



Scottish  
Ambulance  
Service

Working in Partnership with Universities



# Caring for you as you care for Scotland

A resource for supporting  
health, self care and wellbeing



# Forward

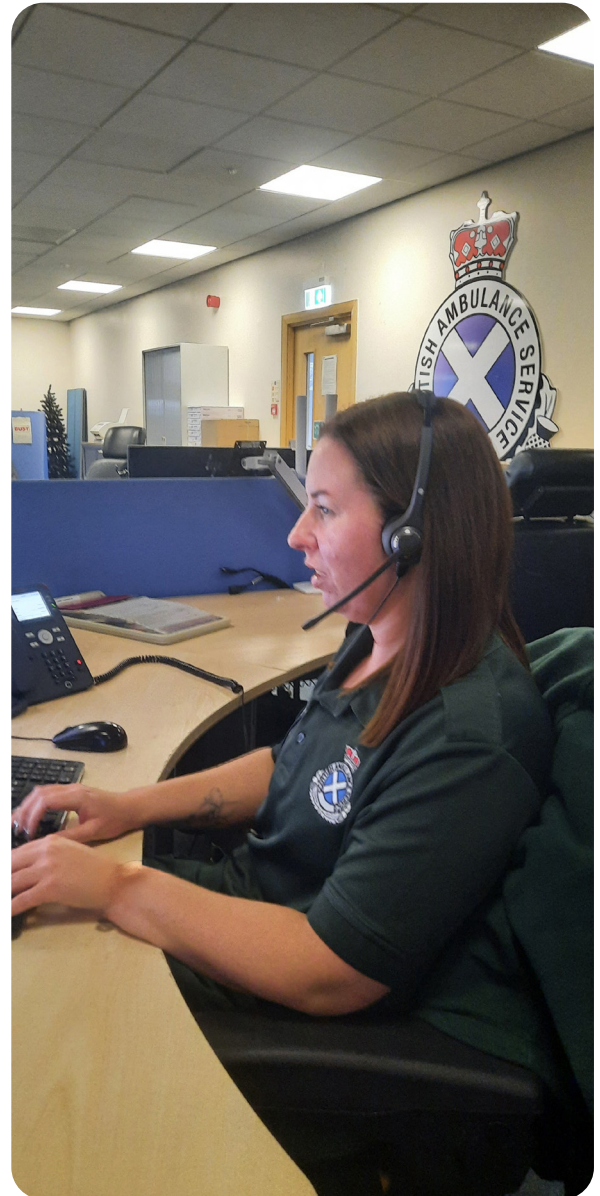
Improving the health and wellbeing of our workforce is a top priority for the Service and we want to ensure you know how to seek advice and support for maintaining your wellbeing.

In the Scottish Ambulance Service, work can be challenging and stressful and at times it can be difficult to prioritise personal wellbeing. However, recognising and responding to our employee health needs is of critical importance. Different people need different levels of support and interventions depending on the situation

This includes advice on coping when under pressure, recognising stress in a colleague and supporting the wellbeing needs of your staff as a manager, as well as giving practical recommendations and tips on a variety of wellbeing topics.

Please treat yourselves with the kindness and compassion you show to others day in, day out and take time to look after your own health and wellbeing and that of your colleagues.

You all do a fantastic job in what can be a very challenging environment, from the front lines to our control staff, patient transport, support services and more, looking out for each other and delivering great care to patients all over Scotland.



# Contents

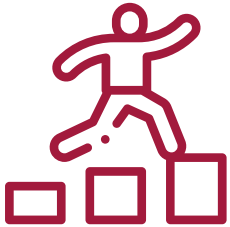
This resource pack is for you to use to help keep you healthy, resilient and well. It contains a range of evidence-based resources available to help you receive the support you need, when you need it.

If you are reading this because you feel you can't cope anymore, need urgent help or are having suicidal thoughts then please reach out and talk to someone or you can call the TASC Crisis Line on 0300 3730 898



## Healthy Mind

3



## Healthy Body

6



## Supporting your Colleagues

9



## Sources of Help and Support

14



# Healthy Mind

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## SAS WELLBEING RESOURCES

You can find lots of information and resources on the Wellbeing and Support section of our intranet @SAS including mental health, physical health and supporting your colleagues and family.

## COPING WHEN UNDER PRESSURE

In a crisis, NHS teams are fantastic at pulling together, taking care of one another and getting on with the job. The team you work for can be the most important source of on-going support in challenging circumstances. Use that resource and share your concerns with colleagues. You may find the things you are feeling are likely to be similar to how they are feeling.

It might be helpful to acknowledge the biggest difficulties you experience but also share moments of success, providing hope and encouragement. Remember to focus on what you can do and what you can control and acknowledge what you are feeling.

Above all, be kind to yourself. Think of all the supportive things you would say to a family member or colleague in their dark days...and then say those things to yourself!

## TASC – The Ambulance Staff Charity

Support Line: 02477 987922 Email: [support@theasc.org.uk](mailto:support@theasc.org.uk)

The Ambulance Staff Charity supports the UK's ambulance community in their time of need in many ways:

- Counselling and Mental Health Support
- Financial Guidance
- Physical Rehabilitation
- Wellbeing advice and Life Skills

# MINDFULNESS

Research indicates a growing number of people are finding mindfulness and meditation beneficial in improving their mental wellbeing and general health.

Meditation works by helping you regulate your emotions, changing the brain to be more resilient to stress, and improving stress biomarkers. Through mindfulness training, we can improve the ways in which we react to and manage stress in a sustainable way.

## Regulating emotions

Stress can cause us to have less control over our emotions and make it difficult to handle challenging situations. Mindfulness training teaches how to regulate our emotions.

## Changing your brain

Anxiety, fear and stress are based on our natural 'fight or flight' response of the brain. Through meditation and mindfulness practice we can reduce this and encourage a more analytical response.

## Stress biomarkers

Studies suggest mindfulness practice can improve our health by balancing our body's natural hormone response of cortisol. This can reduce blood pressure, heart rate and overall health risks.

## BE MINDFUL

**Be Mindful** is an online mindfulness course for Service staff to improve mental health and wellbeing.  
[bemindfulonline.com/scottish-ambulance-registration](http://bemindfulonline.com/scottish-ambulance-registration)

## **headspace**

**Headspace Plus** is an app providing access to a library of resources for sleep, meditation, mindfulness, workouts and more.  
[headspace.com/nhs](http://headspace.com/nhs)

## FEELING GOOD

**Feeling good: positive mindset** is a free app for Service employees with a series of 12 tracks to improve mental and physical health and build personal resilience. Download app and unlock tracks with username: **sas9102** and password: **positive**



**Daylight** is a free smartphone app for helping process feelings of worry and anxiety, using evidence-based cognitive behavioural techniques.  
[trydaylight.com/healthandcare-scot](http://trydaylight.com/healthandcare-scot)



Service staff work hard every day to take care of their fellow citizens but your jobs can be emotionally and physically demanding. Lifelines Scotland is about looking after you.

Lifelines is led by the Rivers Centre for Traumatic Stress in NHS Lothian who are working in partnership with Scotland's blue light services, charities and staff bodies to help them take care of the psychological wellbeing and safety of their people.

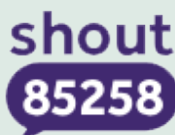
You can view their website which includes wellbeing resources and guides to support your wellbeing on [lifelinesscotland.org](http://lifelinesscotland.org).



The National Wellbeing Hub has a wide range of resources, guidance and advice to support your emotional and psychological wellbeing. These resources are available to all staff in every role across Health & Social Care in Scotland. You can access these resources at [wellbeinghub.scot](http://wellbeinghub.scot)



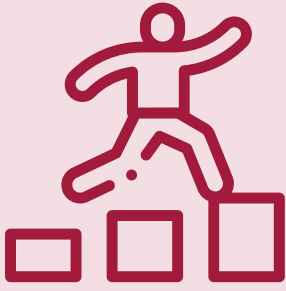
A free, confidential phone service for those experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety. Monday-Thursday 6pm to 2am, Friday 6pm-Monday 6am  
[breathingspace.scot](http://breathingspace.scot) 0800 83 85 87



Free 24/7 text support to help you look after your emotional health. 'BLUELIGHT' to **85258**



Free resources for improving mental health and wellbeing. [mind.org.uk/BlueLight](http://mind.org.uk/BlueLight)



# Healthy Body

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## SLEEP - SOME PRACTICAL TIPS

For sleep to occur, your mind needs to be in a state of deep relaxation. Focus on this first to allow restorative sleep. Don't worry if you don't fall asleep straight away, this will only add to your stress. Here are some tips to help.

### Unchallenge your brain

- The absence of light stimulates melatonin release, invest in an eye mask and blackout blinds or curtains.
- Avoid using electronic devices for 30-60mins before bed.
- Eliminate unwanted sounds with earplugs.
- Consider listening to a podcast or hypnosis audio on a gentle volume to help you fall asleep.

### Good habits for quality sleep

Relax your mind before sleeping - switch off from work or study, write out tomorrow's to-do list so it isn't playing on your mind when you're trying to nod off. Try to avoid going to bed on an argument, stick to a common bedtime to help build a pre-bed routine which lets your mind know it's time to sleep.

### Being prepared for sleep

- Avoid exercising too close to bedtime, try to avoid it at least 2hrs before going to bed.
- Food and drink: try to avoid fatty or spicy food in the hours before sleeping. Toast, a biscuit or pasta can help make us more drowsy.
- Try to reduce your caffeine as much as you can later in the day - even a caffeine-rich drink a few hours before sleeping can be enough to keep you awake.
- A bath or shower before bed can help relax you enough to sleep, though it's recommended to do so at least an hour before going to bed, so the temperature change doesn't keep you awake.
- Alcohol is not helpful in getting to sleep. It is likely to wake you up more readily as it reduces REM (rapid eye movement) sleep that is the restorative part of our sleep cycle.

# NUTRITION

**NHS Inform** is a website full of evidence based advice on healthy living that includes nutrition, in addition to mental and physical wellbeing.

[nhsinform.scot/healthy-living](https://nhsinform.scot/healthy-living)

**The British Dietetic Association** has many recipes and tips, including guides for getting children involved with cooking at home.

[letsgetcooking.org.uk](https://letsgetcooking.org.uk)

**British Nutrition Foundation** website contains lots of helpful guides for general health improvements and healthy eating advice.

[nutrition.org.uk](https://nutrition.org.uk)

**Beat** is the leading UK charity for assisting those living with eating disorders and their carers. With useful resources for understanding the conditions and finding support.

[beateatingdisorders.org.uk](https://beateatingdisorders.org.uk)

## Hydration at Work

Staying well hydrated is an incredibly important contributor to our personal wellbeing; however, being so busy at work often impacts on our ability to hydrate. Poor hydration practices can have both short and long-term consequences on our health and wellbeing. It is important to always carry a bottle of water with you throughout the day and night to keep your hydration levels up.

## TIPS WHEN WORKING AT HOME

We have adapted our working practices to ensure we can offer flexible work arrangements to support staff. Working at home can be challenging and below are some pointers to help maintain your wellbeing while working at home.



Stay in touch with your colleagues regularly & try using Microsoft Teams.



'Transition' activities can help switch off - like books, podcasts or exercise.



Set patterns for home working, get dressed so you feel you're going to work & keep to a normal schedule.



Structure your day such as set times for team meetings or making calls, to help maintain focus and not overwork.



Workspace. Set up a separate work area from your living space if possible so that you can switch off and relax after work.



Regular breaks drinking and eating, help break up the day's tasks - it's important to avoid a working lunch!

## FITNESS AND EXERCISE

Keeping active is connected to keeping a healthy mind. By exercising regularly and staying fit, we can improve our overall health and wellbeing and be less prone to experiencing periods where we feel like everything's a little too much.



Local jogging groups are a sociable and fun way to stay active outdoors, improving your physical and mental health in a fun, supportive environment. **jogscotland** are part of Scottish Athletics and provide a supportive community for recreational joggers and those looking to start out. **[jogscotland.org.uk](http://jogscotland.org.uk)**



**Let's Ride** from British Cycling offers advice and informative videos for getting started out in cycling, or teaching your younger family. An online map database of cycling routes is also available with local cycling route maps and ratings.

**[www.letsride.co.uk/community](http://www.letsride.co.uk/community)**



**Paths for All** is a Scottish Charity promoting the benefits of outdoor walking for improving quality of life and wellbeing. Their website contains useful resources on local walks, walking groups and a popular podcast by Edith Bowman if you'd like some help along the way. **[pathsforall.org.uk](http://pathsforall.org.uk)**



**Sportscotland** is our national agency for sport with the aim of having an active Scotland where everyone benefits from sport. The website contains sport, performance and physical activity information and guidance. **[sportscotland.org.uk](http://sportscotland.org.uk)**

**Strava** is a physical activity app that allows you to track your running, walking and physical activity, join challenges, share achievements and follow other friends and colleagues in your activities.

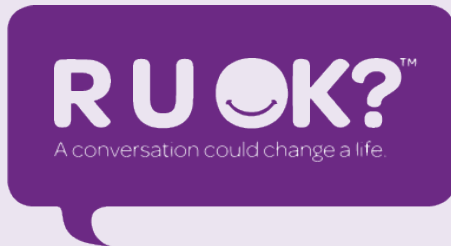
**[Strava.com](http://Strava.com)**



# SUPPORTING YOUR COLLEAGUES

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## CONVERSATION CAN CHANGE A LIFE



RUOK? is a way to enable anyone to meaningfully connect with the people around them and start a conversation with someone who may be struggling with life

You don't need to be an expert to reach out - just a good friend and a great listener.

Start a conversation with these four steps:

1. Ask RUOK?
2. Listen
3. Encourage action
4. Check in

### Trauma Risk Management (TRiM)

A traumatic incident is any event that can be considered to be outside of an individual's usual experience and causes physical, emotional or psychological harm.

The Scottish Ambulance Service launched its TRiM Programme in June 2023 to support staff after these incidents.

Requesting a TRiM Assessment after these events can be done by self-referral, management referral or peer referral.

For more information in TRiM, and for TRiM contacts in your area, please find more information on the TRiM @SAS page:



<https://scottish.sharepoint.com/sites/@SAS/SitePages/TRiM.aspx>

# RECOGNISING STRESS IN A COLLEAGUE

A colleague struggling with stress may:

- Be withdrawn and not their usual self
- Prone to outbursts or anger
- Appear to be more irritable or tearful
- Take less pride in their appearance
- Suffer from loss of motivation or become prone to making mistakes
- Take more time off work

They may also have developed coping mechanisms like drinking too much, smoking, over or under eating or abusing drugs.

If you feel that one of your colleagues is struggling, it is important that you ask them 'Are you OK?' You don't need to have all the answers or be an expert in mental health to really listen and show that you care.



MIND has produced a guide for ambulance staff and volunteers on how to support a colleague experiencing mental health problems.  
[mind.org.uk/media-a/4156/blue-light-supporting-a-colleague- ambulance-2017.pdf](https://mind.org.uk/media-a/4156/blue-light-supporting-a-colleague-ambulance-2017.pdf)



See Me Scotland has produced a guide on recognising stress in a colleague and how you should approach them.  
[seemescotland.org/media/7648/talking-about-mental-health.pdf](https://seemescotland.org/media/7648/talking-about-mental-health.pdf)



## PEER SUPPORT

We know that having good relationships is one of the most important contributors to human happiness and health. People need people, to share the joy of good times and to give and receive support in the face of adversity. Social support is especially important when something traumatic happens and the amount of help and kindness we get from other people has a huge influence on our ability to recover.

Peer support describes the support that exists between people who have shared experiences and want to help each other and is at the heart of what keeps our staff well. From “having each other’s backs” (trusting your colleagues to keep you safe & feeling confident in their skills) to “looking out for each other” (including knowing if they are having a hard time outside work), the support of colleagues is essential for responder wellbeing, especially in roles where people are facing potentially traumatic experiences.

Peer support includes informal interventions like RUOK? and formal programmes like TRiM (Trauma Risk Management) and CISM (Critical Incident Stress Management) where some peers get additional training on how to support colleagues. But remember you don’t need to be trained to look out for each other and you probably already provide and receive mutual support. The Service is actively implementing informal and formal peer support projects with training and development to maximise this mutual support.



togetherall (formally known as BigWhiteWall) is a safe peer to peer community to support your mental health 24/7  
[bigwhitewall.com](http://bigwhitewall.com)

## COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP

It is the role of our leaders and managers to create a culture where seeking help is seen as courageous and thoughtful. Being honest and transparent can help tackle any stigma around mental health and improve the wellbeing of the people we work with.

As individuals our wellbeing and mental health can vary with the different circumstances and life events we face on a daily basis. It is therefore important to know how and when we can help staff as a leader or manager.

Supporting and responding to the needs of your staff

- Ensure basic needs and support are provided in relation to breaks, hydration, rest and connection
- Establish a work environment and culture where seeking help for mental wellbeing and distress is actively welcomed
- Create safe opportunities for staff to tell you about how they are feeling and coping by maintaining regular contact and routinely enquiring empathically about wellbeing
- Enable team members to seek and gain support from each other through informal connections, meetings or reflective practice
- Lead by taking active steps to preserve your own wellbeing as a model for others
- Encourage staff to be proactive about protecting their wellbeing and resilience by taking time to

create and implement their own wellbeing actions. A wellbeing planner can help to support this conversation

- Provide information to staff and signpost to other sources of help and support as appropriate. You will find a range of options in our wellbeing site [www.saswellbeing.com](http://www.saswellbeing.com) or via the National Wellbeing Hub [www.promis.scot](http://www.promis.scot)
- Recognise the indications that a member of staff may be experiencing difficulties, for example when identified problems are increasing in severity, persistence, duration or frequency and usual coping mechanisms are not working

### How to respond as a manager when you identify a staff member's wellbeing may be at risk

- Actively monitor their wellbeing with them in the first instance to see whether it improves, stays the same or gets worse. Support the staff member to engage with wellbeing activities such as rest, breaks or activities that allow for natural recovery. It does not involve, at this stage, referral for a formal assessment
- Support the person to consider who they feel is best placed to monitor their symptoms; for example their GP, Occupational Health or you as their line manager
- Signpost your colleague to information, or work with them to identify which information will be the most relevant or beneficial to them
- Consider routinely incorporating opportunities for discussion into your ongoing management of the member of staff to highlight any new or existing difficulties and whether it would be helpful to arrange regular 'check ins', but do not push them to do so
- Support staff member to understand their own 'warning signs' that might indicate that they need to seek further specialist support
- Be informed about the range of options that might be available if difficulties persist and you need to make an onward referral

Information and resources on Turas Learn ([learn.nes.nhs.scot](http://learn.nes.nhs.scot)) to assist managers in taking care of their staff and their wellbeing including an e-learning module on Psychological First Aid [learn.nes.nhs.scot/29715/psychosocial-mental-health-and-wellbeing-support/taking-care-of-your-staff](http://learn.nes.nhs.scot/29715/psychosocial-mental-health-and-wellbeing-support/taking-care-of-your-staff)

**The King's Fund**

The King's Fund is a charity committed to improving health care for all and improving the support available to leaders in healthcare. [kingsfund.org.uk](http://kingsfund.org.uk)

# TEAMWORK WHEN UNDER PRESSURE

Do you often work as part of a team in your job? Experts from the Clinical Human Factors Group ([www.chfg.org](http://www.chfg.org)) have outlined some key messages on teamwork, leadership and communication that could be helpful in your workplace.

## TIPS FOR WORKING UNDER PRESSURE

- 1** Team briefings. Don't assume people know what to do or have the same insight as you do. Brief staff and purposefully check-in regularly
- 2** Stress management. Error risk increases when working under stress. Pause, use mnemonics and take deep breaths to reduce your stress levels.
- 3** Ask questions, lead second. Rapidly changing situations require open & inclusive working. Listen to everyone, focus on what is right, not who is right.
- 4** Helping each other. Our working environment & practices change rapidly - support others in keeping up- to-date, explain changes and have patience.
- 5** Use of aide memoires. Guidelines (such as those in the JRCALC app) can be helpful in stressful situations, so cross check with colleagues when you can.
- 6** Psychological safety. Create an environment where staff are encouraged to speak up without feeling marginalised, so that concerns can be raised and addressed quickly and thank staff for their input
- 7** Support each other. Recognise when a colleague needs a break or might be struggling. Performance can be affected by fatigue, dehydration or worries.
- 8** Debrief as a team. Enable learning through debriefing and signpost to further wellbeing support. Debriefing should be commonplace.



# Sources of Help and Support

## URGENT HELP



**THE  
AMBULANCE  
STAFF  
CHARITY**

Crisis Line: **0300 373 0898** (Open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year)

Immediate and ongoing suicide and mental health care for UK ambulance staff



Samaritans 24-hour support service  
Samaritans provide confidential non-judgemental emotional support for anyone who is struggling to cope.

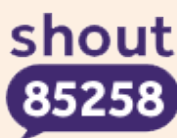
Call: **116123**

Text: **07725 909090**



Help and support for people living with domestic abuse and practical guidance on how to support colleagues experiencing domestic abuse.

**[safelives.org.uk](https://safelives.org.uk)**



Shout is the UK's first 24/7 text service, free on all major mobile networks, for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere. It's a place to go if you're struggling to cope and you need immediate help.

Text Shout to **85258**

# WELLBEING SUPPORT

## Occupational Health

As an employee you can contact the Occupational Health team at any time to discuss a health or work related health problem. This may involve a visit to see a Local Occupational Health Provider and possible health checks. Consultations are confidential and no-one within the Service will be informed without your permission.

Freephone: 0131 275 7890

Or by email: [nss.sasoccupationalhealth@nhs.scot](mailto:nss.sasoccupationalhealth@nhs.scot)

## IPRS Health (Injury Prevention Rehabilitation Services)

IPRS provide our rehabilitation services, including physiotherapy and provide advice and guidance on maintaining a healthy lifestyle. [myiprshealth.com](http://myiprshealth.com) Company code: SAS2018

If your musculoskeletal related issues continue, you or your manager can contact our MSK lead - [emma.collins4@nhs.scot](mailto:emma.collins4@nhs.scot)

## HELP Employee Assistance Programme

HELP is our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and available to all employees of the service 24hrs a day, 7 days a week. It is confidential, doesn't require a management referral and free to access. Trained advisors and counsellors are available to assist across a range of interventions and subjects from emotional support, counselling and health and wellbeing advice to home life, work life or financial worries and can signpost to further information and support. Their website contains resources or you can download their app.

Freephone: 0800 032 9849 Website with self care resources [sgframeworkeap.workplacewell-being.com](http://sgframeworkeap.workplacewell-being.com)

## College of Paramedics

The mental health and wellbeing of paramedics is one of the five key strategic aims of the College of Paramedics. They have a number of resources on their website including a series of vlogs by Health Psychologist Ester Murray and links to other useful information and advice at: [collegeofparamedics.co.uk](http://collegeofparamedics.co.uk)

## The Ambulance Staff Charity (TASC)

**TASC** - A charity dedicated to caring for the mental, physical and financial wellbeing of ambulance staff and their families. [theasc.org.uk](http://theasc.org.uk)

If you are not in a crisis but need support you can contact TASC on: 02477 987 922 (Available 9am – 5pm, Mon – Fri. A voicemail service runs outside of these times.)

## TRADE UNIONS



**Unite's** Scottish Ambulance Service branch can be contacted at:  
Email: [scotland@unitetheunion.org](mailto:scotland@unitetheunion.org)  
Website: [unitetheunion.org](http://unitetheunion.org)



**Unison's** Scottish Ambulance Service branch can be contacted at:  
Email: [unisonscotamb@icloud.com](mailto:unisonscotamb@icloud.com)  
Website: [unison.org.uk](http://unison.org.uk)



**GMB's** Scottish Ambulance Service branch can be contacted at:  
Email: [branch@gmb-sas.org.uk](mailto:branch@gmb-sas.org.uk)  
Website: [gmb.org.uk](http://gmb.org.uk)



**Royal College of Nursing**  
Website: [www.rcn.org.uk](http://www.rcn.org.uk)



## FINANCIAL SUPPORT

**Benevolent Fund** was set up to support the wellbeing of Service staff and members of the fund can apply for financial assistance through loans and grants. More information can be found on @SAS.



**GamCare** is the leading provider of information, advice and support for anyone affected by gambling harms.

**Helpline: 0808 8020 133**

**[www.gamcare.org.uk](http://www.gamcare.org.uk)**



**Money Helper** is a free online financial health checker tool.

**[www.moneyhelper.org.uk](http://www.moneyhelper.org.uk)**



**Citizens Advice Scotland** – The Scottish Citizens Advice Helpline provides personal, one to one advice and information on debt. Available Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm.

**0800 028 1456**



**Debt Advice Foundation** - National debt advice and education charity offering free, confidential support and advice to anyone worried about loans, credit and debt.

**[debtadvicefoundation.org](http://debtadvicefoundation.org)**



**Debt Advice Foundation** - National debt advice and education charity offering free, confidential support and advice to anyone worried about loans, credit and debt.

**[debtadvicefoundation.org](http://debtadvicefoundation.org)**



**National Debt Line** – Online advice tool which will help you work out your budget. **[mymoneysteps.org](http://mymoneysteps.org)**

We will continue to update our resources based on your feedback and as evidence changes and emerges.

We are keen to hear your feedback via the wellbeing section on @SAS



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