

ARE YOU
**FEELING
STRESSED?**

IF YOU ARE IN NEED OF
SOME SUPPORT, THIS
SELF-HELP BOOK CAN
HELP YOU COPE BETTER
WITH STRESS.

A BETTER YOU, FOR A
**BRIGHTER
TOMORROW**



wellbeing
services south glasgow

STRESS SELF-HELP BOOKLET

This self-help booklet is divided into eight sections. It is aimed at helping you gain a better understanding of:

- What stress is and how it can affect you
- What causes stress and keeps it going
- Effective ways to control and manage your stress

Stress is a commonly experienced problem. There is no need to feel embarrassed or concerned about stress and you are not weak because you struggle with it. However, if stress is becoming an overwhelming force in your life and is affecting your ability to function properly, then this self-help booklet could be helpful to you.

CONTENTS

Section 1: · What is stress?	3 - 12	Section 5: · Worry & problem solving	45 - 50
Section 2: · Stress and the body	13 - 22	Section 6: · Lifestyle changes	51 - 54
Section 3: · Stress and thinking	23 - 34	Section 7: · Review	55 - 56
Section 4: · Stress and behaviour	35 - 44	Section 8: · Wellbeing resources	57

The booklet aims to help you to deal with stress using techniques from a well-established psychological treatment known as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

There are various exercises throughout the booklet to help you understand your stress and to help you learn ways of managing it. Like any new skill, it may take a bit of time and practice before you notice any changes in the way you feel.

The exercises in this booklet are identified by 'Stop & Think'. To gain the most from these, it is important that you take some time to think about the questions asked and to complete the exercises.

It may be that it takes several readings of it before you start to write things down. That's okay, just take your time. It is helpful to read each section thoroughly before moving on to the next.

Praise yourself for every step you take.



SECTION 1: WHAT IS STRESS?

- Do you find it difficult to relax and unwind?
- Do you find it hard to stop worrying?
- Do you find it a struggle to cope with the demands of daily life?
- Do you feel like there is too much being demanded of you?
- Do you feel overwhelmed and unable to cope?
- Do you constantly feel exhausted and teary?
- Do you take on a lot but achieve very little?
- Do you feel like you are losing control of your life?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'YES', then stress may be affecting you.

Stress affects us all and is a completely normal reaction that all human beings experience from time to time, when faced with situations that put us under pressure. People have different ways of reacting to stress and for some people, a certain level of stress can be helpful and indeed motivating. For other people, however, stress can become overwhelming, enduring and constant and negatively impact on their ability to function properly on a day-to-day basis. This is when stress becomes a problem. Although everyone's experience of stress will vary to a certain extent, most people who suffer from stress generally describe it as combination of both anxiety and depression.

In the UK today, stress negatively affects around one in five people making it a very common problem. Indeed, more people go to their GP with stress than with any other health complaint. When we experience too much stress we may begin to feel that the demands and pressures of life outweigh our ability to cope and that we are losing control over our lives. We may even feel like we are 'cracking up'. We may become more and more exhausted, tense and irritable and find it increasingly difficult to cope with even the simplest of tasks. We may also find that our relationships with friends and loved ones worsen as a result. Suffering with stress over a long period of time can also make us more vulnerable to experiencing health problems, which can further undermine our psychological wellbeing. It is, therefore, important to learn ways to manage our stress levels and by doing so, reduce its often debilitating effects.



WHY ME?

The causes of stress are complex. There are many different reasons why we may experience stress and depending on our genetic make-up, childhood factors, social background and events in our lives, we may be more or less prone to experiencing stress than other people.

Think of your vulnerability to stress as a bucket like the one shown opposite.

Everyone's bucket will be a different size depending on their genetic make-up, childhood factors, social background and events in their lives. If you are more vulnerable to stress because of these factors, then your bucket will be smaller than someone who is able to cope with larger amounts of stress. The water here represents the stress induced by difficult or challenging situations and events, therefore the bigger your bucket is, the more stress you will be able to cope with. When the water starts to overflow, however, this is when things begin to go wrong so it's important to stop that from happening. While you cannot change the size of your bucket, you can change the way you manage your stress and by doing so, stop your bucket from overflowing.

For most people, stress develops gradually over a long period of time from lots of little problems and events. A build-up of stress from various different sources over a prolonged period can then lead us to 'breaking point', particularly if we are physically run down or not eating or sleeping properly. It is also common that a single specific life event can trigger stress, for example a death or a relationship break-up.

The factors that may contribute to stress can be split into categories called internal stressors and external stressors. Internal stressors are the sources of stress that occur within our control, i.e. our thoughts (*how we interpret what happens to us*) and our behaviours (*what we do to cope*). External stressors, on the other hand, are sources of stress that we cannot easily control, i.e. life events and daily hassles (*as shown in the table on the next page*).



In reality it is likely that a combination of internal and external factors influence our stress. Managing your stress, therefore, may involve dealing with the external factors which confront you and also making changes to the internal factors, which can then strengthen your ability to deal with what comes your way.

STOP & THINK



What factors do you think have contributed to your stress? Look at the table below and tick the life events that have been around for you over the past 12 months. Remember these are just a few so write others down if they are not on the list.

Stressful life events

Death or illness in the family	
Relationship break-up/divorce	
Getting married	
Moving house	
Personal illness/long-term health problems	
Pregnancy or a birth in the close family	
Pressures or changes in work	
Being unemployed/losing a job	
Money worries/debt	
Being a carer	
Problems with your home or neighbours	
Being isolated or lonely/lacking support	
Others:	



Some of the sources of stress mentioned above are things that can happen to us out of the blue. Others are unavoidable events or changes over which we have little control. It is also worth noting that although we tend to think that stress comes from being too busy and pressured, it can be just as difficult to cope when we are in a situation where we do not have enough to do, e.g. being unemployed or in an unfulfilling job, being lonely and so on.

It is important to acknowledge that the stress we are experiencing is a natural reaction to what we perceive as a difficult or challenging event and it does not mean that we are weak. Sometimes even the events which most of us would typically associate with pleasure can be stressful, such as getting married, starting a better job, pregnancy and parenthood.

Whether or not you found it easy to pinpoint the source(s) of your stress, what's more important is that you recognise how stress is affecting you and your life so that you can start to manage it in a better way.

HOW STRESS AFFECTS US

Stress can affect how we think, how we feel, both emotionally and physically and how we behave and each of these areas can influence the others.

IT AFFECTS HOW WE THINK

When we feel stressed, we tend to think in very negative ways. We might:

- Worry excessively about things by going over them in our mind again and again
- Dwell on the negative aspects of ourselves and/or our lives
- Criticise ourselves all the time
- Expect the very worst to happen and jump to the very worst conclusion about everything
- Focus on what other people think of us

IT AFFECTS HOW WE FEEL EMOTIONALLY

If we are regularly stressed, it is likely that we will experience a lot of emotional turmoil. We may begin to feel unhappy and upset, tearful, helpless, hopeless, anxious, overwhelmed, irritable, angry, frustrated, guilty and fed up.

IT AFFECTS HOW WE FEEL PHYSICALLY

When we are stressed, we can experience a range of physical symptoms including:

- rapid heartbeat
- breathlessness
- muscular tension
- headaches
- indigestion
- aches and pains
- poor memory and concentration
- lack of motivation and energy
- changes in appetite
- tiredness/exhaustion
- disturbed sleep patterns

N.B. Many people who experience stress are unaware that it can trigger these types of symptoms and may visit their GP believing that they have an underlying medical condition.

IT AFFECTS HOW WE BEHAVE

Stress can affect our behaviour and how we act/interact in everyday situations. It can have an impact on how we behave at work, at home and in our relationships. Typical stress related behaviours can include:

- Avoidance – avoiding people, places and/or situations that we find difficult
- Procrastinating – putting things off
- Over-activity – running around at full speed and taking on too much, never finishing anything
- Underactivity – withdrawing from life, not doing the things that we once enjoyed, neglecting responsibilities
- Eating a lot more or a lot less
- Drinking alcohol to excess
- Biting nails, teeth grinding and pulling hair out



The following diagram links these areas together to make sense of what happened to Gerry when he experienced a stressful situation.



This diagram shows us that what we think about a situation affects how we feel physically and emotionally and changes what we do. This ‘vicious circle’ can keep our stress going, by weakening our sense of control over our lives and making us believe that there is no way to regain that control.

This self-help booklet aims to help you to weaken the ‘vicious circle’ of stress and regain control by helping you to manage better the unhelpful thoughts and behaviours that keep it going.

SUMMARY

- Stress is common and affects us all.
- A certain level of stress can be helpful and give us the motivation to do things.
- Stress becomes a problem when it is enduring and constant and affects our ability to function properly.
- We may be more or less prone to experiencing stress than other people depending on a complex mix of factors including our genetic make-up, childhood experiences, social background and events in our lives.
- For most people, stress develops gradually over a long period of time from lots of little problems and events, but it is also possible that a single specific life event can trigger stress.
- Stress can affect how we think, feel and behave and each of these areas can influence the others.
- Identifying the unhelpful thoughts and behaviours that maintain your stress, can help you to weaken the ‘vicious circle’ and help you to regain control over your life.



SECTION 2: STRESS AND THE BODY

Although stress is not a physical problem, our body reacts to excessive psychological pressure.

When we find ourselves under extreme pressure, or perceive a particular situation as threatening or challenging, we experience a strong emotion called fear. Fear triggers a chain of automatic events in our body to ensure that we are able to deal with the threat or challenge that confronts us. When this happens, the body produces a hormone called adrenaline which triggers a range of physical symptoms in our body that prepare us, either to run away or to be ready to react. This physical reaction to stress is called the 'fight or flight' response and can be traced back to our need for survival in the past.

E.g. imagine you are walking through the woods and come face to face with a bear. Your heart starts beating fast, your muscles tense, you are intensely alert. For a split second, you are paralysed with fear. Then you make a decision. You decide either to defend yourself or run. This is called the 'fight or flight' response.

Let's look at some of the common physical sensations that we experience when our 'fight or flight' response is triggered.

- **Heart beating stronger and faster** – The heart is pumping more blood to the muscles in arms and legs which are important if you want to fight or flee. More blood carries more oxygen which allows muscles to work harder. Blood pressure increases.
- **Tingling and hot flushes** – The blood supply is limited where it is not needed e.g. in toes or fingers. This is why our skin looks pale, feels cold and our fingers and toes experience tingling or numbness. We might also experience hot flushes as our bodies are working hard and our body temperature increases.
- **Rapid and shallow breathing** – Rapid breathing helps us to take in more oxygen which helps our muscles to work harder. However, when our body is at rest and our breathing becomes rapid, we end up breathing in more oxygen than our body needs. This can cause breathlessness, a sensation of choking and even pains or tightness in the chest.
- **Dizziness** – Rapid breathing means that less oxygen reaches your head. While this is not dangerous, it produces unpleasant symptoms such as dizziness and confusion. Although we may feel as though we are going to faint, this is very unlikely to happen, as to faint our blood pressure has to drop. However, because our hearts beat faster, our blood pressure is temporarily raised.
- **Muscle tension/headache** – Muscles tense up in preparation for fight or flight which results in feelings of tension, aches, trembling and shaking.
- **Nausea & dry mouth** – The digestive system shuts down meaning your stomach becomes less active causing nausea and a heavy feeling. You also produce less saliva which causes a dry mouth.
- **Sweating** – Your body works hard to prepare you to attack or run away which causes your body to heat up. Sweating helps you to cool down.



The 'fight or flight' response is a normal and helpful response when we are faced with immediate physical danger or threat. It is unhelpful however, if it is triggered when the threat is low or happens in situations where there is no 'real' threat. Modern day situations that we may perceive as threatening such as work overload, relationship difficulties or financial problems, do not require such an extreme physical reaction and so it can be distressing and scary when this happens to us. The physical symptoms can also be made worse by the way we interpret them and what we think is happening to us. It is important, therefore, to remember that the 'fight or flight' response is **not harmful**. It is our body's healthy protection system.



STOP & THINK

Look at the table of physical sensations below. Tick the sensations you experience and how often they occur.

PHYSICAL SENSATIONS	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
Rapid heartbeat			
Tingling/numbness			
Chest tightness			
Breathlessness			
Dizziness			
Blurry vision			
Nausea/feeling sick			
Dry mouth			
Sweating/feeling hot			
Muscle tension			
Shaking/trembling			

PANIC ATTACKS

Panic attacks are very sudden periods of intense anxiety and can cause extreme discomfort. These symptoms are a heightened experience of the 'fight or flight' response. Panic attacks are very common. If you experience high levels of stress on a daily basis then you will be more prone to panic attacks than someone who does not. Studies suggest that the symptoms of a panic attack can last between 15 seconds up to around 30 minutes. Many people experience this problem and are also able to cope and overcome it.

MANAGING THE PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

Relaxation: Is a very useful way of coping with the physical symptoms of stress. Relaxation can involve doing something that you enjoy, a hobby, or even just being by yourself. It is important to make time for yourself and to do the things that you enjoy and make you feel good. It does not really matter what you do as long as it's something that you will look forward to and will give you a break. Taking time to relax can help to improve your mood and reduce your stress levels by calming your body and mind. Relaxing activities can also help you to sleep better. Without taking the time to unwind, it is all too easy to feel overwhelmed and stressed.

Exercise: Has great benefits for both your physical and psychological wellbeing. It is a healthy way to relieve stress and physical tension. Exercise can reduce levels of the body's stress hormones, adrenaline and cortisol. It also stimulates the production of serotonin and endorphins, which are the body's natural mood elevators. It is recommended that you are active for at least 30 minutes each day, 5 days a week. You don't have to join a gym to become more active. Going for a brisk walk, a cycle, or a jog are all good sources of exercise and can help us to combat stress.

Hobbies: You can rediscover old hobbies or find new ones. Here are some suggestions:

- Listen to music
- Do some exercise (e.g. swim, cycle)
- Take up a new sport
- Have a bath
- Read a book
- Watch your favourite TV show
- Go to the cinema
- Do something creative (e.g. draw, paint)
- Visit a friend or family member





STOP & THINK

What things do you do at the moment which help you to relax? What activities do you think you could do that might help you to relax and unwind? What do you find enjoyable? What things did you previously enjoy doing that you don't do anymore? Write them down.

Now, make a plan to start including some relaxation time into each day by being specific about what you will do and when you will do it. Try to stick to this plan.

If we learn to turn on the symptoms of relaxation we can turn off the symptoms of being highly strung, tense and stressed. You can't experience both at the same time. When you have learned to relax it can make a noticeable difference to your mood and your energy, not just when you are feeling tense but at other times too. Try to make time to relax daily. This may seem difficult but it is worth it!

CONTROLLED BREATHING & PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

There are some effective techniques that have been specifically designed to help us relax and gain control over the physical symptoms of stress. These techniques are called controlled breathing and progressive muscle relaxation and are outlined on the next page.

Controlled Breathing

At times when we feel stressed, we may notice a change in the way we breathe. We tend to take quicker and shallower breaths. This can lead to over-breathing, which is breathing too fast and taking in more oxygen than we need. We may find ourselves out of breath or feel that we need to gulp air. We may think we are not getting enough air and that we are at risk of suffocating. This can cause tightness in the chest and lots of other unpleasant sensations such as dizziness, a feeling of choking and/or feeling faint.

Breathing is one of the easiest physical sensations to control by yourself. Try controlling your breathing following the instructions below. Just as when learning any new skill, it is important that you practise this technique on a daily basis to get maximum benefit from it.





STOP & THINK

Controlling your breathing

- Sit in a comfy chair or lie down and try to relax as much as you can. You may want to close your eyes.
- Slow your breathing down to a slow easy pace
- Place one hand on your chest and one on your stomach
- Breathe in through your nose counting 1...2...3 slowly (notice that when you breathe in, your stomach moves out slightly)
- Breathe out through your mouth or nose (which ever works best for you) counting 1...2...3 slowly (notice that when you breathe out your stomach moves in slightly)
- Repeat a helpful word to yourself like 'relax' or 'calm' each time you breathe out
- Aim to do this for at least 5 minutes
- Be careful not to tense up or gulp air to do this; keep your muscles soft and your whole body relaxed
- Practise calming your breathing many times before using it to control the symptoms of stress – you may find it takes a number of attempts before you are able to breathe calmly when you feel stressed or panicky
- It is a good idea to practise this technique when you do not feel stressed, so that you can use it easily when you do

TIPS FOR PRACTICE

- If possible, breathe in through your nose and breathe out through your nose.
- If you breathe out through your mouth, pucker or 'purse' your lips as if you are about to whistle.
- Use your stomach rather than your chest to breathe. Imagine you have a balloon in your stomach; as you breathe in, fill the balloon with air, as you breathe out let the air go.
- At first, you might find this exercise easier when lying down

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

When we have been experiencing stress for a long time we are often unaware of the tension in our muscles, or the knot in our stomach, which are a result of the body's reaction to stress. When we are upset or stressed, the muscles in our bodies tense up and this can cause uncomfortable bodily feelings like headaches, backaches, or tightness in the chest. The aches and pains of tension can be painful and cause us more worry, making us even more stressed and tense.

A strategy that can help you to ease tension in your muscles is called progressive muscle relaxation. It involves tensing specific muscles in your body for about 5 seconds and then relaxing them. Progressive muscle relaxation can help you to lower the overall tension in your body. With daily practice you will then be able to recognise and respond to the onset of tension.



STOP & THINK

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Before you start: To practise this technique, sit or lie down somewhere warm, quiet, and comfortable where you won't be interrupted. Begin by closing your eyes and focusing on your breathing. Try to have a slow and comfortable pace. You could use the controlled breathing technique described earlier. If you begin to notice your mind wandering, bring your attention back to your body.

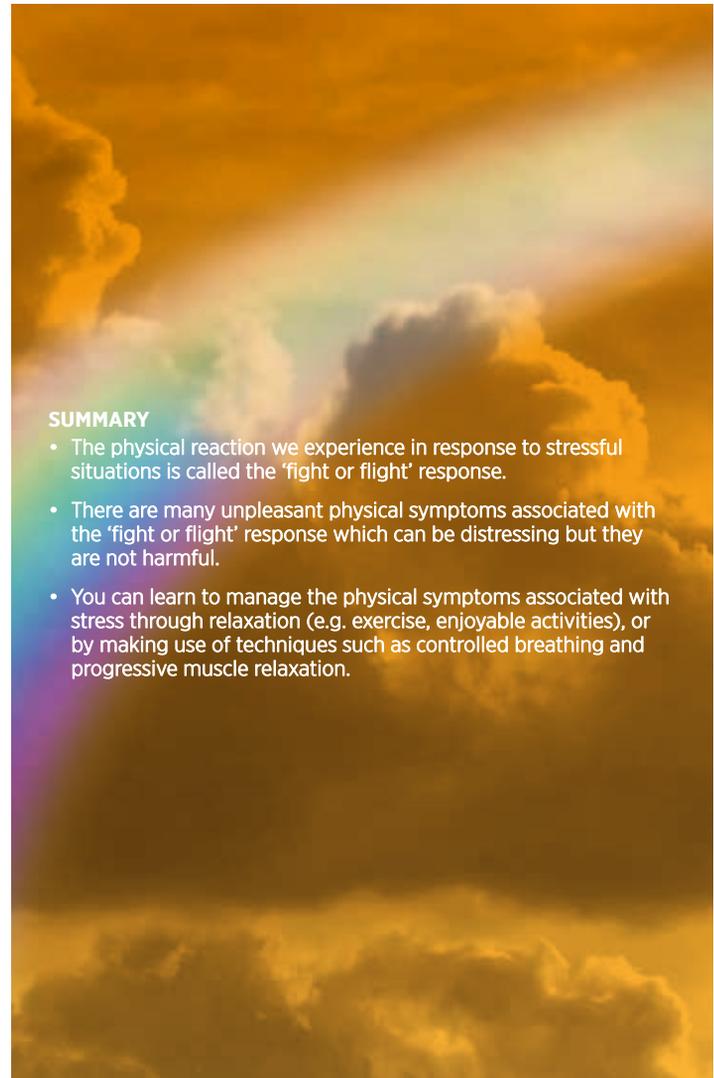


You can work from your head to toes or toes to head. Take your time, tense each muscle group for about 5 seconds. Don't tense the muscles too tight. You should never feel discomfort or pain while completing this exercise. If you do, stop the exercise.

- Start by raising your eyebrows as high as you can and hold them in that position for about 5 seconds. **Notice the tension. Then, release and notice the relaxation.**
- Shut your eyes as tightly as you can. **Notice the tension. Relax.**
- Open your jaw as widely as you can and make a grimace on your face. **Notice the tension. Relax.**
- Now, bring your shoulders up to your ears. **Notice the tension. Relax.**
- Bend, first your right, and then your left elbow tensing the muscles in your arms. **Notice the tension. Relax.**
- Make a fist with your right and left hand. **Notice the tension. Relax.**
- Squeeze the muscles in your upper and then lower back. **Notice the tension. Relax.**
- Suck your stomach in. **Notice the tension. Relax.**
- Tighten your buttocks by pulling them together. **Notice the tension. Relax.**
- Push your thighs together. **Notice the tension. Relax.**
- Tense the muscles in your calves by pulling your toes towards you. **Notice the tension. Relax.**
- Finally, curl your toes. **Notice the tension. Relax.**

When you have completed this exercise, it can be helpful to spend just a few minutes sitting or lying quietly in a relaxed state. When you feel ready, continue on with your day. Try to carry that relaxed feeling with you throughout the day.

If you would like to practise controlled breathing and progressive muscle relaxation techniques using an audio recording, please visit our website where you will be able to download this:
www.wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk



SUMMARY

- The physical reaction we experience in response to stressful situations is called the 'fight or flight' response.
- There are many unpleasant physical symptoms associated with the 'fight or flight' response which can be distressing but they are not harmful.
- You can learn to manage the physical symptoms associated with stress through relaxation (e.g. exercise, enjoyable activities), or by making use of techniques such as controlled breathing and progressive muscle relaxation.



SECTION 3: STRESS AND THE THINKING

Although many of us experience negative or worrying thoughts from time to time, people who suffer from stress tend to experience these type of thoughts a lot of the time.

When we are stressed, we may find that we think negatively about ourselves, situations and/or other people. Here are some of the common examples of the way in which we may think when we are under stress:

- I can't cope
- I'm useless
- What if they all think I am stupid
- What's the point in trying
- Things never go right for me
- There must be something wrong with me
- I just want to get out of here
- They are all looking at me

These sorts of unhelpful thoughts tell us that we're useless, that nobody likes us and not to bother doing things. Unhelpful thoughts talk us out of going out with friends, applying for that new job, speaking up at meetings, or simply doing something nice for ourselves. Our thoughts are strongly related to how we feel, therefore if we are constantly experiencing negative or worrying thoughts, it is likely that we will feel bad about ourselves, lose confidence in our ability to cope and suffer a great deal of emotional distress.

As our thoughts become more and more extreme, our levels of stress increase and can become debilitating. The type of thoughts that we experience when we are stressed are called negative automatic thoughts.

FEATURES OF NEGATIVE AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS

- They are automatic – they pop into our head, we are often unaware of them and they seem to come from nowhere.
- They may seem reasonable at the time and often we accept them as absolute fact or truth without question.
- They are hard to stop.
- They are the kind of thoughts that, if they were true, would make most of us feel stressed.

UNHELPFUL THINKING STYLES

When we worry, the thoughts we have are of a certain type. They tend to focus on the likelihood that something bad will happen and underestimate our ability to cope with it. Most of the unhelpful, worrying thoughts that we experience when we are feeling stressed, tend to fall into some common categories which we call unhelpful thinking styles (or cognitive distortions) as outlined on the next page.



STOP & THINK

As you read through the unhelpful thinking styles, place a tick next to those you think are most relevant to you.



Mental Filter: People who suffer from stress have a tendency to focus on the negative part of a situation or themselves, dismissing the positives and/or their successes, which only serves to keep stress going.

Example: *After having delivered a presentation at work you receive a lot of positive feedback from your colleagues. One colleague however makes a slight criticism of one aspect of your presentation. You dismiss the positive feedback from the majority and focus on the negative remark from one person, until eventually you believe that the presentation was poor and that you must improve.*

Jumping to conclusions/ Mind-Reading: When people are feeling emotionally vulnerable, they tend to take things to heart and become more sensitive to what people say. They can often make assumptions about why someone said something, and be overly quick to draw conclusions, thinking that they are the focus of what has been said.

Examples: *“My boss will start asking questions if I ring in sick.”
“He’s not rung back - he must dislike me.”*

“He’s thinks that I don’t know the first thing about doing my job.”

“I better not suggest that idea, she’ll think I’m stupid.”

“She doesn’t understand what I mean.”

Magnification and Minimisation: Magnifying the positive attributes of other people and minimising our own positive attributes. Constantly undermining ourselves and our ability to cope.

Examples: *“Getting that promotion doesn’t mean I’m any good at my job, it was just luck. Other people are far better at the role than me.”*

“Other people are better at coping in difficult situations than me.”

‘Shoulds’ and ‘Musts’: By constantly thinking or saying ‘I should’ and ‘I must’, people can put unreasonable demands or pressure on themselves. They may have unrealistic expectations of what they should be able to do, whether at work, at home, or in their personal lives and criticise themselves if they are unable to achieve these standards. This can produce an enormous amount of stress.

Examples: *“Making a mistake would be a disaster. I should never make a mistake.”*

“I must ensure that I please everyone all of the time.”

All or nothing thinking: Seeing only one extreme or another and no in-between. Believing that something, or someone, can only be good or bad, right or wrong and so on. When people think in this way it

can result in putting them under a lot of pressure and can make stress worse.

Examples: *“If it’s not perfect, I’ve failed.”*

“If I don’t look my absolute best tonight then there is no point in going out.”

Over generalisation: Taking one experience in the past or present and imposing it on all current or future situations.

Examples: *“I wasn’t successful at my first couple of job interviews. I’ll never get a job.”*

“I never have luck in relationships. I always mess up.”

Labelling: When people assign labels to themselves or other people – often negative labels. This is self-destructive.

Examples: *“My son is doing badly at school. I must be a bad mother.”*

“I didn’t get that promotion, I’m such a loser.”

“I’m just a boring person really.”

Personalisation: When people blame themselves or take responsibility for everything that goes wrong or could go wrong, even when they may only be partly responsible or not responsible at all. This way of thinking can clearly feed stress.

Examples: *“If I was a better husband my wife wouldn’t have had an affair”*

“If everyone at my party doesn’t have a good time it’ll be my fault.”

Catastrophising/Predicting the future: When people are stressed, they tend to catastrophise or blow things out of proportion. They may assume that something that has happened is far worse than it actually is, or that something terrible is going to happen in the future.

Examples: *“I’m going to get into serious trouble for calling in sick.”*

“My friend is going to dislike me because I cancelled a night out.”

‘What if’ statements: When people constantly wonder if something bad is going to happen, they tend to think ‘what if...’ This type of thought can often make people avoid going places or doing the things that they would like.

Examples: *“What if I have a panic attack at the party?”*

“What if I don’t make friends when I start my new job?”

It is clear to see how this kind of thinking might contribute to stress and bring our mood and confidence levels down.



IDENTIFYING NEGATIVE AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS

When you notice a change in how you feel (e.g. stressed, sad, anxious, tense, irritable), take time to examine what is going through your mind. Often it is hard to do this as so many thoughts go through your mind all the time and can become muddled up. When you feel stressed, try tuning in to your thoughts and what is going through your mind. Ask yourself "What was I thinking about just then?" "What was I saying to myself?"



STOP & THINK

Think back to the last time you were feeling stressed? What was going through your mind? What were you saying to yourself?

Do any of these thoughts fall into the categories mentioned above? Which ones?

Noticing the negative thoughts you experience is important if you are to begin tackling them. You can train yourself to notice your thoughts. One way of doing this is to use a thought diary.

THOUGHT DIARY

Thought diaries can provide a way of recording your thoughts, identifying negative, worrying thoughts and becoming more aware of them. When learning a new skill, it's useful to go back to basics. Writing it down can help!

The table below gives an example of a thought diary and how to complete it.



STOP & THINK

Thought Diary

Date/time:

When you had the negative/self-critical thought

Situation:

The place where you had the negative/worrying thought. You may also want to note who was with you, anything that was happening at the time and what was said.

Mood:

How you felt at the time, for example did you feel anxious, upset, tense, or irritable?

Thought:

Write down the negative/worrying thought(s). What was going through your mind at that time?

How much do I believe the self-critical thought?

On a scale of 0-10, rate how much you believe the thought (0=not at all, 10=completely believe)

Here is Paul's diary:

DATE/TIME	SITUATION	MOOD	NEGATIVE THOUGHT(S)	BELIEF RATING
20 th March, 7pm	Preparing for presentation at work tomorrow	Anxious, worried, irritable	This presentation will be rubbish. It's not good enough. I'll probably come across as though I don't know what I'm talking about.	10
30 th March, 11am	Phone call from girlfriend to cancel lunch	Low, upset, frustrated	She doesn't want to spend time with me, I think she is going to end our relationship.	8



For the next week or so, write down any negative/worrying thoughts that you have about yourself/situations/others as you go about your day. Try to get into the habit of noticing them. Notice if any of them fall into the *unhelpful thinking styles* categories we looked at previously.

This can be quite difficult. Like all skills, you will get better at it with practice. So don't worry about taking a long time over this before moving on to the next section. It may be helpful to ask a friend or family member to help you – they may be able to prompt you to remember the unhelpful, negative thoughts you experienced.

Think of yourself as a detective – trying to string together clues to what triggers and perpetuates your stress. Carry paper and a pen with you (or use your phone) so you can note things down just after they happen. If you can't do it at the time, try to recall and write down the thoughts as soon as possible after the event.

CHALLENGING NEGATIVE AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS

One of the main problems with negative automatic thoughts is that we often accept them as absolute facts or truths rather than what they actually are – just our view/opinion/assumption. It is this unquestioning acceptance of our thoughts which helps to keep our stress going and going. The next step after identifying negative automatic thoughts, therefore, is to learn to challenge them and develop a more realistic, balanced point of view. This can help boost how you feel and help you get going again.

One of the most straightforward ways to challenge unhelpful thoughts is to weigh up the evidence for and against them and try to come to a more balanced way of thinking.

What is the evidence?

There is always another way of looking at a situation, but when we are feeling stressed we often can't see it. When challenging our thoughts it can be helpful to think of it like a jury in a court case. To know the truth we need to string together information – hard facts about what actually happened (not just what we think happened). For example if a person with stress thinks *"This presentation will be rubbish. It's not good enough. I'll probably come across as though I don't know what I'm talking about"*, we can look at the evidence for and against this thought. Is the thought actually true or is it just your opinion?

Evidence for: Refers to the information that you feel backs up your thought. What makes you think this? It may be how you feel now, or about previous experiences.

Evidence against: Refers to the information that doesn't back up your thought or contradicts your thought. It may be things that your family or friends have said to you, or about past experiences.

Balanced coping thought: When you have considered all the evidence, try to come to a more balanced, realistic perspective about the situation. You can then learn to remind yourself of this if your negative thoughts come back.

Re-rate belief: When you have considered all the evidence and come to a more balanced, realistic perspective about the situation, re-rate how much you believe your original thought. You should find that you do not believe it as much as you did before you looked at all of the evidence and that you feel better about things.

Paul challenges his negative thought from earlier in the diary below.

NEGATIVE THOUGHT(S)	
This presentation will be rubbish. It's not good enough. I'll probably come across as though I don't know what I'm talking about.	
EVIDENCE FOR	EVIDENCE AGAINST
<p>I haven't put much effort into it</p> <p>My teacher at school said that I wasn't very good at presentations</p> <p>I can't think of anything else</p>	<p>I've given presentations before when I haven't spent much time preparing and they went OK.</p> <p>I probably wasn't very good at presentations as a kid but I'm better at them now and anyway that was just my teacher's opinion</p> <p>I know the material that I have to deliver so it's unlikely that I'll come across badly</p>
BALANCED, REALISTIC PERSPECTIVE	
Okay, so even though I've not spent much time preparing, I've been in this position before and nothing bad has happened – I've coped well in the past. I was only a kid when my teacher made that comment I've changed so much since then. I know the material - I'm just thinking in the worst case scenario.	
BELIEF RATING	3



It can be difficult to think through the evidence *for* and *against* your thoughts. Sometimes it can help to ask a friend or loved one to help you with this task.



STOP & THINK

Look at the negative thoughts you wrote down earlier. Using the technique above, try to challenge these thoughts. What's the evidence?

There are other questions that you can ask yourself which might help you challenge your negative/worrying thoughts. These are listed below.



STOP & THINK

- Are you comparing yourself to others, focusing on your weaknesses and others people's strengths?
- Are you ignoring your strengths and focusing on your weaknesses?
- Are you taking responsibility or blame for something that wasn't (totally) in your control?
- What might you say to someone else if they said this to you?
- What might a friend or loved one say about the situation or about you?
- What could you say to yourself that is more helpful and less critical?
- Have you made a mistake? If so that's okay, we all make mistakes. What can you learn from the situation?
- Is there anything you can do about your negative thoughts? (E.g. change diet, lifestyle) If yes, what? Make a plan!
- Does this way of thinking help or benefit you in any way? How?
- Does this way of thinking hold you back? How?



THE GOAL

The goal of this task is to teach you to recognise and tackle the negative, worrying thoughts that contribute to your stress levels. Ideally in the end you will have learned this skill and will be able to apply it any time you need it. In the beginning it will be helpful to write the thoughts down in a table, as it will help you both identify and tackle them in a structured way.

As time progresses, you may find that you only need to note the unhelpful thought and the balanced coping thought, or eventually you can learn to do this in your head.

This is not likely to happen overnight.

Challenging thoughts is a new skill. Like learning any new skill it will take time. Remember to reward yourself for your efforts with praise and/or treats.

If you wish to find out about identifying and tackling unhelpful thoughts, there are several workbooks that can lead you through examples of people learning to tackle their unhelpful thinking. 'Manage your Mind' is an excellent workbook which is available in all libraries in the South of Glasgow, as well as bookstores.

POSITIVE COPING STATEMENTS

Just as we can get into the habit of thinking negatively, so too can we learn to be more positive. But you have to practise! Here are some positive coping statements to practise saying to yourself daily:

- I can overcome this
- I am able to deal with this situation
- I can ask for help if I need it
- Things will get better for me
- I can take control
- I do have choices
- I've done this before so I can do it again

SUMMARY

- The way we think about things has a major influence on our stress levels.
- Stress is associated with certain unhelpful thinking styles, which can cause us to see situations as threatening or pointless and undermine our ability to cope.
- You can learn to challenge unhelpful, worrying thoughts and replace them with more helpful, realistic thoughts which can help you to reduce your stress levels.
- There are a number of questions you can ask yourself to help you change the way you think about things.
- It will take time to learn this new skill.



SECTION 4: STRESS AND BEHAVIOUR

Stress not only affects our thoughts, it can influence our behaviour too. When we experience stress, it is often caused by a number of things going on in our lives at the same time and we can often start to feel overwhelmed.

As a result, the way we try to cope with situations and how we respond, react and behave often changes. Stress affects how we behave both in response to stressful events and also to events that wouldn't normally cause us stress. We may have a tendency to avoid any situations which cause us stress or heightened emotion. Alternatively, we may start to do things more than we normally would, becoming overactive (keeping ourselves busy to avoid what we are feeling), or to do things less, underactive.

The box below highlights some of the common ways in which stress can affect our everyday behaviour.

- Stop socialising or meeting friends
- Stop answering the phone
- Stop doing hobbies
- Stop looking after yourself
e.g. your diet or appearance change
- Avoiding things
- Unable to sleep
- Start drinking more alcohol
- Trying to do too many things
- Being over concerned with safety
- Smoking more
- Unable to sit still
- Having arguments with other people
- Hesitating
- Talking more quickly



STOP & THINK

Make a list of the things that you do/don't do when you are stressed.



AVOIDANCE

Avoidance is a way of reducing our fears and anxieties by not facing up to, or escaping from, the situations we fear. When we are under stress, it is very common for us to avoid any situation that we know will increase how stressed we feel. For example, we may not want to admit that we haven't enough money to pay the bills, or are scared to phone the company to discuss it or ask for help. This result is that we receive increasingly threatening letters and charges for late payments – which increases our stress levels. The refusal to accept the situation as it is causes the 'vicious circle' of stress to continue.

Problems with avoidance

We often avoid situations and/or people because we feel like or believe we are unable to cope. What happens is that when we are in stressful situations, we often experience a lot of negative thoughts which can trigger those distressing 'fight or flight' symptoms that we looked at in section 2.

As a result we decide that we will never put ourselves in that situation again and so we learn that the only way to cope is to avoid. Indeed, in the short term, avoidance can give us immediate relief from situations that cause us stress. However, in the long term, avoidance can continue to grow and spread to different areas of our lives gradually lessening the quality of our lives. It can also eat away at our confidence as we tell ourselves that we are unable to cope with more and more things.



STOP & THINK

Look at the list of avoidance behaviours below. Do you recognise any of these?

- Avoid talking to others face to face
- Avoid being around other people in crowded or enclosed places
- Avoid going to very big or busy shops, or only going at quiet times
- Stay away from any place where it might be difficult to get out of or escape from
- Avoid walking around on your own
- Avoid places/people/things because you think something bad might happen

Do you avoid certain situations/places/activities – if so, what are they?

TACKLING AVOIDANCE

The best way to deal with avoidance is to build up your confidence bit by bit, by gradually facing the situations that you find difficult. The first time you try spending time in a situation or doing something that you would normally avoid, you will probably feel anxious and uncomfortable for a while. The next time however it won't be as bad.



STOP & THINK

There are 5 steps that will assist you in tackling your avoidance. Try to use these steps to help you tackle one of the things on your list that you have been avoiding.

STEP 1 Make a list of things you have been avoiding/you have stopped doing (look at the list you made earlier).

STEP 2 Choose which one to tackle first. List in order of difficulty and start with the one you will find easiest to do. (E.g. going to shops)

STEP 3 State clearly and specifically what it is you want to do (E.g. I would like to go to my local shop and not rush around).

STEP 4 Plan the steps to carry it out. (E.g. phone my mate and arrange to go to the shop tomorrow afternoon around 2pm when it is quiet. Buy a paper as this will not take long. I will try to walk around at a slow pace. I will practise relaxation before I leave the house and check that I am breathing steadily and slowly when in the shop).

STEP 5 Do it and review it. (E.g. what did you notice when you were carrying out the task you set yourself? How did you feel? What were you thinking? What did you do that helped it go well? How did you feel after you carried out your plan? Was there anything you would do differently next time?)



UNDER-ACTIVITY & OVER-ACTIVITY

So we know that stress can cause us to avoid potentially stressful situations in our life. However, not only can stress make us avoid doing things, it can also affect the amount of activity we do. Our level of activity when we are stressed can fall into two categories, under-activity and over-activity.

Under-activity

When people feel stressed they often get tired easily and can't be bothered doing things. They tend to give up their hobbies and things that give them pleasure. If your response to stress is a lowering in your mood you may have a tendency to withdraw from activities and people around you. Being under-active can then reduce your confidence and therefore you do even less, further worsening your mood.



STOP & THINK
Do you withdraw/do less – if so, in what way? What have you stopped doing?

The first step to changing unhelpful behaviours is to identify what they are in the first place. Tracking your current activity using a weekly activity schedule like the one below can help with this.

Record what you do each day over the next week. Be specific. E.g. instead of writing 'at home' write down exactly what you were doing at home e.g. 'watching TV'.

For each activity that you do over the week, rate the sense of enjoyment, achievement, and closeness to others that you get from each activity on a scale of 0-10. Remember that a sense of achievement does not only come from doing huge things (e.g. promotion, graduating), it can also come from day-to-day things (e.g. cooking a nice meal, doing housework when feeling unmotivated). By doing this, you will be able to see how much time you are spending with others, how much of a sense of achievement you are getting and how much enjoyment you are having in an average week.

DAY	MORNING	AFTERNOON	EVENING
MONDAY			
TUESDAY			
WEDNESDAY			
THURSDAY			
FRIDAY			
SATURDAY			
SUNDAY			

Once you have completed your weekly activity schedule, reflect on what you have recorded. If there is not much that is pleasant, fun, or enjoyable, or you find that you are not spending much time with other people, then this may be a sign that you have to increase your enjoyable and meaningful activity.



Think about what you would like to change.

- Do you need more enjoyable activities in your week?
- What activities would be enjoyable, pleasant, or relaxing?
- What would be something you can do just for you, to treat yourself?
- Are you avoiding or neglecting things in your life, so that there is little sense of achievement in your week?
- What did you use to enjoy doing that you no longer do?

Increasing your activity by a small amount everyday can help to improve your mood. Getting back to doing something you used to enjoy will have great benefits for you. Thinking of fun and relaxing things for yourself to do may be difficult at first. Remember it does not have to be something big. Perhaps you could go to the cinema, meet a friend for coffee, or spend some time in the garden. Try out new things or take up old hobbies. Why not volunteer for something?

Whatever you are doing set aside time and stick to it! Do something you enjoy on a regular basis. Try not to do too much too soon. Be realistic. Plan to do things which are achievable at your current level of functioning. Although it will be difficult initially, you will feel better about doing things for yourself and taking on new challenges.

Over-activity

The other extreme is feeling that we have to do everything and do it all the time. When we feel stressed our behaviour can increase the amount of work we do. We may find it difficult to say 'no' to others' requests whether at home or at work and struggle to complete tasks. Although we know that a certain amount of stress can sometimes be a good thing, e.g. if we have a deadline to meet, over-activity all the time, everyday, can easily lead to burnout and exhaustion. It's important to note that over-activity can also be seen as another way to avoid situations - by keeping busy we can easily avoid dealing with some emotional issues, or that difficult conversation with a loved one.

Typical over-active behaviour:

- Trying to do too much?
- Always rushing around?
- Doing too many things at the one time?
- Not relaxing/No time for you?
- If you are over-active ask yourself:
 - Do I have to be doing something every minute of the day?
 - Who or what am I doing this for?
 - What's the worst thing that will happen if I do not get this done today?

Saying 'no'

If we find it difficult to be assertive, it can be hard to say 'no' to people's requests and so we may find that we take on more and more projects and commitments. If we say 'no' we often experience self-critical thoughts which make us feel guilty. To avoid feeling guilty, therefore, we just keep saying 'yes' to every request. The problem with this however is that by agreeing to things that we don't really want to do, or indeed have the time to do, we are adding to our stress levels and simply keeping our stress going. We may also start to feel as though we are losing control over our lives and feel bad about ourselves.

Let's look at an example.

Every weekend Karen received a call from her daughter asking her to babysit her granddaughter. Karen loved her granddaughter and wanted to be helpful therefore she always agreed to babysit. She felt guilty about saying 'no' because her daughter was still young and loved going out to enjoy herself at the weekend. Meanwhile, Karen was becoming more stressed as she didn't have time to get her shopping, see friends or get organised for her busy week ahead at work. As a result she was doing more in the evenings after work to compensate and rarely had time for herself. She began to feel upset, overwhelmed and helpless to do anything.

We can learn ways of saying 'no' that will help us to feel less guilty and more in control. Take a look at some examples below:

- *"I'm sorry, I'm quite busy just now. Maybe another time."*
- *"I'm sorry but I really can't take on anything else at the moment."*
- *"I'd like to help out, but I don't feel up to it at the moment."*
- *"I don't need new windows, I'm happy with what I have. Thank you anyway."*
- *"You're a lovely person but I don't want to go out with you. It was nice of you to ask though."*

Karen decided to speak with her daughter about babysitting. She decided to say something like *"I really enjoy babysitting at the weekends but I'm finding it a struggle to make the time to fit in my shopping and other commitments. At the moment I'm babysitting every weekend. How about if we made it once a fortnight?"* By saying this, Karen acknowledges that she enjoys babysitting but she is also honest about the impact this is having on her own life. She even suggests an alternative arrangement.



If someone has difficulty accepting what you are saying to them then simply repeat yourself over and over again if necessary. It may be that you have to add the word 'no' at the beginning your statement e.g. *"No. I'm sorry I can't make it tonight."*

Watch out for self-critical thoughts! Challenge them and remind yourself:

- That you have explained your reasons why you couldn't do the thing that was requested.
- That it's not your responsibility.
- That it would only upset you and increase your stress levels if you agreed to it.
- That your decision is for the best. If you feel less stressed then maybe you'll be in a better position to help out next time.



STOP & THINK

Use an activity tracker (as before) to identify the things that you are currently doing in a week that perhaps aren't necessary, or that need to be re-evaluated. Then start to plan out a realistic schedule for yourself for the week ahead. Alternatively, rather than planning ahead, you may prefer simply to make a daily list of things that you would like to do. In either case be realistic about what you can actually do in a day!

Some Tips:

- Stick to one task at a time and see it through
- Prioritise. Some things can wait!
- Make the amount of activity reasonable including time for rest and relaxation
- Set aside time for yourself and to do things you enjoy
- Remember you are not superhuman
- Be pleased with what you have managed to achieve; don't focus on what you haven't managed to do.



SUMMARY

- Stress can affect how we behave, making us avoidant, underactive or overactive.
- If you are avoiding certain things then tackle these step-by-step, writing down exactly what you would like to do and how you could go about doing it.
- Tackle under-activity by planning your week with activities for everyday. Think about what you previously enjoyed doing or new things that you could include in your life.
- Tackle over activity by planning your day with plenty of breaks.



SECTION 5: WORRY & PROBLEM SOLVING

WORRY

Worry is a thought process driven by uncertainty or fear which can either help us to get things done or which can overwhelm us.

As we have already discussed, fear can drive stress when having to deal with things like money problems, relationship problems, work problems, unemployment issues, illness and worry about others. Worry is a chain of thoughts which usually make us anxious about future events, to which we then add judgements about our ability to cope. We may begin to become problem focused, jumping from one worry to another. If this is the case, it can become more difficult to make decisions and we can become very pessimistic.



STOP & THINK

When you recognise that you are worrying, ask yourself what is happening.

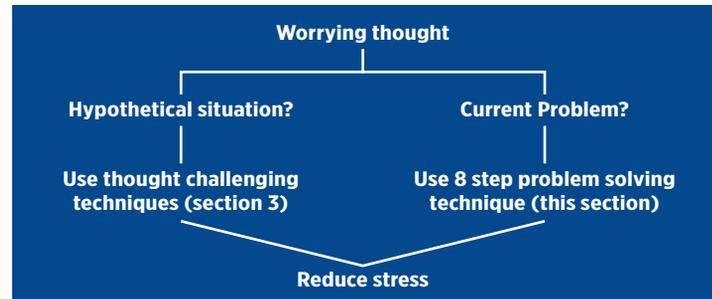
- When did the worry start?
- What triggered it this time?
- What's so bad about it?
- What's the worst that could possibly happen? How likely is this?
- What do you think will happen? How likely is this?
- How is worrying about this benefiting you?
- How is worrying about this hindering you?

CLASSIFYING WORRIES

There are two general types of worry:

1. **Worries about hypothetical situations.** These are worries about situations that have not happened yet and might never happen. They tend to be situations that we *don't* have much control over (e.g. "what if the flight I'm taking next month crashes", "what if I get a serious disease when I get older").
2. **Worries about current problems.** These are worries about things that are going on in our lives that we *do* have some direct control over (e.g. "what if I don't have enough money to pay the bills", "what if I don't finish my report on time", "what if my argument with my friend leads us to fall out").

The chart below may help you to decide how best to deal with your worrying thought.





STOP & THINK

Write down some of your worrying thoughts. Are they *hypothetical worries* or are they *worries about current problems* that you could do something about?

PROBLEM SOLVING

When we are feeling stressed, it can sometimes be more difficult to cope if we have lots of problems that we just can't seem to get on top of and this can lead to even more stress. Sometimes problems can seem overwhelming and we may feel like ignoring them, hoping that they will go away. However, this is not a useful long-term strategy. Struggling with unresolved problems just makes us feel worse. We can end up worrying or ruminating over our problems without finding a way to resolve them. This only serves to cause us more emotional distress and can affect our ability to get a good night's sleep.

8 STEP PROBLEM SOLVING TECHNIQUE

If you feel overwhelmed with many worries and problems, then it is useful to be able to break it all down into more manageable parts. One way of helping us to tackle problems is by using a technique called problem-solving. This technique provides a structured way of working through problems in a step-by-step approach, following a clear plan. Starting to overcome some of your problems might help you to reduce your stress and feel better, after all the more problems you solve, the less you will have to worry about!

Look at Sarah's example on the next page. She owes her friend Gina £1000 but if she repaid the money it would leave her with nothing left over from her wages to pay other bills.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

Be specific about what the problem is.

- "I owe my friend over £1000."

STEP 2: WHAT DO I THINK WILL HAPPEN IF I DON'T SOLVE THE PROBLEM?

What do think will be the consequences of not solving the problem?

- I won't be able to pay Gina back
- Gina may not lend me money again
- I will feel embarrassed
- Gina may get angry with me
- Gina may fall out with me
- I will be able to keep my wages to pay the bills and buy myself something nice
- I will keep worrying about it

STEP 3: WHAT DO I THINK WILL HAPPEN IF I DO SOLVE THE PROBLEM?

What do you think will be the benefits of solving the problem?

- I will feel good that I've paid back my debt
- I won't have to worry about it anymore
- It will show Gina that I can be trusted to borrow money and pay it back when I say I will
- I will feel as though I've been proactive about something and taken control of the situation

STEP 4: BRAINSTORM

What ideas can you think of to solve the problem? Write down as many ideas as you can, no matter how silly they may seem. Then, go through each of your options and think about the pros and cons of each option.

- Don't pay the money back at all
- Pay the money back and leave myself with nothing
- Offer to give Gina some of the money I owe her and pay the rest next month



SOLUTION	PROS	CONS
Don't pay the money back at all	I would be able to pay the bills and buy myself something nice	I would be embarrassed and feel guilty. Gina wouldn't trust me again and it could ruin our friendship
Pay the money back and leave myself with nothing	I would be able to keep my promise to Gina and show that I'm trustworthy by paying back the money I owe her	I would end up in even more debt if I missed the payments on the bills. I wouldn't have enough money to eat or put petrol in the car
Pay the money back in two instalments	It's a start on paying Gina back and would make me feel better that at least I'm doing something It would still leave me with enough for other bills and expenses	I told Gina that I'd pay her back in full. I will have very little money to live on for two months

STEP 5: CHOOSE THE BEST OPTION

Choose the best option(s) from the list you made based on the pros and cons of each.

- Offer to give Gina some of the money I owe her and pay the rest next month.

STEP 6: WORK OUT A PLAN

Plan step by step what you will need to do to carry out this solution. What? When? How? With whom or what? What could cause problems? How can you get around those problems? Is your plan realistic and achievable?

- Phone Gina this afternoon and explain to her that you're unable to pay her back the full amount but that you will pay her in two instalments this month and next.

STEP 7: PUT IT INTO ACTION *Do it! Carry out the plan*

STEP 8: REVIEW

Review how it went. Was it helpful? Did you achieve what you set out to achieve? If not how could you have done it differently? Did you achieve any progress, however small, towards your goal? What have you learned?

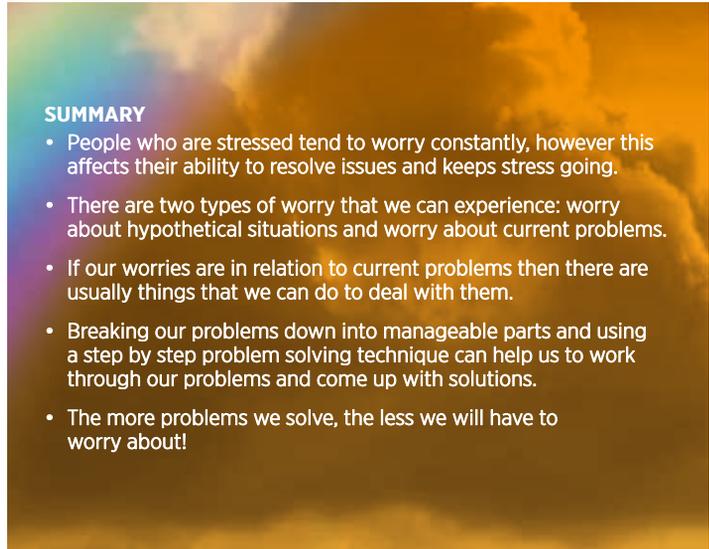
- The conversation went well and Gina was agreeable to receiving the money in two instalments which was great. I suppose I could have planned for this and set aside money each month to ensure that I could pay back the full amount but I have learned from this and I will make sure that I plan better in the future. I definitely feel less stressed now that I've reached a solution.



STOP & THINK

Make a list of all the problems that you have been avoiding dealing with. From the list, choose ONE thing which you will tackle first and use the 8 step problem solving technique to help you to work through it.

N.B. You may want to start with the thing you will find easiest to tackle and put the hardest things last.



SUMMARY

- People who are stressed tend to worry constantly, however this affects their ability to resolve issues and keeps stress going.
- There are two types of worry that we can experience: worry about hypothetical situations and worry about current problems.
- If our worries are in relation to current problems then there are usually things that we can do to deal with them.
- Breaking our problems down into manageable parts and using a step by step problem solving technique can help us to work through our problems and come up with solutions.
- The more problems we solve, the less we will have to worry about!



SECTION 6: LIFESTYLE CHANGES

There are certain basic changes that we can make to our lifestyle that may help us to manage stress better. These are listed on the following pages.

REDUCE CAFFEINE INTAKE

Caffeine is a stimulant that affects the brain and central nervous system and can be found in drinks e.g. tea, coffee, fizzy drinks, red bull, pro-plus and also in pain killers e.g. aspirin, some cold remedies and headache tablets. Too much caffeine (more than 4 cups per day) can leave us feeling nervous, irritable, restless, agitated, shaky, give us headaches, increase our heart rate, speed up breathing etc. Your body can get so used to caffeine that if you just cut it out suddenly, you may experience withdrawal effects such as headaches, tiredness, sickness, anxiety. If you think you may be taking too much caffeine wean yourself off it slowly, perhaps try switching to decaffeinated tea and coffee, or from fizzy drinks to caffeine free drinks etc.

WATCH WHAT YOU DRINK

Many people who suffer with stress use alcohol as a way of coping – to calm their nerves. However, if you drink alcohol to cope with stress you may begin to depend on it. Symptoms such as nausea, sweating, and shaking may be more to do with alcohol than anxiety. Alcohol is a stimulant which makes falling asleep and reducing stress harder to do. If you do drink alcohol, then bear in mind the recommended weekly limits of 21 units for men and 14 units for women.

Drinking too much can damage your physical and emotional health in the short and long term. As well as affecting your weight, looks and sleep, heavy drinking can lead to a wide range of medical conditions including high blood pressure, liver disease, strokes, cancers and brain damage.

The NHS recommends:

- Men should not regularly drink more than 3-4 units a day
- Women should not regularly drink more than 2-3 units a day

(‘Regularly’ means drinking these amounts every day or most days of the week)



EXERCISE

30 minutes of moderate exercise each day can make a huge difference to our physical and psychological wellbeing.

Physical benefits:

- Releases tension
- Controls weight and improves body shape
- Can reduce blood pressure
- Reduces risk of developing chronic health conditions e.g. heart disease, cancers, diabetes (type 2)

Bio-psychological benefits:

- Reduces levels of the body's stress hormones – adrenaline and cortisol
- Stimulates the production of serotonin and endorphins – the body's natural mood elevators

Becoming more physically active could be especially helpful if your routine has been changed e.g. loss of employment – being able to focus on a rewarding self-determined goal, like increasing your physical fitness, will increase the feeling of control you have over your time.

IMPROVE SLEEP ROUTINE

Stress often leads to sleep trouble but lack of sleep can leave us feeling even more stressed. Some tips:

- Try to get into a regular routine of going to bed and getting up at the same time everyday – don't spend more than 8 hours in bed.
- 'Put the day to rest' in the early part of the evening – make a 'to do' list and deal with any problems or worries you have well before bedtime.
- Try to avoid discussing worries with your partner when in bed together
- Try to relax and unwind at least 90 minutes before bedtime – listen to music, read, do a crossword puzzle etc.
- Keep your bedroom tidy & fresh.
- Avoid alcohol or caffeine in the evenings.
- Try to avoid eating a large meal before bedtime.
- Try to avoid watching TV in bed.
- If you notice you're tossing and turning, get up and do something relaxing before returning to bed.
- Be aware of your thinking – don't use the time of being awake to worry about not sleeping.
- This is your time for rest – do what you find relaxes you and encourages sleep.

EAT HEALTHILY

The way we feel physically, affects how able we are to cope with stress. Physical wellbeing is closely linked to emotional wellbeing. Quite often when we are stressed we do not eat regularly or we eat snack food which isn't always good for us. Some tips:

- Vitamins A, C, and E, zinc and selenium may help to combat stress. These vitamins can be found in plums, bananas kiwi fruit, dark green vegetables, seafood and sesame seeds.
- Try to eat five fruit and vegetables a day.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Avoid drinks which are high in sugar or caffeine.
- Avoid high sugar food such as cakes, biscuits and sweets as these may fuel anxiety.
- Have regular meals and healthy snacks and do not miss out on breakfast.



SECTION 7: REVIEW

As you continue working on managing your stress, remember to stop and see how you are doing. You will be using a lot of new skills and these require practice. It's always good to step back sometimes and ask "how's it actually going?"

One way of doing this is keeping track of past experiences – times when you did well, times when you did less well, what you have tried and how you got on.

It is important to be realistic about your progress. It will take time to overcome stress and to notice changes in it. Things will not run smoothly all of the time. You may find yourself in a muddle and face some setbacks; this is to be expected and they can teach you about what you can do differently next time.

Sometimes there are times in our lives when the problem we face just cannot be solved. Examples are ageing, falling ill, or bereavement. These are things that we cannot really control or prevent.

Managing stress should be seen as a long-term goal. It will take practice and effort over time. You may well face setbacks and have bad days, but you can try to accept these as normal and learn from them to keep you moving forwards.

If you feel that, having tried the ideas in this booklet, you are making little progress, you may wish to contact your GP for further help and support. You can also contact Wellbeing Services on 0141 232 2555. Alternatively, more information and self-help material can be found on our website at:

www.wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk



Further help and information

For more information or advice please contact Wellbeing Services on **0141 232 2555** or visit the website **www.wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk**

Wellbeing Services is a Primary Care Mental Health Team based in the South of Glasgow. Wellbeing Services offer a variety of services to assist people with common mental health problems and helps them see a brighter tomorrow.



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