



British Heart
Foundation

10 MINUTES TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE Take time out



**FIGHT
FOR EVERY
HEARTBEAT**

bhf.org.uk

Stressed out?

Stress is a word people use for the feeling they get when everything seems too much.

You might start feeling stressed if you have too much to do, if other people are asking a lot of you, or you're having to deal with things you can't control.

To help keep your heart healthy, you need to take care of your body and your mind.

Remember you're in control – and by taking ten minutes every day to make some small changes, you could change your life.

How does stress affect your heart?

Being stressed can mean you do things which can be bad for your heart health, like:

- smoking
- drinking too much alcohol
- eating unhealthy foods that are high in saturated fat and salt (eating too much of these foods can cause you to gain weight and can be bad for your **blood pressure** and **cholesterol** levels).

If you smoke, have high blood pressure, have high cholesterol or are overweight, you are more likely to get **coronary heart disease**, which means you might get **angina** or have a **heart attack**.

Drinking too much can cause problems with your heart rhythm, high blood pressure and damage your heart muscle.

Are you stressed?

When you're stressed, your body and mind will tell you. Everyone reacts differently.

If you're stressed

You might have...

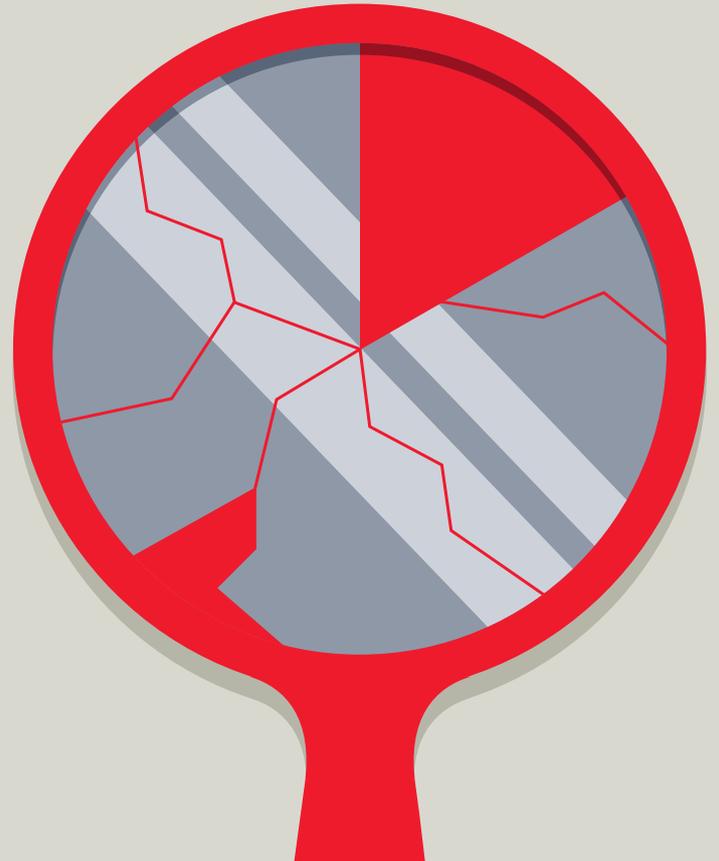
- problems sleeping
- tight knotty feelings in your stomach
- lost your appetite for food, fun, or sex

You might feel...

- fearful or worried
- hopeless
- alone

You might find..

- it's difficult to concentrate
- it's hard to make decisions
- you avoid relationships or going out and about
- you're eating, drinking, or smoking more to make you feel better.



What makes you stressed?

Most of us have some stress in our lives.
The most common causes of stress are:

- work
- money problems
- relationships – either between two people or your family
- major life events like getting married, divorce, unemployment, or the loss or illness of someone you love
- time pressure
- loneliness

Thinking about which areas of your life are most stressful is the first step to finding ways to cope with them.

Which parts of your life make you stressed?



What can you do about stress?

Avoid things that make you stressed

For example, if you're having family problems, try and work the problem out by talking things through with those close to you, before they become more of a problem.

Change how you react to stressful situations

If you can't avoid the things that make you stressed, try changing your attitude towards them. Take a look at the next page for some hints and tips.

Make changes to help you feel less stressed

Exercising, eating well and getting plenty of rest can all help you to feel less stressed. For more information about making these changes, go to [bhf.org.uk/ten](https://www.bhf.org.uk/ten)

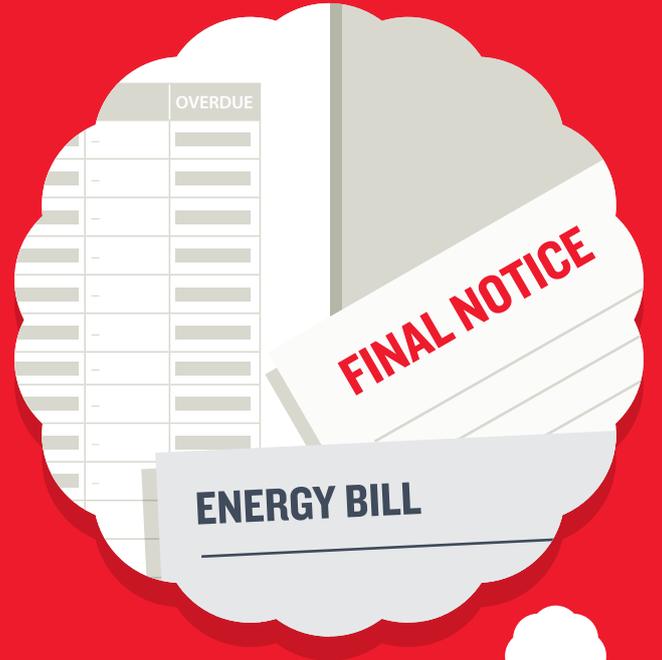


Challenging stressful thoughts

If you feel stressed and tense, or you feel frustrated, angry or depressed, take a step back.

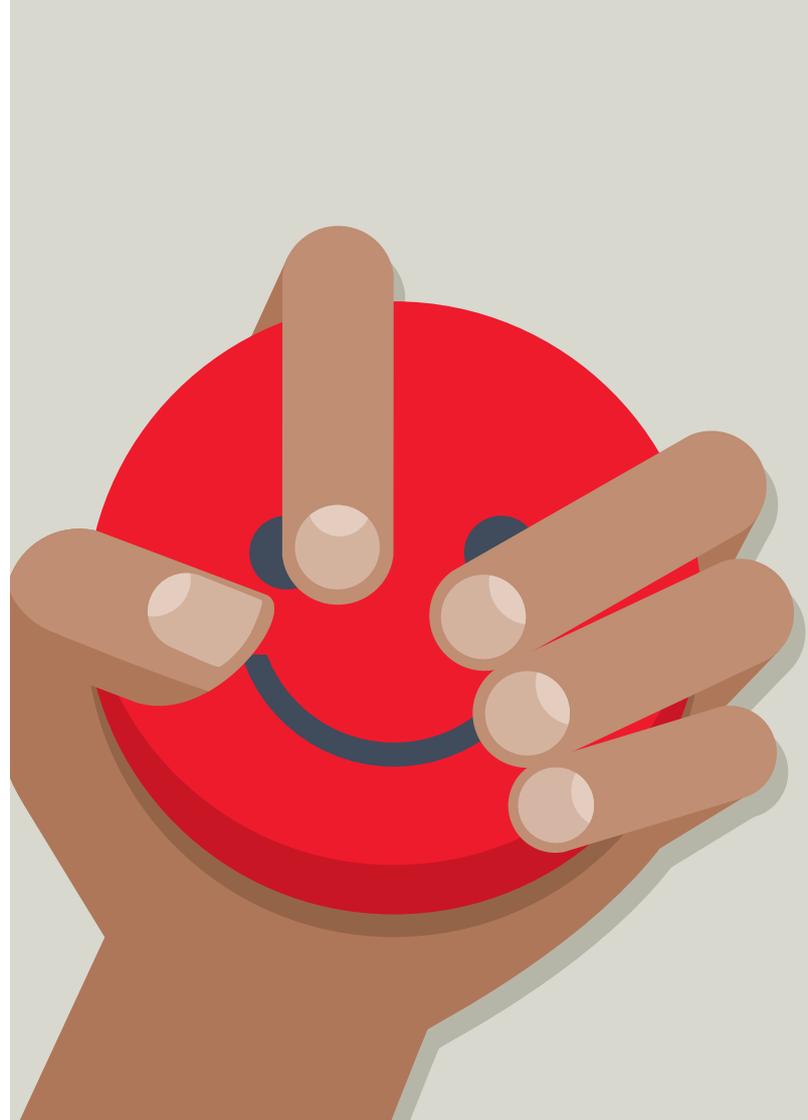
Give yourself some space, **remind** yourself that getting stressed won't help, and **take** a couple of minutes to think about what you can do to change your situation.

If you have negative thoughts going through your mind – like 'I can't cope', or 'I'm useless' – try challenging them with more positive thoughts, like 'I know I will get through this in time' or 'there are lots of things I am good at'.



Take ten: Try these quick relaxation exercises

- Take one deep breath in, hold it, and then tell yourself to let go as you breathe out through your mouth. Breathe naturally for a while, and then repeat the deep breath and 'letting go' with your outward breath.
- Tense up and then relax your hand, foot or stomach. When you let go, try to let all the extra tension slip away. Do the same for other parts of your body. If you're out and about, you can use a stress ball to do this with your hands.



Time for more help?

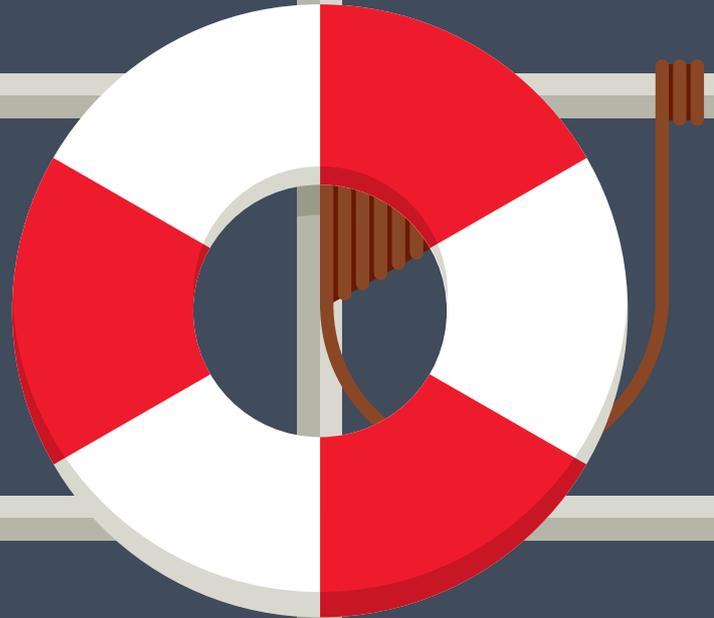
It's better to ask for help rather than struggling to cope.

You should ask for help if:

- you feel stressed a lot of the time.
- stress means you're not coping well with your life or relationships.
- stress is stopping you doing your work as well as you used to.
- you think you might have depression. (Stress and depression are sometimes linked, but stress doesn't always lead to depression, and stress is not the only cause of depression.)
- you are drinking too much or are using drugs to cope with stress.
- a friend or your partner asks you to get help.

Who should I ask for help?

The first thing to do is to talk to your doctor. They may be able to help, or they may arrange for you to see another health professional.



Maureen's success story

"I used to be a work-a-holic. I would work really long hours and never be able to switch off.

I had a heart attack in March 2004. After that, I knew I had to deal with the stress.

I went through different things – I listened to music, I did a number of relaxation techniques – but within 30 seconds I would start to get myself in a state about all the things on my to-do list.

I found the best thing is to go for walks outside. It was just good to get out, get some fresh air, and get away from things for a bit.

This has really made a difference, and things that felt big and stressful don't anymore."

Find out more about how Maureen changed her life at [bhf.org.uk/ten](https://www.bhf.org.uk/ten)



Next steps

If you'd like to find out more about coping with stress, download and print an A4 stress-buster planner, or order the other booklets in this series, go online to [bhf.org.uk/ten](https://www.bhf.org.uk/ten)

To speak to someone about anything heart-related, call our Heart Helpline on 0300 330 3311. Phone lines are open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday at a similar cost to 01 or 02 numbers.

Join us in the fight for every heartbeat

For 50 years the British Heart Foundation has been funding life-saving heart research.

From babies with heart problems to the mums, dads and grandparents who survive a heart attack, so many people need our help.

But we need your support to continue the fight against heart disease. Visit [bhf.org.uk](https://www.bhf.org.uk) to make a donation or find out more.



**10 MINUTES TO
CHANGE YOUR LIFE**
Your change challenge



British Heart
Foundation

Coronary heart disease is the UK's single biggest killer.

For over 50 years we've pioneered research that's transformed the lives of people living with heart and circulatory conditions. Our work has been central to the discoveries of vital treatments that are changing the fight against heart disease.

But so many people still need our help.

From babies born with life-threatening heart problems to the many Mums, Dads and Grandparents who survive a heart attack and endure the daily battles of heart failure.

Join our fight for every heartbeat in the UK. Every pound raised, minute of your time and donation to our shops will help make a difference to people's lives.

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**10 MINUTES TO
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Your challenge



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Take time out

Your 10 minute challenge

Take ten minutes to plan some stress-busting activities into next week

- think about the week ahead
- think through what you'll be doing and the likely 'danger spots' for stressful situations
- plan the stress-busting activities that you are going to build into your week.

Day	Danger spots	Stress busting activity
e.g	Anna's birthday party	Avoid stress: Do shopping tomorrow. Change reaction: relaxation exercise before party
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

At the end of the week, look back over what you did and answer these questions.

What worked?

What can you do in future to help reduce stress?

What didn't work?