

Advice from NHS Moodzone

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/reduce-stress/>

10 stress busters

If you're stressed, whether by your job or by something more personal, the first step to feeling better is to identify the cause.

The most unhelpful thing you can do is turn to something unhealthy to help you cope, such as smoking or [drinking](#).

"In life, there's always a solution to a problem," says Professor Cary Cooper, an occupational health expert at the University of Lancaster. "Not taking control of the situation and doing nothing will only make your problems worse."

He says the keys to good stress management are building emotional strength, being in control of your situation, having a good social network and adopting a positive outlook.

Check out our selection of [stress-busting apps](#) in the Digital Apps Library.

What you can do to address stress

These are Professor Cooper's top 10 stress-busting suggestions:

Be active

Exercise won't make your stress disappear, but it will reduce some of the emotional intensity that you're feeling, clearing your thoughts and letting you to deal with your problems more calmly.

For more advice, read [how being active helps mental wellbeing](#).

[Get started with exercise](#).

Take control

There's a solution to any problem. "If you remain passive, thinking, 'I can't do anything about my problem', your stress will get worse," says Professor Cooper. "That feeling of loss of control is one of the main causes of stress and lack of wellbeing."

The act of taking control is in itself empowering, and it's a crucial part of finding a solution that satisfies you and not someone else.

Read tips on [how to manage your time](#).

Connect with people

A good support network of colleagues, friends and family can ease your work troubles and help you see things in a different way.

"If you don't connect with people, you won't have support to turn to when you need help," says Professor Cooper.

The activities we do with friends help us relax. We often have a good laugh with them, which is an excellent stress reliever.

"Talking things through with a friend will also help you find solutions to your problems," says Professor Cooper.

Read about some [other ways relationships help our wellbeing](#).

Have some 'me time'

Here in the UK, we work the longest hours in Europe, meaning we often don't spend enough time doing things we really enjoy.

"We all need to take some time for socialising, relaxation or exercise," says Professor Cooper.

He recommends setting aside a couple of nights a week for some quality "me time" away from work. "By earmarking those two days, it means you won't be tempted to work overtime," he says.

Challenge yourself

Setting yourself goals and challenges, whether at work or outside, such as learning a new language or a new sport, helps to build confidence. This will help you deal with stress.

"By continuing to learn, you become more emotionally resilient as a person," says Professor Cooper. "It arms you with knowledge and makes you want to do things rather than be passive, such as watching TV all the time."

Avoid unhealthy habits

Don't rely on alcohol, smoking and caffeine as your ways of coping. "Men more than women are likely to do this. We call this avoidance behaviour," says Professor Cooper. "Women are better at seeking support from their social circle."

Over the long term, these crutches won't solve your problems. They'll just create new ones. "It's like putting your head in the sand," says Professor Cooper. "It might provide temporary relief, but it won't make the problems disappear. You need to tackle the cause of your stress."

Help other people

Professor Cooper says evidence shows that people who help others, through activities such as [volunteering](#) or community work, become more resilient.

"Helping people who are often in situations worse than yours will help you put your problems into perspective," says Professor Cooper. "The more you give, the more resilient and happy you feel."

If you don't have time to volunteer, try to do someone a favour every day. It can be something as small as helping someone to cross the road or going on a coffee run for colleagues.

See more on [giving for mental wellbeing](#).

Work smarter, not harder

Working smarter means prioritising your work, concentrating on the tasks that will make a real difference.

"Leave the least important tasks to last," says Cooper. "Accept that your in-tray will always be full. Don't expect it to be empty at the end of the day."

Read some tips on [how to manage your time better](#).

Try to be positive

Look for the positives in life, and things for which you're grateful. "People don't always appreciate what they have," says Professor Cooper. "Try to be glass half full instead of glass half empty," he says.

Try writing down three things that went well, or for which you're grateful, at the end of every day.

[Listen to an audio guide on beating unhelpful thinking](#).

Accept the things you can't change

Changing a difficult situation isn't always possible. Try to concentrate on the things you do have control over.

"If your company is going under and is making redundancies, for example, there's nothing you can do about it," says Professor Cooper.

"In a situation like that, you need to focus on the things that you can control, such as looking for a new job."