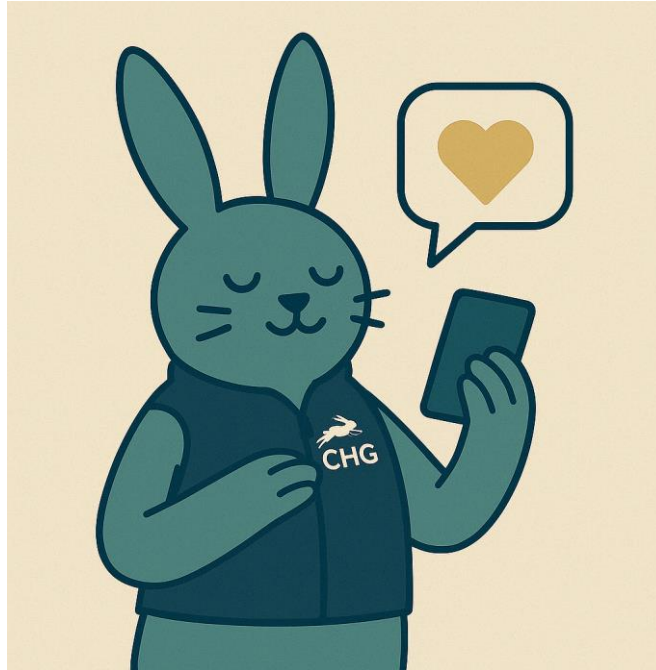
5. Reclaim Small Choices

- Saying no, delaying tasks, or protecting sleep nudges your stress response back toward balance.
- Also worth exploring if it suits you:
 - short mindfulness practices
 - sleep tweaks (dim lights, caffeine cut-offs)
 - creative outlets (gardening, music, art)

Try This: Delay one task today and give yourself permission to drop another entirely.

Support is available — you're not alone

If stress is affecting your wellbeing, work, or relationships, you don't have to wait for it to get worse—and you don't need a diagnosis to seek help.



It's okay to ask for support

Support from Cirencester Health Group

- Speak with your GP or nurse
- Social prescribers & wellbeing advisers
- Ask us about resources for stress, sleep, or emotional wellbeing—we're here to help.
- Check out our other leaflets on *Depression* and *Insomnia* via our website

Trusted Resources

- *NHS talking therapies*: "Let's Talk" -visit letstalkglos.nhs.uk or call 0800 073 2200
- *NHS Every Mind Matters*
- *Mind* – www.mind.org.uk
- *Headspace* or *InsightTimer* apps – free mindfulness and sleep apps

When to seek urgent help

Call us or NHS 111 if stress causes:

- Panic attacks or overwhelming anxiety
- Feelings of hopelessness or being trapped
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide
- Inability to function day-to-day

You will always be taken seriously.

Final Thought

There's no single cure for stress—but understanding what's happening and taking small, steady steps can make all the difference.

If you have further questions:

- **Visit:** www.cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk/contact-us/
- **Call us:** 01285 653184 or 01285 653122
- **Call NHS 111:** If you require *urgent* medical advice (24/7)
- **Call 999:** in an *emergency*

