

Ten top stress-busting tips for Mental Health Awareness Week (14-20 May 2018)

Having trouble sleeping? Dread getting out of bed and going to work? If you said 'yes' to either of these questions you could be going through work-related stress – and you wouldn't be alone.

Stress is an increasingly common problem in modern life, affecting more than half a million workers in 2016/17*.

Now, NHS South Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and NHS Vale Royal CCG are urging us to pause for thought during Mental Health Awareness Week (14-20 May), focusing on stress and what you can do to combat it.

Lesley Cleworth, lead for mental health commissioning at the CCGs, said: "Stress is one of the biggest drivers in the rise of mental health problems such as depression and suicidal thoughts, as well as physical health problems like muscle pain, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity and even some cancers.

"This is an awareness week that encourages us all to take stock of how we're feeling inside, to talk to a friend or a loved one about any worries and to start making lifestyle changes that will help to reduce stress levels and build resilience for the future.

"For many people, self-help can bring rapid improvements. Others will need professional help and, if that's the case, it's important to make an appointment with your GP. Don't let high stress levels become normal for you."

Here are the top ten steps to help manage your stress levels:

Get active

Taking exercise, even a brisk half hour walk in the fresh air, clears your thoughts, lifts your mood and encourages healthy sleep.

Take control

Most problems have a solution. Try to find it and you'll feel less vulnerable.

Connect with people

Spend time with friends and family to catch up on the news, relax and have some fun together. They will probably offer a listening ear and maybe some practical help, too.

Take some 'me time'

Put a regular slot in your diary if you need to, and do something that you really enjoy.

Challenge yourself

Set yourself a new goal. Working to learn a new language or master a skill will build your confidence.

Avoid unhealthy habits

Comfort eating, smoking and drinking too much are all avoidance tactics that stop you dealing with your stress, contribute to making it worse and bring more health problems.

Help others

It makes you feel good about yourself and builds your social network. Even small things like offering to make coffees for your team can bring positive changes in your mood, especially if you do them often enough.

Work smarter, not harder

Learn to prioritise and focus on the tasks that will make the most difference.

Try to think positive

As a start, try writing down three good things that happened, at the end of each day. Even if it's just avoiding a traffic jam, having something nice for tea, and sharing a joke with a friend.

Accept that you can't change some things

This will leave you free to focus on the things that you can influence.

Lesley Cleworth added: "Workplace stress is a growing problem and it's one that people often don't talk about because they are worried that their boss or their colleagues will think they can't cope with their job.

"That's simply not the case. Dealing with the stress before it gets worse will ensure that you can cope with your job long-term. It'll also teach you some coping strategies for dealing with stresses and strains that may come up in other areas of your life from time to time."

You can help to look after your mental health with 'You in Mind', an online 'one stop shop' for advice when you need it at www.youinmind.org

Help is also available at your fingertips thanks to the CCGs' Self Help Guides App. To download the app, search for South Cheshire CCG & Vale Royal CCG Self Help Guides in the Apple App Store or Google Play or visit the website: www.selfhelpguides.ntw.nhs.uk/cheshirevale

You can find information about Mental Health Awareness Week on the Mental Health Foundation's website:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/mental-health-awareness-week>