Understanding stress

A short guide to the stress response and why opportunities for recovery matter.

What is stress?

Stress is a response to demands or pressures that feel challenging. It can affect attention, emotions and the body. Stress is not a personal failure, and people respond differently to similar situations.

Short-term stress

A temporary stress response may increase alertness or help us respond to an immediate challenge. Recovery afterwards matters.

Ongoing stress

When demands continue without enough rest, control or support, stress can affect sleep, concentration, health and everyday wellbeing.

A simple way to understand the process

Demand
A challenge or pressure

›

Response
Mind and body react

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Recovery
Time, support and relief

A useful reminder

Reducing unrealistic demands and improving support can be just as important as individual coping strategies.

Reflection: What does stress usually feel like for me?

Recognising the signs of stress

Stress can show up in several ways. These are examples, not a checklist you must match.

Physical

Muscle tension, headaches, tiredness, sleep changes, digestive discomfort.

Emotional

Worry, irritability, frustration, feeling overwhelmed or emotionally drained.

Thinking

Difficulty focusing, forgetfulness, racing thoughts or decision fatigue.

Behaviour

Withdrawal, restlessness, changes in routines or difficulty switching off.

My personal stress signals

Early changes I tend to notice

Signs that stress has been continuing

Changes someone else might notice

Understanding my stressors

Identify demands that affect you and consider whether the situation itself could change.

Common sources of stress

Work and responsibilities

Workload, deadlines, expectations.

Relationships

Conflict, communication, caring demands.

Environment

Noise, interruptions, sensory demands.

Health and wellbeing

Pain, fatigue, sleep or health concerns.

Change and uncertainty

Money pressures, transitions, unpredictability.

My stressors worksheet

Situation or demand	How it affects me	What might help

It is reasonable to seek support or ask for changes when demands are too high.

How stress affects my wellbeing

A gentle check-in across different parts of everyday life.

Sleep and rest

Have I noticed changes in sleep, rest or recovery?

Energy and physical wellbeing

How are my energy and physical comfort?

Concentration and thinking

Have attention, memory or decisions become harder?

Emotional wellbeing

How have I been feeling recently?

Relationships and daily life

Has stress changed how I connect or take part?

Which area could benefit from more support right now?

Finding supportive responses

Helpful changes can include reducing demands, changing environments and accessing support.

Rest and recovery

Build in opportunities for breaks and reduced demands where possible.

Boundaries

Review responsibilities, expectations and available time.

Environment

Reduce avoidable distractions and consider access needs.

Connection

Talk with trusted people or seek appropriate professional support.

Practical adjustments

Consider task changes, workload redistribution or workplace adjustments.

My supportive responses

What is already helping me?

What could be changed or reduced?

What support might I need from others?

My personal stress awareness plan

Use this page to collect the ideas that feel most relevant and manageable for you.

My early warning signs

My main stressors

What helps me recover

Support I can access

One manageable next step

Gentle reminder

You do not have to manage every demand alone. Support may involve changing what is expected of you.