

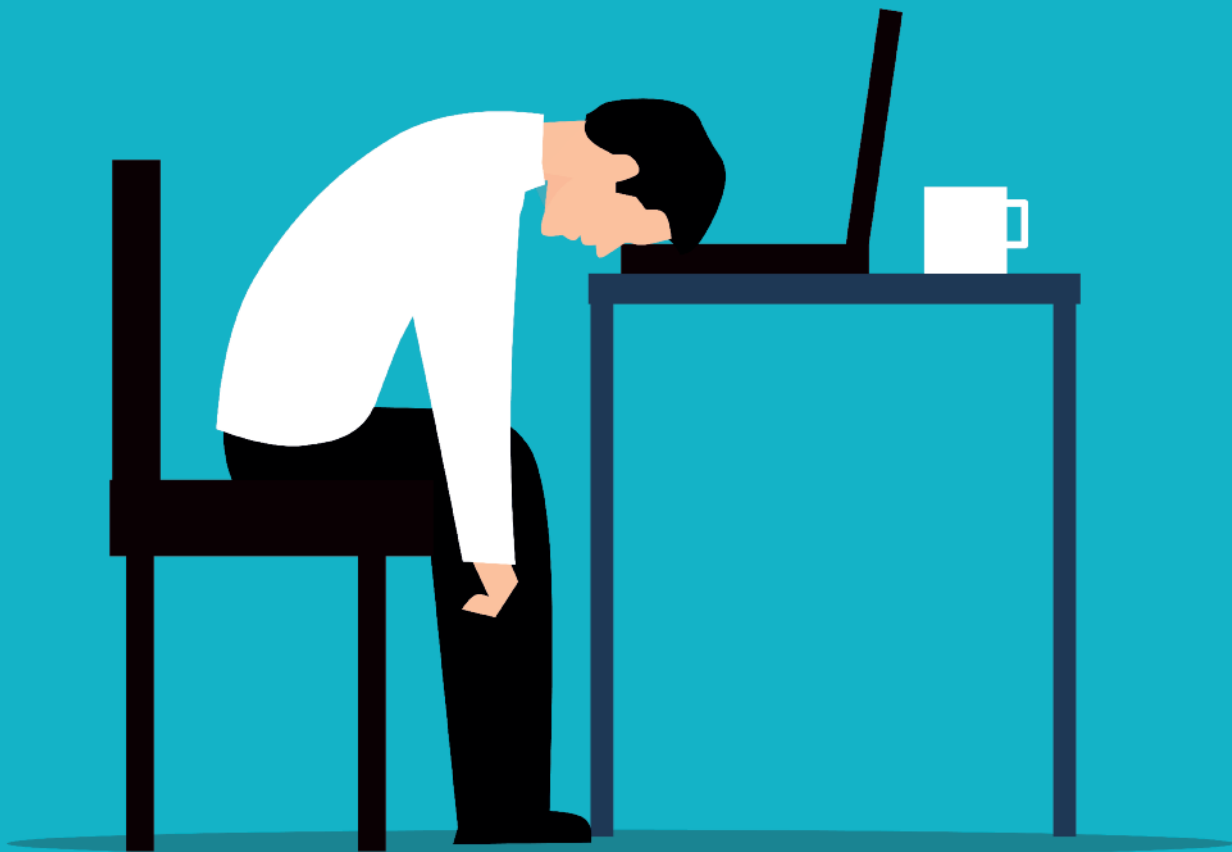


Illustration by Mohamed Hassan via Pixabay.

HOW TO IDENTIFY AND COPE WITH STRESS

THE FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY

Experiencing stressful situations is nothing new for the rescue community and coping with these feelings of stress and anxiety in our everyday lives may, at times, feel overwhelming. But there are some simple techniques you can try to not only relax your body, but your mind too. Here, Psychological Services Lead for the Fire Fighters Charity, **Jane Rosso**, shares some advice for coping with stress.

First of all, if you are feeling stressed, know that this is perfectly normal. It's worth noting that some stress can be good for us. It can protect us from threats, help us escape from danger and enhance our performance by temporarily changing our physiology.

But while these physiological changes are excellent in the short term, if we feel continually stressed it can upset our health and wellbeing, creating pressure on our minds, bodies and relationships that previously weren't there.

Stress manifests differently in all of us. Our perception of stressful events is unique to us as individuals, so our reactions can be varied. Common physical symptoms include headaches or dizziness, muscle

tension, stomach problems, chest pain or increased heartbeat and sexual problems. Meanwhile, mental symptoms can include difficulty concentrating, struggling to make decisions, feeling overwhelmed, worrying, or being forgetful. It can also affect our behaviour, making us snappy or irritable, unable to sleep, overeat (remember stressed is desserts spelt backwards) avoiding places or people, or drinking or smoking more.

The NHS has a fantastic mood self-assessment (<https://tinyurl.com/yc5b8bke>), which may help you understand how you or a member of your household has been feeling recently.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT STRESS?

The good news is we can take proactive steps to change how we react to things beyond our control, reducing our stress levels and regaining balance. Here are a few tips to help.

1 Accept the unchangeables: We cannot change the unpredictability of life — particularly after the last eighteen months — so accept what you cannot change and try to look forward.

2 Control the controllables: Focus your efforts into areas you can influence by looking at what you can do instead of

what you can't. You can't control challenges at work, but you can be empathetic and considerate to people and you can choose to maintain a routine, for the benefit of your physical and mental health.

3 Nourish your relationships: Start spending quality time with those closest to you. Just because we're now able to meet face-to-face, you can still continue to use video apps to chat together too if that's easier. And be creative in the activities you do together.

4 Talk to your children: Stress isn't exclusive to adults and many children will be feeling stressed or upset. Take the time to chat to the younger members of your family.

5 Believe in yourself: Stress affects our self-esteem and likes to tell us we aren't good enough. But this isn't true, you are good enough! Focus on your strengths and skills. Ask yourself what you're good at, we bet it's more than you think. Consider how you could use some of the special things that make you you. Brush the dust off old parts of yourself you may have forgotten.

6 Strive for balance: Be kind to yourself. It's okay to take some time out and give yourself a break by focusing on your mind, body and soul. Exercise either at home or out and about, find yoga, Pilates or Tai Chi tutorials online, get out into your garden or grow herbs on a windowsill, play music you love, be creative, and take time to notice the good things in your life.

7 Laugh: Laughter is very good for alleviating stress. Watch a funny film or comedy show, listen to a funny podcast, or even join an online laughter yoga group. Phone the person who makes you laugh more than anyone else in the world and enjoy each other's company.

8 Take on a challenge: Learn a new hobby or pick up an old one. Is there something you've always wanted to do but never found the time to? Whatever sparks your interest, take this opportunity to learn and grow. 🌱



TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE CHARITY, GO TO [FIREFIGHTERSCHARITY.ORG.UK](https://firefighterscharity.org.uk)

Both in-house and online, physical and psychological, rehabilitation programmes with **The Fire Fighters Charity** are accessible to mountain and cave rescue team members and their families, via the **Rescue Benevolent Fund**. Email Judy Whiteside: secretary@rescuebenevolent.fund for details and a confidential chat.