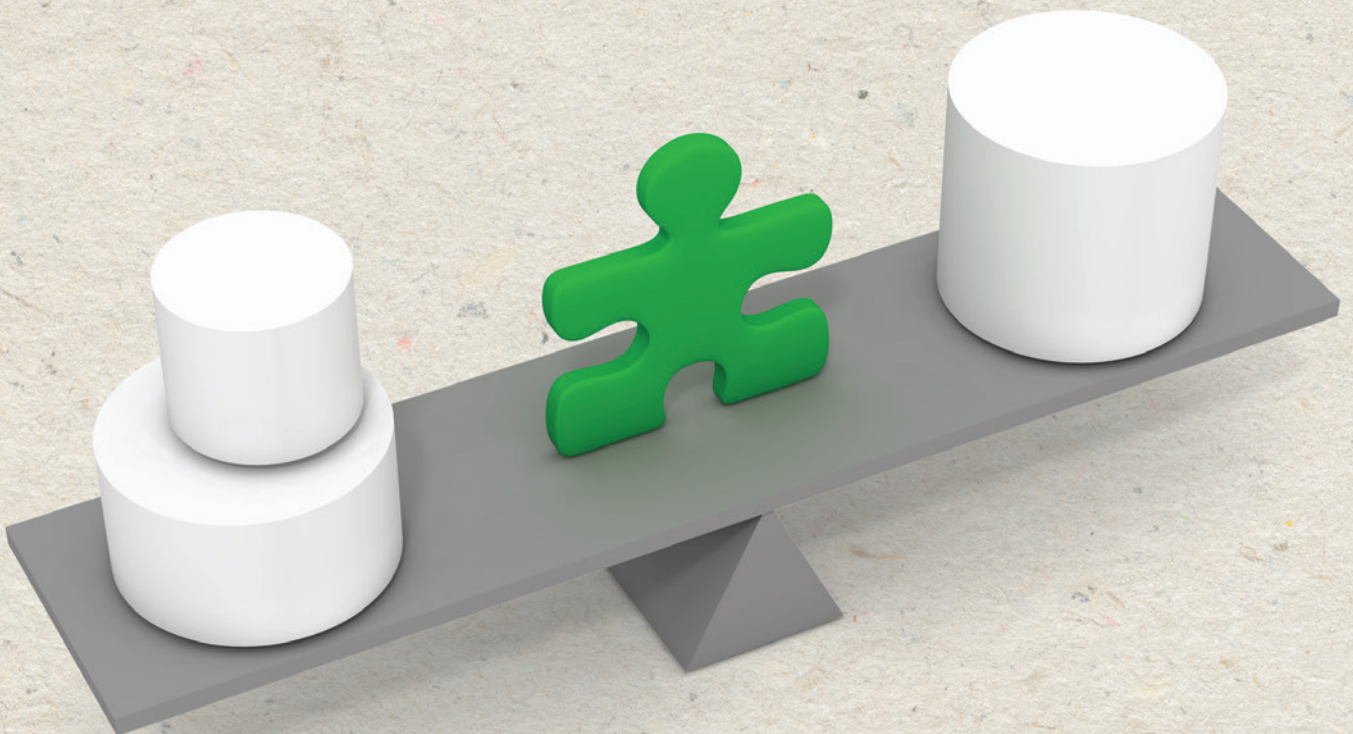


Top Tips

For Stress Management



Are you feeling overwhelmed, overworked, or just plain helpless?

Do you feel undersupported and underappreciated?

Is excitement something that a few lucky individuals may experience, but which you certainly do not?

If your answer to any of these is 'yes', or if you think members of your team would answer 'yes' to any of these questions, then this Top Tips booklet will help you and/ or your team to manage stress better.

So what does 'stress management' really mean?

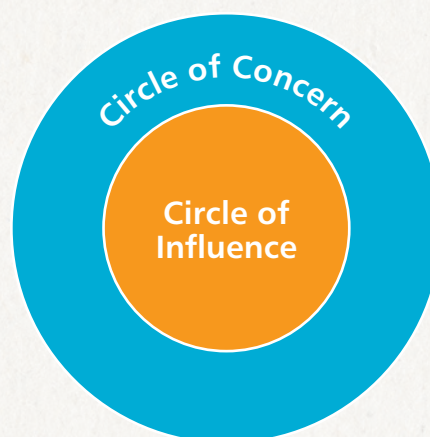
Well firstly it is important to point out that not all stress is bad. In fact stress can be either good or bad.

Good stress is where we feel challenged, as if we are doing something worthwhile. It is what makes us want to jump out of bed in a morning, it gets us excited. So, clearly we want more of that don't we? (or at least some of it I can hear you say!)

Bad stress, however, is where we feel that we have too much on, that more is being expected of us than we can possibly deliver. These feelings are exacerbated when we feel that others don't recognise this, that we are unsupported and undervalued. Often this affects the quality of what we do, mistakes start to creep in, which in turn affects our confidence. We feel that we are powerless to control the situation we are in. This can then lead to feelings of hopelessness, and an inability to imagine a future that will be any better than our current situation.

Whether you feel an absence of good stress or an abundance of bad stress, the good news is that the following strategies, dutifully applied, will help you transform your situation.

In Stephen Covey's "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" he writes about two circles which contain our lives, the **Circle of Concern** and the **Circle of Influence**.



- **Circle of Concern** – encompassing all the things we care about; ranges from personal concerns (health, career, relationships, etc.) or global concerns (global warming, war, recession, etc.)
- **Circle of Influence** – includes the things we have the power to affect; this circle is smaller than the Circle of Concern. However, by taking action relating to those things within our Circle of Influence we make that circle bigger.

Top Tips for leveraging 'Good' Stress

As regards strategies to increase the levels of 'good stress' in your life, take a look at the following Tips.

Think BIG	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do you believe you were put on this Earth for?• What could be your 'magnificent obsession' that will really drive you?• What causes are you passionate about?• What legacy could you leave?• Whatever you come up with think of doubling it (at least) in size! (with 'size' defined in terms of whatever is meaningful to you)
Set goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are your goals for different areas of your life?• What are they really? Write down each goal, then write a short paragraph explaining what difference it would make to your life if you achieved it. Having written each paragraph ask 'and what difference would that make?' again and again until you get to your real 'end' goal, e.g. some people define goals in terms of money, but when they go through that process they may realise that what they really want is feelings of security, freedom, or achievement. Whatever this is for them is their 'end' goal.• Devise different options for ways in which you could achieve your own 'end' goal. These goals become your 'means' goals.• You know you have got the right goals only when you can feel the rise in energy when you start to think or talk about them. Others will be able to see your eyes light up, hear the excitement in your voice, and feel the energy radiating from you.• Decide which of these 'means' goals to go for first to bring some of what you really want (your 'end' goal) into your life RIGHT NOW!!• This will then inspire you to start going for your next goal.• Remember to keep a balance between the different areas of your life when pursuing goals.
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider where your sources of support will come from as you embark on your journey.• Ensure that you only discuss your plans with people who will support you. This does not mean only people who will tell you what you want to hear, but people who will genuinely take an interest, have your best interests at heart, and be positive and constructive.
Coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find a coach to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Help you define the goals that are right for you.– Encourage you to think BIG– Challenge and support you– Keep your motivation high whilst on the journey– Help you celebrate successes/ learn from failures

Top Tips for handling Bad Stress

Look down this list, find the one which you like most and which you think is most pertinent to your current situation, and work on that. Then periodically (make a diary entry!) come back to this Top Tips booklet and consider your next actions.

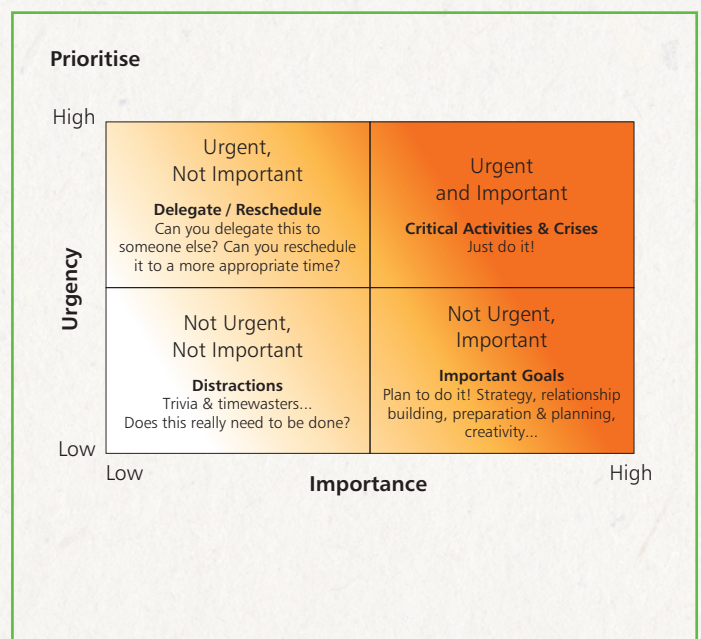
Remember	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• That you are not alone in this. This is very common in the NHS at present.• Therefore you are not the problem!
Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make a list of all your issues, then transfer them onto 2 sheets of paper, headed "Issues within my personal control" and "Issues outside my personal control" respectively.• Take the sheet listing issues outside your control. Resolve not to waste any more energy on bothering about these, just let them go.• Strike a diagonal line through this list. If you wish, you can reaffirm this intention by imagining the list inside a helium balloon that you are holding by a string. Then imagine letting go of the string and watching the balloon rise into the air, getting smaller and smaller as it slowly ascends into the clouds and eventually disappears from view.• Take the sheet listing issues that are within your control. Pick just one item from this list, then determine just one action to address, or start to address, this item. Give yourself a timescale to implement this action. When you have done that, come back to your list and determine your next action.• By doing this you are constantly expanding the control you exert over your own situation.
Anchors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extreme bad stress often results from changing too many things in your life at once.• Think of some of life's most stressful situations, e.g. divorce/ separation, bereavement, moving house, changing jobs/ employers, etc. When going through periods of change, try to ensure you have some things in your life that stay as they are, at least until you have embedded the change into your life. These are your anchors.
Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is important that you find time for recreation. This recharges your batteries, replenishes the energy that stressful situations can drain. Look after yourself as a 'whole' person.• Consider what you enjoy doing or have enjoyed doing in the past.• Make some time for an enjoyable activity and then schedule such enjoyment into your weekly routine.
Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not to play down your current situation, but many things that we agonise over – whilst they may seem important to us at the time – in the grand scheme of things are not as important as they may seem.• Imagine yourself at the end of your life, sat in your rocking chair, and looking back at what has been important in your life, what you have maybe regretted, etc.• How important will your current work situation seem in that context?• How important to you (really) are the people that you may currently be assigning importance to in your life? e.g. line managers.

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Reinhold Niebuhr,
American public commentator:

Prioritisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask yourself some empowering questions, e.g. • If your stress brought on a heart attack and you could only return to work on a 1 day per week basis, what would be the most important things that you could achieve in that day? • How would a deterioration in your health change your perspective on life, work, etc? Try to make this shift in perspective NOW rather than waiting for ill health to force it upon you. • Using the 80:20 principle, what activities do you currently do that are among the 20% that deliver 80% of the benefits in your role. Give priority to these.
Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you currently struggling to live up to standards which are impossible to meet? • Who is responsible for setting the standards you are struggling to live up to? People often struggle to live up to standards that they have set themselves! • Determine what would be more reasonable, and achievable, standards to set yourself.
Coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find yourself a coach • Your coach will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Listen to you confidentially and work with you to devise strategies specific to you and your situation. – Help you to see things from different, and helpful, perspectives and to take control. – Work with you for a period of time whilst you are carrying out your strategies to help you stay on task, keep your motivation high, and to help you embed changes into your life. • You will then have a personal toolkit of strategies and new awarenesses that will have worked for you and that you will be able to draw upon for the rest of your career, if not the rest of your life!

People under stress often respond to the latest urgent task at the expense of the Not Urgent but Important, such as planning, relationship building, fine tuning systems, personal development etc. These can be key to making your situation better so place some priority on them.



The **NHS Skills Development Network** operates across NHS organisations in England. Its remit is to provide the infrastructure for improving leadership and professional development skills, raising standards and sharing best practice through economy-wide learning.



The Skills Development Network uses a dedicated website, **www.skillsdevelopmentnetwork.com**, to publicise and support its work. The website is the primary source of information for all staff in providing resources for personal and organisational development.

Skills Development activities include but are not limited to:

- Professional Education and Qualifications
- Lifelong Learning and Continuing Professional Development
- Talent Management
- Career Development
- Widening and Improving Technical Skills
- Achieving Excellence
- Partnership working
- Sharing Best Practice
- Networking
- Accreditation

Other Top Tips available include:

- Dealing with Change
- Increasing Productivity
- Team Building
- Making Partnerships Work
- Communicating Financial Information Effectively

For more information visit **www.skillsdevelopmentnetwork.com**

This document has been produced in conjunction with Chris Brown, NHS Accountants Coach. Chris has significant experience of working with individuals and teams in the NHS Finance function to support their personal and business performance.



If you want to find out how Chris Brown, NHS Accountants Coach can help you and your team manage stress more effectively or to learn about other services Chris can offer you, please contact **chris@nhsaccountantscoach.co.uk**

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