



**GREATER  
MANCHESTER**  
**FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**



International  
**Wellbeing Insights**  
People, Culture & Wellbeing

# STRESS AWARENESS MONTH



**#BeTheChange**

**#BETHECHANGE**



**GREATER  
MANCHESTER**  
**FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

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# WELCOME

Stress is part of life. It's how we respond to it that matters.

In today's world, pressure is constant. Deadlines, changing priorities, and the demands of everyday life can quickly build up. A certain level of stress can help us stay focused and perform well. But when it becomes ongoing or overwhelming, it starts to affect our health, our thinking, and how we show up day to day.

Recent data highlights just how common this has become. Stress remains one of the leading causes of long-term absence at work, and many people experience symptoms of anxiety or low mood at any given time. The impact is not just emotional. Stress affects the whole body, from sleep and energy levels to concentration, physical health, and overall wellbeing.

This workshop and handbook are designed to help you better understand your own response to stress and change.

You'll explore how stress shows up for you, how to recognise early signs, and what you can do to manage pressure more effectively. The focus is not on removing stress completely, but on building awareness, strengthening resilience, and taking small, practical steps that make a difference.

Whether you're managing competing priorities, supporting others, or just trying to stay on top of daily demands, the aim is to help you feel more in control and better equipped to cope.



# WHAT'S THE FIRST THOUGHT THAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD 'STRESS'?

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When people hear the word “stress,” their first reaction is often instinctive:

**Threat:** “I can’t cope with this”

**Challenge:** “I can handle this”

What shapes that reaction is **self-efficacy**, your belief in your ability to cope and take action.

When **self-efficacy is low**, stress feels overwhelming and out of your control. When it is high, the same situation feels more manageable, even if it is still difficult.

The situation may be the same, but your belief changes your experience of it.

A simple way to shift this is to ask:

**“What is one thing I can do right now?”**

**That small step moves you from feeling stuck to taking action, and that is where a sense of control and calm begins to return.**

# THE REALITY OF STRESS

Stress is now a widespread experience affecting the majority of adults, yet it is often normalised and overlooked in daily life. Current data highlights the scale and impact of stress across both work and home environments.

- 91% of adults report experiencing high or extreme stress
- 1 in 5 people take time off work due to mental health pressures
- 22 million working days are lost due to work-related stress
- The most common causes are work and home pressures combined

These figures highlight that stress is no longer isolated or occasional. It is now a shared experience for many people across different areas of life.

These figures show that stress is not an individual issue, but a broader cultural and societal challenge.

When stress becomes the norm, it can be easy to dismiss it as part of everyday life. Many people continue to “push through” until the pressure becomes unmanageable, leading to time off, reduced wellbeing, or burnout. This reflects a wider pattern where endurance is often prioritised over recovery.

Work and home stressors are increasingly interconnected, meaning there is often little separation or space to recover. As a result, pressure is carried across different areas of life, making it harder to switch off and reset.

Although stress is common, it is not without consequence. The impact is seen not only in wellbeing, but also in productivity, engagement, and overall sustainability of how we live and work.

# UNDERSTANDING STRESS

Stress is a physical response. Under stress, the body thinks it is under attack and switches to

## 'FIGHT, FLIGHT OR FREEZE' MODE

releasing substances such as adrenaline, cortisol and norepinephrine to prepare the body for physical action. This causes a number of reactions, from blood being diverted to muscles, to shutting down unnecessary bodily functions such as digestion.

The common physical symptoms when we are faced with a highly stressful situation are:

**HEART RATE INCREASES**

**BREATHING BECOMES SHALLOW AND FAST MUSCULAR TENSION INCREASES**

**FEELING OF ANGER AND HOSTILITY INCREASE TEETH**

**GRITTED BLADDER RELAXES BLOOD PRESSURE INCREASES**

**BLOOD SUGAR INCREASES**

Our bodies have evolved to produce this stressed state in order to survive life-threatening situations like attacks from sabre-tooth tigers, however, in modern times we're no longer living in caves and running away from sabre-toothed tigers so becoming stressed is more of a hindrance than a useful tool.

There are still situations where it is beneficial to work yourself into a stressful state, such as participating in competitive sports; so the challenge is being able to control the effects of stress when it isn't beneficial to the situation.

### What is fight, flight or freeze mode?

Fight or flight means building up the energy to be able to respond to a life-threatening situation.

For many people however this life-threatening experience sets the stage for 'dysregulation'. The energy mobilised by the perceived threat gets "locked" into

the nervous system when we go into freeze. This freeze response sometimes reveals itself when you breathe. Holding your breath and shallow breathing are both forms of freeze. The occasional deep sigh after a period of stress is the nervous system catching up on its oxygen intake.

# IS 'STRESS' GOOD OR BAD?

## THE PERFORMANCE ZONE

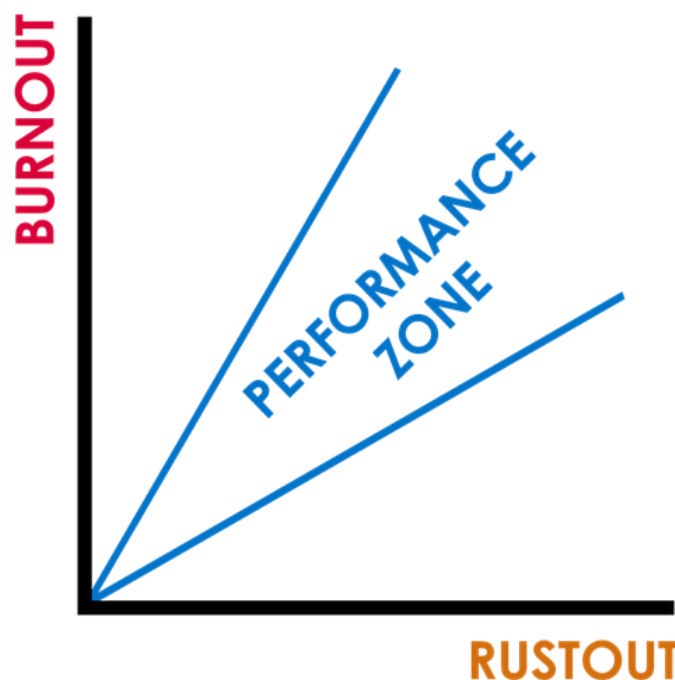
Manageable levels of stress are not a problem, a stress-free environment is not the ultimate goal - we need pressure in our lives in order to perform. The issue is long stages of inactivity causing distress from stagnation or prolonged exposure to high levels without a rest or reset period.

The Performance Zone is the area that drives optimal performance, whether applied to sports, work or even driving. Burnout and Rustout present in different ways but are both as traumatic to experience.

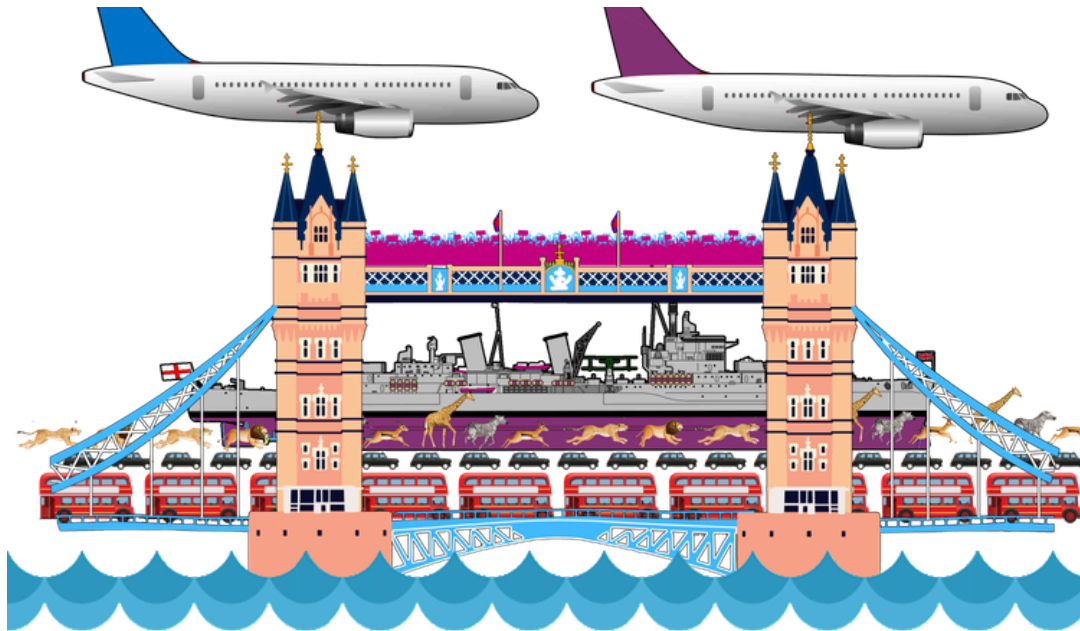
When our stress levels move beyond the Performance Zone and edge towards Burnout we will struggle; problem solving, lateral thinking and creative thinking diminish. We are unable to think clearly and make good decisions, and can become reactive, angry and sometimes even aggressive.

Below the Performance Zone is Rustout where we may find ourselves unable to motivate ourselves; energy and enthusiasm will be low and we will be bored sluggish and lethargic.

Make yourself familiar with the signs when your stress levels move above or below the Performance Zone so that you can rein them back in or raise them up accordingly.



## BRIDGE ANALOGY



The Health & Safety Executive defines stress as ‘the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them’. This links very closely to one of our definitions of stress and poor wellbeing; a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that:

**“DEMANDS EXCEED THE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RESOURCES THE INDIVIDUAL IS ABLE TO MOBILISE.”**

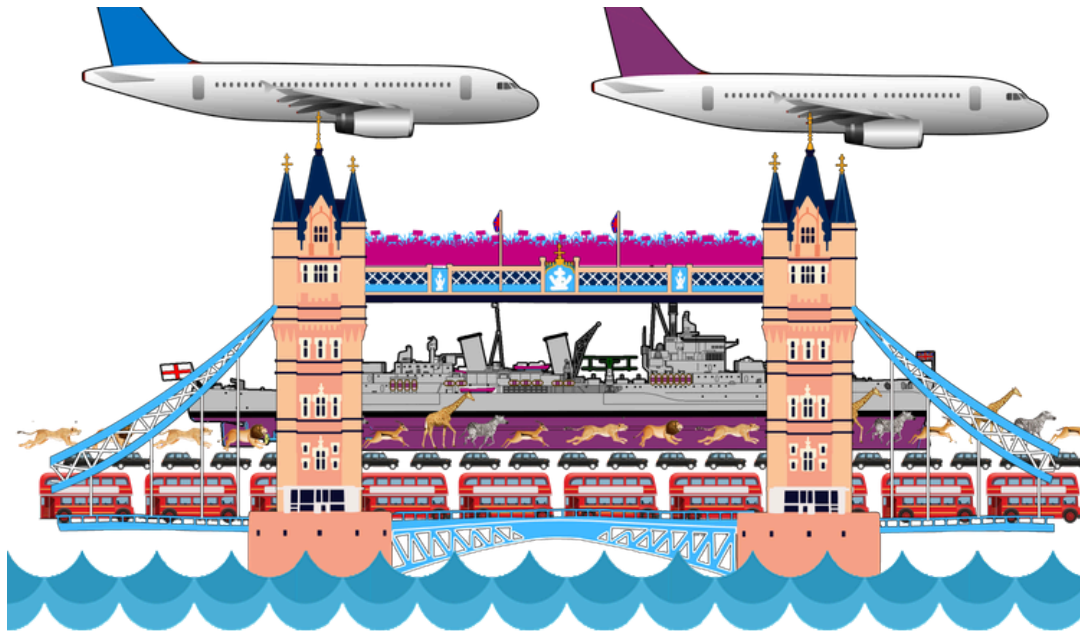
International Wellbeing Insights uses ‘The Bridge’ analogy to approach the topic of mental health, wellbeing and stress. When a Bridge is carrying too much weight, it will eventually collapse. It is possible to see the warning signs before this happens, ‘The Bridge’ would bow, buckle and creak.

The same principle can be applied to human beings, with excessive demands and challenges placed on our bridges. There may be early warning signs. However stress can creep up on some of us, resulting in an unexpected breakdown.

‘The Bridge’ analogy can also be applied to a team or organisation as a whole by looking for more general signs such as team deadlines not being met or a decrease in team morale.



# WHAT'S ON YOUR BRIDGE?



1. We don't have a work bridge and personal bridge, it all goes to the same place and we tend to carry it around with us. Take a moment to think about what is on your bridge.

A large rectangular area with a dashed blue border, intended for a response to question 1.

2. What are the signs and symptoms that you display when your bridge is bowing and buckling? Take a moment to think about what that means for your bridge.

A large rectangular area with a dashed blue border, intended for a response to question 2.

# RECOGNISING THE SIGNS OF STRESS

Stress can present in different ways and is not always immediately visible. It often shows up emotionally, physically, and behaviourally before a person fully recognises it themselves.



## Emotional Signs

Stress often shows up first in how people feel rather than what they say. Irritability, feeling overwhelmed, constant worry, or emotional numbness can all be early signals that someone is struggling internally, even if they appear fine on the outside.

## Physical Signs

The body often carries what the mind tries to ignore. Headaches, fatigue, sleep disruption, muscle tension, changes in appetite, or frequent illness can all indicate that stress levels are becoming unmanageable.

## Behavioural Signs

Stress can also change how people act. Withdrawal from others, reduced performance, procrastination, increased reliance on coping habits, and difficulty concentrating may all be signs that pressure is building.

Stress is not always visible. People can appear to be functioning well while struggling internally. This makes awareness and observation more important than appearance alone.

Early recognition of signs of stress is essential. The sooner changes in emotion, behaviour, or physical wellbeing are noticed, the greater the chance of preventing escalation into chronic stress or burnout.

# ACTIVITY: RECOGNISING STRESS IN YOURSELF

**1. Emotional awareness: What emotions do you notice first when you start feeling stressed?**

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**2. Physical awareness: What physical signs does your body show when you are under pressure or stressed?**

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**3. Behavioural awareness: How does your behaviour change when you are feeling stressed? (e.g. withdrawal, overworking, avoidance, irritability)**

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## ACTIVITY: RECOGNISING STRESS IN YOURSELF

**4. Early warning signs: What are your earliest signs that stress is building, before it becomes overwhelming?**

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**5. Personal reflection: Think about a recent time you felt stressed. What signs did you notice, and did you recognise them early or late?**

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**6. Action awareness: What is one small thing you could do earlier next time you notice these signs?**

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# ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS

## HOW ARE YOU...GOING TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS?

Why bother asking a question that is almost guaranteed to generate no new information? That's why the question, "How are you?," is in need of a drastic makeover.

When asking "How are you?", 99% of the time, what is the response? "...alright." Sometimes, the respondent doesn't even answer, they simply bounce the question back.

Let's think about asking better questions, particularly in a way that shows you are genuinely asking about the person's life. Or better yet, in a way that shows genuine care and leads to new information that can inspire positive action.

## WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF A MORE PRODUCTIVE QUESTION THAN 'HOW ARE YOU?'



# ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS

## HOW ARE YOU... ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Examples of better questions:

- Have you got anything on this week?
- How's your day going?
- How do you feel today?
- What has been your highlight today?
- What are your plans for the weekend?
- What are you dreading today?

- What is new with you?
- How do you enjoy spending your free time?
- How's your [insert dogs/kids/family]?
- What shows are you enjoying lately?
- What's on your mind?
- Is there anyone you enjoy talking to?

- How was your drive in?
- How are you feeling today?
- What could you use more help with?
- How did you sleep?
- What could be going better in life right now?
- How is your family?



- What did you have for breakfast?
- Have you read any good books?
- How's work been recently?
- Are you working on any new projects?
- How is the team feeling?

- What else could you do?
- If you did know the answer, what would it be?
- How would you advise someone else in the same position?
- On a scale from 4–19, how would you rate your mood/day/week? How do we get you to 19?
- Over the last two weeks, if you were a movie character, who would you be and why?

- How's life treating you?
- What are your plans for the next [period of time]?
- What are you happy with?
- What do you need from me?
- What would you do if [XYZ] happened?

# ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS

## PATTERN INTERRUPT



### WHAT IS A PATTERN INTERRUPT?

**ENCOURAGES PEOPLE TO NOT RELY ON THEIR GO-TO RESPONSES**

**THE KEY TO DISRUPTING THE AUTO-PILOT**

A pattern interrupt is anything that gently breaks someone out of automatic behaviours, **a question, an action, a shift in tone or pace**, and creates space for something real.

This helps us **create meaningful connection**, especially when someone seems shut down, distracted, or defaulting to “I’m fine.”

#### **A few examples:**

- Ask: “What’s been the highlight of your week?”
- “What’s on your bridge?”
- “How’s your bridge doing?”
- Begin a meeting with a deep breath.
- Invite someone to place a hand on their heart.
- Say: “Can we pause for a moment before we continue?”

# THE T.O.P PRINCIPLE

## Focusing your energy where it helps most

Stress often increases when our attention stays on what we cannot control. It eases when we return to what we can. The T.O.P Principle is a simple way to sort situations so your energy goes where it makes the biggest difference.

### T. Totally within my control

These are things you can decide or change yourself.

You might notice this includes

- How you respond to a situation
- How you speak to yourself
- Taking a break
- Setting boundaries
- Asking for support
- Choosing your next small step

Focusing here increases clarity and confidence

### O. Outside of my control

These are things you cannot change directly.

This often includes

- Other people's reactions or decisions
- Past events
- Organisational or system-wide change
- Uncertainty in the wider world

Spending energy here can increase frustration and tension.

### P. Partially within my control

These sit between the two. You may not control the outcome, but you can influence parts of the situation.

Examples include:

- How you communicate your needs
- What you prepare for
- When and how you raise an issue
- How you manage your time within constraints

This is often where the most helpful action sits.

# THE T.O.P PRINCIPLE

When something feels stressful, pause and ask:

Is this totally within my control, partially within my control, or outside of my control?

Use the next exercise to practice.

Write down 3 situations/worries that you often think about or are currently challenged with:

1.

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2.

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3.

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If the problem is outside of your control, then it can help to refocus your energy on things you can influence.

How would you classify each of your 3 worries? Circle the respective letter.

1. **T** **O** **P**

2. **T** **O** **P**

3. **T** **O** **P**

If the problem is totally within my control or even, partially in your control, what are 3 small actions I could take to support myself this week?

# HEALTHY BOUNDARIES SURVEY: LEARN TO SAY 'NO'!

This survey will ask you a series of questions to unpack some of the behaviours that can often lead to 'Yes Stress'. The objective of this exercise is not to be compared against a scale or receive a score.

The exercise is not intended to cause alarm or cast judgment, but to empower you to say 'No' when you need to.

<b>ASSESS YOUR ABILITY TO ASSERT YOURSELF</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>DISAGREE</b>
I TAKE ON MORE THAN I CAN DEAL WITH	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I DO MORE TASKS FOR OTHERS THAN OTHERS DO FOR ME	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I FEEL PEOPLE TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ME	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I AGREE TO THINGS TO AVOID CONFRONTATION	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I FEEL STRESSED BECAUSE OF TASKS THAT OTHERS HAVE GIVEN ME	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I CANNOT TELL OTHERS WHEN THEIR BEHAVIOUR IS NOT ACCEPTABLE TO ME	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I CANNOT EXPRESS MY HONEST OPINION TO OTHERS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I CANNOT SAY 'NO' WITHOUT FEELING GUILTY OR ANXIOUS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I OFTEN DEPRIORITISE MY NEEDS TO FULFIL SOMEONE ELSE'S DEMANDS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>TOTAL</b>		

## MY PERSONAL ACTION PLAN

I promise myself I am going to decrease my 'YES-stress' by taking these actions:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Enter your commitments to log your actions and progress.

# FLAWED STRATEGIES WHEN DEALING WITH STRESS

When the general public were asked to complete the sentence

**“I’m So Stressed, I Need A....”**

The most popular answers are:

1. ALCOHOL
2. NICOTINE
3. REFINED SUGAR
4. CAFFEINE

All of these are stimulants and don't actually reduce stress. Alcohol is the exception, as it has a biphasic effect. In small amounts it can feel stimulating, while in larger amounts it acts as a depressant.

If you strip away the substance itself, what's left is often the part that helps. The pause. The break. The shift in focus.

For example, smoking doesn't relieve stress in itself. What can help is stepping away for a few minutes, getting some fresh air, and taking a proper break at the right time. That's what tends to improve both your wellbeing and your productivity.

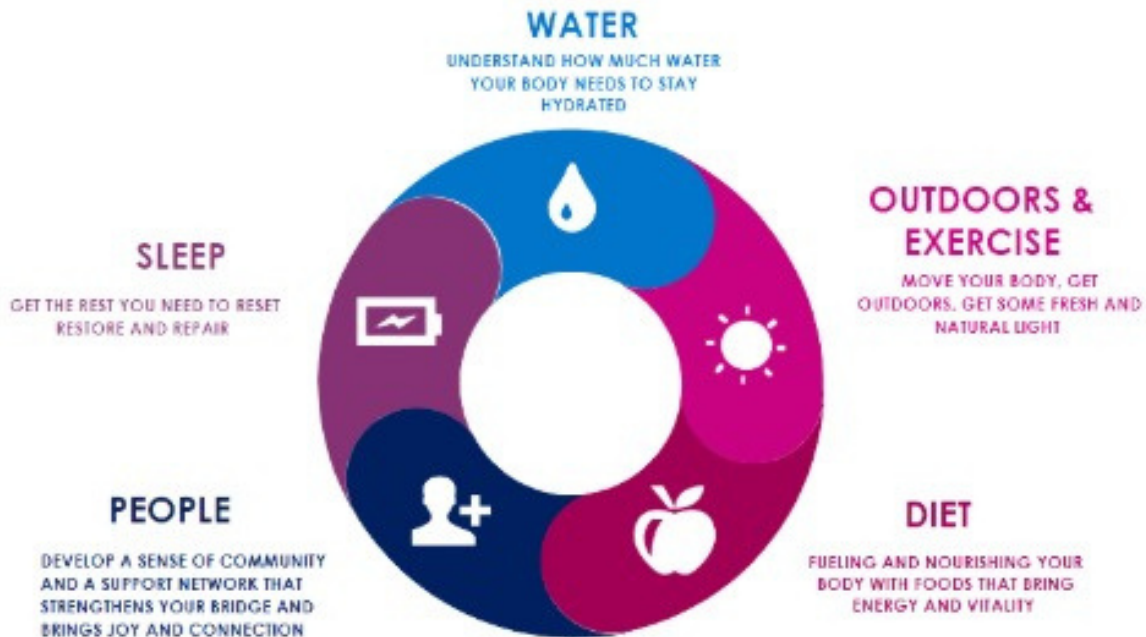
## STRESS & NUTRITION

Many of us fill our plates with food high in sugars, unhealthy fats, additives, and chemicals that offer little real benefit to the body, yet we still expect it to function well.

There's a strong link between nutrition and stress. What you eat can either support your body or make it harder to cope. A balanced diet helps strengthen your ability to handle stress and supports overall wellbeing.

Keeping your body supplied with the right nutrients matters. When you eat well, your body works more efficiently, and you're better equipped to deal with daily pressures. People with a balanced diet often feel more resilient and less affected by stress than those with poorer eating habits.

# THE FIVE DAILY ESSENTIALS



## WATER

Hydration affects your body, mood, and cognitive function. Aim to drink enough so that you rarely feel thirsty.

## OUTDOORS AND EXERCISE

Getting natural light into your eyes soon after waking can lift your mood, support your immune system, improve focus during the day, and help you sleep better at night. Regular movement adds to these benefits and keeps your body functioning well.

## DIET

A diet rich in fresh, natural foods can lower the risk of chronic conditions such as cancer, obesity, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. When you eat well, you tend to feel better, too.

## PEOPLE

We are social beings. Some of us enjoy being at the centre of things, others prefer the edges, and some just like knowing support is there when needed. Connection matters, whatever it looks like for you.

## SLEEP

Sleep plays a huge role in our physical, mental, and emotional health. It's when the body restores, repairs, and processes the day.

# LIFESTYLE BALANCE EXERCISE

Knowledge is power...only if you apply it or take action This is about lifestyle balance; as a starting point, think about the different areas of your life and give them a score.

Rate on a scale: Zero being poor, 10 being Excellent

## HOW DO YOU RATE YOURSELF OUT OF 10 ON THE FOLLOWING SKILLS/ STATEMENTS?

### WATER

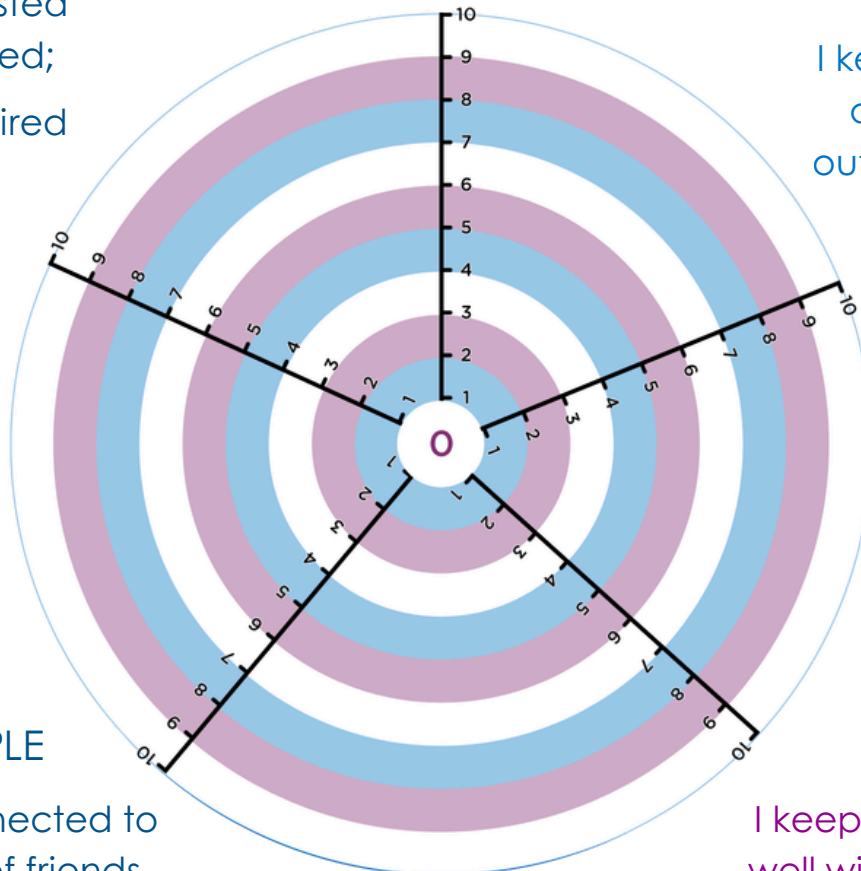
I drink enough to keep  
my mind and body  
sharp

### SLEEP

I am fully rested  
and refreshed;  
I rarely feel tired

### OUTDOORS & EXERCISE

I keep my body  
active: I am  
outside for long  
periods



### PEOPLE

I keep connected to  
a variety of friends  
and family that I can  
rely on and who can  
rely on me

### DIET

I keep my body fed  
well with lots of fresh  
food

## FOOD, WATER AND MOVEMENT

Our bodies are biological machines that work best when we treat them well, consistently. Strangely, many of us take better care of a pet than we do of ourselves. We wouldn't let a dog or cat go without water, regular meals, movement, or attention. Yet it's easy to find ourselves dehydrated, eating poorly, and stuck in a routine that lacks energy and variety.

Question	Yes (Y)	No (N)
You never feel thirsty?	Y	N
Do you drink more than 2 litres of water a day?	Y	N
Do you have a water bottle that you have with you?	Y	N
Do you stop to eat three regular meals a day?	Y	N
Do you have a healthy balanced diet?	Y	N
Do you eat breakfast?	Y	N
Do you eat at least five portions of fruit & vegetables per day?	Y	N
Do you eat red meat less than twice per week?	Y	N
Do you eat takeaway food less than once per week?	Y	N
Do you eat freshly prepared meals more than ready meals?	Y	N
Do you stop to eat lunch away from work or interruptions?	Y	N
Do you drink less than three cups of caffeinated drinks per day?	Y	N
Do you drink less than 1 unit of alcohol per day?	Y	N
Is your urine a very pale or clear colour?	Y	N
Do you get outside for at least 45 minutes a day?	Y	N
Do you get your 10,000 steps per day?	Y	N
Do you exercise to the point of perspiration at least three times per week?	Y	N
Do you do something for fun, just for you, at least once a week?	Y	N
Do you check in with people who make you feel good at least 3 times a week?	Y	N
<b>TOTAL</b>		

## SLEEP

Sleep is the rockstar of wellbeing, yet it's often overlooked. We tend to push it aside because of work or personal pressures, but that choice can ripple into our physical, mental, and emotional health.

This short survey is designed to help you reflect on your habits and spot the behaviours that may be affecting your sleep.

Question	Agree (Y)	Disagree (N)
I keep a consistent bedtime at least four times a week	Y	N
I relax before my bedtime	Y	N
I spend the last 45–60 minutes of my day free from TV, phone, or screens	Y	N
The bedroom is clear of TVs, PCs, and mobiles	Y	N
The bedroom is dark	Y	N
I have a process I follow to wind down before bed	Y	N
I can recognise when something is bothering me and process the day	Y	N
I have a quiet and calm mind when trying to fall asleep	Y	N
I find it easy to fall asleep and stay asleep	Y	N
I can fall back to sleep easily if I wake during the night	Y	N
I get an average of 7–8 hours of sleep at least four times a week	Y	N
I dream often	Y	N
I can wake up naturally without an alarm without stress or disruption	Y	N
I have a consistent wake-up time (within 60 minutes), even on weekends	Y	N
My sleep is restful; I wake feeling refreshed at least four times a week	Y	N
<b>TOTAL</b>		

# WHAT COULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

## Water

Water is essential for maintaining optimal brain and cognitive function. From a neuroscience perspective, the brain is highly dependent on water to regulate a range of physiological processes, including blood flow, oxygenation, and waste removal. Even mild dehydration can impair cognitive performance, attention, and memory. Adequate hydration is crucial for promoting optimal brain health, preventing cognitive decline, and reducing the risk of age-related brain diseases. Prioritising regular water intake throughout the day is crucial for maintaining overall health and optimal brain functioning.

1. Carry a reusable water bottle with you throughout the day, and sip on it regularly.
2. Set a goal for how much water you want to drink each day, and track your progress with a water tracking app or journal.
3. Infuse your water with flavour by adding slices of fruit, vegetables, or herbs.
4. Drink a glass of water first thing in the morning to kick-start your hydration for the day.
5. Sip on water before, during, and after exercise to stay hydrated.
6. Drink water instead of sugary drinks, such as soda or sports drinks, to reduce your calorie intake.
7. Choose water instead of alcoholic beverages when you're out at a social event.
8. Keep a glass or bottle of water on your desk or in your workspace to remind you to drink throughout the day.
9. Drink a glass of water before each meal to help you feel fuller and eat less.
10. Choose sparkling water or club soda as a hydrating and low-calorie alternative to soda.
11. Drink water with a slice of lemon or lime to add flavour and increase your vitamin C intake.
12. Take a water bottle with you when you travel, and fill it up at water fountains or restaurants.
13. Drink water when you feel hungry between meals, as thirst can often be mistaken for hunger.

# WHAT COULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

## OUTDOORS & EXERCISE

Outdoor light and exercise are crucial for maintaining optimal brain and cognitive function. From a neuroscience perspective, exposure to natural light helps regulate the body's internal clock and circadian rhythm, promoting healthy sleep-wake cycles and regulating hormone levels. Exercise is essential for promoting neuroplasticity, increasing blood flow to the brain, and promoting the growth of new neurons and neural connections. Regular outdoor exercise also helps reduce stress and improve mood, which can positively impact brain function. Prioritising regular outdoor exercise and exposure to natural light is crucial for maintaining overall health and optimal brain functioning.

1. Set a goal for how much physical activity you want to achieve each day, and track your progress with a fitness tracker or journal.
2. Incorporate more movement into your daily routine, such as taking the stairs instead of the lift or parking farther away.
3. Try a new form of exercise, such as yoga, Pilates, or dancing, to keep things interesting and challenge your body.
4. Incorporate strength training exercises into your routine to improve muscle tone and overall fitness.
5. Take frequent breaks from sitting or standing for long periods, and move around to stretch and increase blood flow.
6. Walk or cycle instead of driving when possible to boost daily activity.
7. Practice good posture throughout the day to reduce strain on your muscles and joints.
8. Stretch regularly to improve flexibility and help prevent injury.
9. Take a fitness class, such as aerobics, Zumba, or kickboxing, to keep workouts fun and engaging.
10. Use resistance bands or weights to add intensity and build strength.
11. Get outside and enjoy nature, whether it's walking, cycling, or gardening.
12. Take a dance class, such as ballroom or salsa, to improve coordination, balance, and agility.
13. Use a stability ball instead of a chair at your desk to improve posture and engage your core muscles.

# WHAT COULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

## DIET

Diet plays a crucial role in our health and wellbeing, with our food choices directly impacting our brain and cognitive function. From a neuroscience perspective, the nutrients we consume are essential for maintaining healthy brain cells and neural connections, supporting memory, attention, and mood. A healthy diet that is rich in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and omega-3 fatty acids has been linked to a reduced risk of cognitive decline and age-related diseases, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. On the other hand, an unhealthy diet that is high in sugar, saturated fats, and processed foods has been associated with impaired cognitive function, depression, and anxiety. Prioritising a healthy diet is crucial for promoting optimal brain health and cognitive function.

1. Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables every day. Aim for at least five servings.
2. Choose whole-grain foods over refined grains, as they are higher in fibre, vitamins, and minerals.
3. Limit your intake of processed foods, which are often high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats.
4. Choose lean sources of protein, such as chicken, fish, beans, and legumes.
5. Include healthy fats in your diet, such as olive oil, avocado, nuts, and seeds.
6. Add sources of omega-3 fatty acids, such as oily fish and flaxseed.
7. Use herbs and spices to add flavour instead of relying on salt.
8. Choose whole, fresh foods over processed options whenever possible.
9. Plan your meals in advance so you have healthy choices ready.
10. Eat slowly and pay attention to your hunger and fullness cues.
11. Try to eat at regular intervals to keep your energy and blood sugar steady.
12. Limit high-calorie, low-nutrient foods like sweets and crisps.
13. Use a food scale or measuring cups if needed to support portion control.
14. Snack on healthier options such as fruit, vegetables with hummus, or nuts.
15. Cut back on high-sugar foods like desserts and sweetened cereals.

# WHAT COULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

## PEOPLE

Staying connected to people is critical for maintaining optimal brain and cognitive function. From a neuroscience perspective, social interaction and connection are essential for promoting neuroplasticity, reducing cognitive decline, and improving mental health. The brain is highly responsive to social cues, and social interaction has been shown to stimulate the growth of new neurons and neural connections. Conversely, social isolation and loneliness have been linked to increased risk of cognitive decline, depression, and anxiety. Prioritising social interaction and staying connected to people is crucial for maintaining overall health and optimal brain functioning.

1. Join a local group that shares your interests to meet new people and connect over shared passions.
2. Volunteer for a cause you care about. It's a meaningful way to give back and meet others.
3. Attend local events such as festivals, concerts, or fairs.
4. Take a class or workshop in something that interests you.
5. Reach out to old friends you've lost touch with and reconnect.
6. Host a themed dinner or potluck with friends or neighbours.
7. Use social media to stay in touch with friends and family who live far away.
8. Attend networking or professional events to meet people in your field.
9. Join a sports team or fitness group to connect with others who enjoy similar activities.
10. Take a course, such as cooking or a language class, to learn and meet new people.
11. Join online forums or communities related to your interests.
12. Host a game night or movie night with friends or family.
13. Attend a book club or literary event to meet other readers.
14. Join a hobby group, such as photography or knitting, to connect with like-minded people.

# WHAT COULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

## SLEEP

Sleep is a vital aspect of our health, affecting both our mental and physical wellbeing. From a neuroscience perspective, sleep is critical for brain functions such as memory, learning, and cognitive performance. During sleep, the brain consolidates and organises newly acquired information, leading to improved learning and retention. Furthermore, sleep is essential for the restoration and repair of neurons and other brain cells, promoting optimal brain health and functioning. Lack of sleep has been linked to a range of negative health outcomes, including increased risk of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and mood disorders.

1. Stick to a consistent sleep schedule by going to bed and waking up at the same time each day.
2. Create a relaxing bedtime routine, such as reading, a warm bath, or calming music.
3. Avoid caffeine and alcohol close to bedtime, as they can disrupt sleep.
4. Exercise regularly, but avoid strenuous activity close to bedtime as it can increase alertness.
5. Create a comfortable sleep environment with a supportive mattress, good pillows, and a cool, dark, quiet room.
6. Avoid using screens for at least an hour before bed.
7. Practice relaxation techniques to help you wind down.
8. Avoid large meals close to bedtime.
9. Use blackout curtains or an eye mask to keep the room dark.
10. Keep your bedroom cool, ideally between 15–19°C.
11. Avoid napping for more than 20 minutes during the day.
12. Avoid watching TV or using devices in bed.
13. Use white noise if needed to block out background sounds.
14. Avoid drinking large amounts of fluids before bed to prevent waking during the night.

# MY 30 DAY ACTION PLAN

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER...ONLY IF YOU APPLY IT OR TAKE ACTION.

THIS IS ABOUT LIFESTYLE BALANCE;

HOW DID YOU DO? WHAT ARE YOU DOING WELL? WHAT COULD NEED IMPROVEMENT?

BUILD YOUR PERSONAL RESILIENCE.

Finding meaningful ways to engage your brain and occupy your time can help alleviate the distress and irritability that poor wellbeing brings.

The coping mechanisms that will work best for you will have a lot to do with your personal situation

FOR EXAMPLE: "IF I AM NOT FEELING OKAY, I WILL REACH OUT TO SOMEONE IN MY SUPPORT NETWORK". "I WILL GET OUT EVERY DAY IN THE FRESH AIR, WHATEVER THE WEATHER" "I WILL GO TO BED 30 MINUTES EARLIER

ACTION POINT 1: (WATER): I WILL...

ACTION POINT 2: (OUTDOORS & EXERCISE) I WILL...

ACTION POINT 3: (DIET) I WILL...

ACTION POINT 4:(PEOPLE): I WILL...

# PERSONAL REFLECTION

When change happens, we often react before we've had time to think. Noticing that reaction is the first step.

When you feel that response, what is one small action that helps you regain a sense of control?

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Now take a moment to reflect more broadly:

What situations during change do you find most challenging?

How do you usually respond?

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What strengths or skills have helped you adapt in the past?

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Think of a change you handled well.

What mindset, support, or actions made the difference?

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# PERSONAL REFLECTION

How could you apply those same strengths to what you're facing now?

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Where might you benefit from more support or resources?

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How capable do you feel of adapting to new situations right now?

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# 30 DAY CHALLENGE

JOIN THE #BETHECHANGE MOVEMENT! TRY ONE OF THESE EVERY DAY FOR 30 DAYS AND NOTICE HOW MUCH IT HELPS YOUR STRESS

Smile at a stranger today	List three things you love	Celebrate someone else's achievement	Hold a door for someone	Take a guilt-free break
Compliment a friend	One thing you like about yourself	Send a thank-you message	Ask someone how they're feeling	Compliment a stranger
Offer help without being asked	Write down one personal win	Reach out to an old friend	Do one act of generosity	Pause, take three deep breaths
Notice something beautiful around you	Journal one thing you learned	Take five minutes to meditate	Express gratitude to a colleague, friend or family	Give a genuine smile today
Say "no" to one stressor	Try one new healthy habit	Listen fully to someone today	Ask for help	Offer encouragement without comparison
Spread a kind word	Reflect on one small success	Do one random act of kindness	Do one act of Self-care	Ask "what can I do next?"

## SUPPORT & RESOURCES

**SAMARITANS:** <https://www.samaritans.org> provides 24/7 support to those experiencing mental health issues. Call 116 123

**HUB OF HOPE:** [www.hubofhope.co.uk](http://www.hubofhope.co.uk)

**BEFRIENDERS WORLDWIDE –** <https://www.befrienders.org>

**CRISIS TEXT LINE:** [www.crisistextline.org](http://www.crisistextline.org)

Offers 24/7 text-based support in the US, UK, Canada and Ireland

**MIND:** Provides everyday support to those experiencing mental health issues.  
Call **0300 123 3393**

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**Employee Assistance Programme:** Free 24hr confidential employee helpline with health\_assured **0800 028 0199**

**PAM Occupational Health:** Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm **01925 227000**

**Firefighters Charity:** 24/7 Crisis Line **0300 373 0896**

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**The Stress Management Society:** [www.stress.org.uk](http://www.stress.org.uk)

The Society can help you understand stress, build resilience, and find balance. Through practical tools, resources, newsletters, free webinars, workshops, and everyday tips, we support you in taking small steps that make a big difference to your mental health and wellbeing.

# ABOUT INTERNATIONAL WELLBEING INSIGHTS

Big ideas, inspiring stories, robust ethics and strong principles and a values driven approach have been at the heart of our organisation since our inception.

We believe that wellbeing isn't just a perk, it's the foundation of a thriving, high-performing, and sustainable workplace. Our mission is simple but powerful: to empower organisations and individuals to take control of their wellbeing, creating cultures where people don't just survive but truly thrive.

We've been at the forefront of workplace wellbeing since 2003, helping organisations worldwide build happier, healthier, and more resilient teams. But we're not here to tick boxes or promote one-off initiatives, we're here to drive meaningful, lasting change.

Our mission is to maximise physical, mental, emotional and social health as well as improve relationships, performance, productivity, creativity, morale, recruitment and retention by creating a resilient workforce and equipping them to cope with change and adversity.

**For more information or to book a workshop or a free no-obligation consultation, see [www.wellbeing.work](http://www.wellbeing.work) or call +44 (0) 203 142 8659 or email [info@stress.org.uk](mailto:info@stress.org.uk)**





# NOTES

A large, empty rectangular area defined by a dashed purple border, intended for taking notes.



We provide a range of services across the UK and internationally.  
We are always happy to discuss how we can support you.

We look forward to supporting your wellbeing journey.

Find Us Here:  
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Visit Us On:  
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We have supported many organisations, including:

