

PEACE OF MIND

To mark Stress Awareness Month, Southampton-based life coach and speaker **Carolyn Bennett** explains how you can go from stressed, to blessed



Life seems to have become increasingly more demanding as we have more things on our to do list and choices to make than ever before. It feels like much of the time, we're spending our energy on surviving day to day and our deepest wish is to feel a sense of peace within. Many of us are fatigued with our relentless schedules and people to please that it leaves us feeling stressed and undernourished. Many of us are not aware of our stress threshold or indeed how to manage it and can often experience anxiety, overwhelm and the slightest thing may tip us over the edge. Life is full of ups and downs and unfortunately things don't always go the way we want them to. When we feel low, everyday challenges that we would normally take in our stride tend to have more of an impact and can feel overwhelming.

You can't pour from an empty cup – take care of yourself first
We may believe that we are being selfish if we take time out to look after our own needs. However, it is worth considering that if we are stressed, we are more likely to be impatient and exhausted which means those we love tend to get the tired and wrung out part of us. The best gift we can give those we love is the patient and positive part of us and this can only come from talking a little time off the treadmill to administer some self-care. Filling up your cup so that you have plenty to pour others.

Andrea, 37, a general manager in aviation was "anxious" for years before she realised what was causing her to feel uptight and fatigued. "Everything just got on top of me," she says. "I had no time to do things for myself. 'Pressured' is a good word for it. I felt as though I had nothing left to give myself when I had taken care of everything else."

Millions of people in the UK are experiencing high levels of stress just like Andrea and it is noticeably damaging our health, affecting our relationships and making life feel like a game of battle of the fittest. If you are feeling stressed or anxious take heart, there are things you can do to live a calmer life.



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Time management

A great way to reduce stress is to plan ahead and manage your time. Learning to prioritise tasks instead of giving everything equal importance and setting daily goals can help to reduce stress significantly.

Relaxation

Take regular breathing breaks throughout the day. Simple exercises like deep breathing can activate your parasympathetic nervous system which controls the relaxation response.



Learn to say no

Do you find yourself taking on more than you can handle and juggling many responsibilities? This can leave you feeling worn out and put upon. Be more selective about what you take on and learn to say no to things that will unnecessarily add to your load. We all know that saying no isn't particularly easy especially if it is not something you're used to doing. Remember that we are all entitled to a boundary. You can still be a good person with a kind heart and still say no every once in a while.

It's good to talk

Having a good old-fashioned chat can significantly reduce stress especially if you have a friend or family member that is happy to simply sit and listen. You feel more supported and potentially come up with solutions that may help as a result.

Take time out

Start to recognise the physical signs your body gives when you are reaching your stress threshold and be sure to take time out. Have a relaxing bath, go for a walk, listen to some soothing music or read a book.

Reset your nervous system and activate the relaxation response with this quick and easy breathing technique. Do this for a few minutes throughout the day to manage your stress threshold.

- Breathe in through your nose for the count to five.
- Hold for the count of five.
- Breathe out through your mouth for the count of five. ①

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