Life is stressful. What matters is that you recognise when you are under so much stress that it may be harmful.

- About 80 per cent of all modern diseases have their beginnings in stress.
- Most of the 12 million adults who see their GPs each year about mental health problems have complaints related to stress.
- 45 million working days are lost each year through anxiety and stress-related conditions, costing the country more than £3 billion.

**Are you under too much stress?**

**How your body may react**

breathlessness  
constant tiredness  
cramps or muscle spasms  
fainting spells  
frequent crying  
headaches  
impotency or frigidity  
nail biting  
nervous twitches or muscle spasms  
sleeping problems  

chest pains  
constipation or diarrhoea  
craving for food  
feeling sick or dizzy  
indigestion or heartburn  
high blood pressure  
lack of appetite  
restlessness  
pins and needles  
tendency to sweat

**How you may feel**

aggressive  
depressed  
fearing disease  
feeling bad or ugly  
feeling there's no-one to confide in  
lack of interest in other people

irritable  
dreading the future  
fearing failure  
feeling neglected  
taking no interest in life  
loss of sense of humour

**How you may behave**

difficulty making decisions  
difficulty concentrating  
denying there's a problem

inability to show true feelings  
avoiding difficult situations
Ten tips to tackle stress

- Make the connection. Could the fact that you’re feeling under-the-weather be a response to pressure?

- Take a regular break. Give yourself a brief break whenever you feel things are getting on top of you – get a soft drink or take a brief stroll.

- Learn to relax. Follow a simple routine to relax your muscles and slow your breathing (see back page).

- Get better organised. Makes a list of jobs; tackle one task at a time; alternate dull tasks with interesting ones.

- Sort out your worries. Divide them into those that you can do something about (either now or soon) and those that you can’t. Those that you can’t change, there’s no point in worrying about.

- Change what you can. Look at the problems that can be sorted and get whatever help is necessary to sort it out. Learn to say ‘no’.
• Look at your long-term priorities. Step back and examine what it is about your life that's giving you too much stress. What can you off-load, or change? How can you introduce a better balance between work, social life and home life? Is it time to reassess your priorities?

• Improve your lifestyle. Find time to eat properly, get plenty of exercise and enough sleep. Avoid drinking and smoking too much. However much you believe they can help you to relax, they'll have the opposite effect.

• Confide in someone. Don't keep emotions bottled up.

• Focus on the positive aspects of your life.
Learn to relax
- Close your eyes and breathe slowly and deeply
- Locate any areas of tension and try to relax those muscles; imagine the tension disappearing
- Relax each part of the body, starting from your feet to the top of your head.
- As you focus on each part of your body, think of warmth, heaviness and relaxation
- After 20 minutes, take some deep breaths and stretch your body.

How to find out more
British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
tel. 0870 4435252; website: www.counselling.co.uk

First Steps to Freedom
tel. 01926 864473, web: www.firststeps.demon.co.uk

The Institute for Complementary Medicine
tel. 020 7237 5165, web: www.icmedicine.co.uk

Further reading available from Mind Mail Order
To order books or a complete catalogue of publications send an SAE to Mind Mail Order at the address below.

A-Z of Complementary and Alternative Medicines (Mind 2000) £3.50
How to Assert Yourself (Mind 1999) £1
How to Look After Yourself (Mind 1999) £1
The Mind Guide to Food and Mood (Mind 2000) £1
The Mind Guide to Managing Stress (Mind 2001) £1
The Mind Guide to Physical Activity (Mind 2001) £1
The Mind Guide to Relaxation (Mind 2001) £1
Understanding Talking Treatments (Mind 2000) £1