

Safe Haven Connect CIC

Living with Chronic Stress

A Practical Workbook

Version: 1.0

Welcome

Stress is a normal part of life, but when it continues for weeks or months without relief, it can begin to affect both your physical and mental wellbeing.

Living with chronic stress can leave you feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, anxious, irritable, or unable to switch off. It may affect your sleep, relationships, work, and overall quality of life.

The good news is that stress can be managed. While you may not be able to remove every source of stress, you can develop practical skills to reduce its impact and improve your wellbeing.

This workbook will help you understand chronic stress, recognise its effects, and create a personalised plan to help you feel calmer and more in control.

What You'll Learn

By completing this workbook, you will:

Understand what chronic stress is.

Recognise the signs and symptoms of long-term stress.

Identify your personal stress triggers.

Learn practical stress management techniques.

Create a personalised stress reduction plan.

Before You Begin

There is no perfect way to manage stress.

Some days will feel easier than others.

Take this workbook one section at a time, and remember that even small changes can have a positive impact over time.

Be kind to yourself throughout this journey.

Inspirational Quote

> "You cannot always remove the stress from your life, but you can learn to respond to it with strength, patience, and self-compassion."

Module 1 – Understanding Chronic Stress

Stress is your body's natural response to challenges or demands.

Short-term stress can sometimes help you stay focused or respond to difficult situations. However, when stress continues for a long time without enough opportunity to recover, it can begin to affect your health and wellbeing.

Chronic stress may develop because of:

Financial pressures

Work-related stress

Caring responsibilities

Relationship difficulties

Long-term health conditions

Loneliness or isolation

Major life changes

Ongoing uncertainty

Multiple responsibilities

Everyone experiences stress differently.

Common Signs of Chronic Stress

Physical

Feeling tired most days

Headaches

Muscle tension

Poor sleep

Upset stomach

Fast heartbeat

Frequent illnesses

Emotional

Feeling overwhelmed

Irritability

Anxiety

Low mood

Difficulty relaxing

Feeling tearful

Lack of motivation

Behavioural

Avoiding tasks

Withdrawing from others

Difficulty concentrating

Changes in eating habits

Increased alcohol or caffeine use

Feeling constantly busy but achieving very little

Activity 1 – My Stress Check

What is currently causing me the most stress?

How is stress affecting my daily life?

Which symptoms have I noticed?

☐ Poor sleep

☐ Feeling tired

☐ Anxiety

☐ Irritability

☐ Headaches

☐ Muscle tension

☐ Difficulty concentrating

☐ Feeling overwhelmed

☐ Other:

Reflection

Recognising stress is the first step towards managing it. You don't have to solve every problem today. Simply understanding what is affecting you can help you begin making positive changes.

> "You don't have to carry every burden alone. Small steps towards managing stress can lead to meaningful improvements in your wellbeing."

Next: Module 2 – Identifying Your Stress Triggers.

Module 2 – Identifying Your Stress Triggers

Understanding what causes your stress can help you respond more effectively. While some stressors cannot be avoided, recognising them gives you the opportunity to plan, seek support, and develop healthier coping strategies.

Remember, everyone experiences stress differently.

Common Sources of Stress

Tick any that apply to you.

☐ Work or study

☐ Financial worries

☐ Family responsibilities

☐ Caring for someone else

- ☐ Relationship difficulties
- ☐ Poor physical health
- ☐ Mental health challenges
- ☐ Loneliness
- ☐ Lack of sleep
- ☐ Too many responsibilities
- ☐ Major life changes
- ☐ Uncertainty about the future
- ☐ Other:

Activity – My Stress Triggers

What situations usually increase my stress?

Who or what tends to trigger my stress?

Which stressors can I influence?

Which stressors are outside my control?

Early Warning Signs

Stress often builds gradually. Learning to recognise the early signs can help you take action before you become overwhelmed.

Physical signs

- ☐ Tight shoulders
- ☐ Headaches
- ☐ Jaw clenching
- ☐ Racing heart
- ☐ Poor sleep
- ☐ Feeling exhausted
- ☐ Muscle aches
- ☐ Changes in appetite
- ☐ Other:

Emotional signs

- ☐ Feeling anxious
- ☐ Irritable
- ☐ Angry
- ☐ Tearful
- ☐ Overwhelmed

☐ Low mood

☐ Restless

☐ Other:

Behavioural signs

☐ Procrastinating

☐ Avoiding people

☐ Withdrawing socially

☐ Working too much

☐ Forgetfulness

☐ Difficulty concentrating

☐ Losing motivation

☐ Other:

Activity – My Stress Diary

Over the next week, make a note of stressful situations.

Situation	Stress Level (1–10)	How I Responded	What Helped?
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Looking back over your diary may help you notice patterns and identify practical changes you can make.

Reflection

What is the biggest source of stress in my life right now?

What is one small change I could make this week?

Who could support me if things become difficult?

Remember

You may not be able to remove every source of stress, but you can change how you respond to it. Every time you recognise a trigger and take a positive step, you're building resilience and protecting your wellbeing.

> "Awareness is the first step towards change. Understanding your stress gives you the power to manage it more effectively."

Next: Module 3 – Practical Ways to Manage Chronic Stress, where you'll learn relaxation techniques, healthy coping strategies, and ways to restore balance in everyday life.

Module 3 – Practical Ways to Manage Chronic Stress

Living with chronic stress can be exhausting, but there are practical steps you can take to reduce its impact. The goal isn't to eliminate all stress—it's to build healthy habits that help you recover, recharge, and cope more effectively.

Small changes practised regularly can make a significant difference.

Healthy Ways to Reduce Stress

Tick any strategies you'd like to try.

- ☐ Go for a walk
- ☐ Practice deep breathing
- ☐ Stretch or do gentle exercise
- ☐ Listen to calming music
- ☐ Spend time in nature
- ☐ Read a book
- ☐ Journal your thoughts
- ☐ Speak to someone you trust
- ☐ Spend time on a hobby
- ☐ Practice mindfulness
- ☐ Have a warm bath or shower
- ☐ Limit caffeine if it increases your stress
- ☐ Reduce screen time
- ☐ Get enough sleep
- ☐ Other:

Calm Breathing Exercise

Try this whenever you notice stress building.

1. Breathe in gently through your nose for 4 seconds.
2. Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 6 seconds.

3. Repeat for 1–2 minutes.

Long, slow breaths can help your body begin to relax.

The Five-Minute Reset

When stress feels overwhelming, pause and ask yourself:

Have I had a drink of water?

Have I eaten recently?

Can I step outside for some fresh air?

Can I stretch my body?

Is there one small task I can complete?

Sometimes a short break can help you regain focus.

Activity – My Stress Relief Toolkit

Write down the things that help you feel calmer.

Activities that relax me

People I can talk to

Places where I feel calm

Music, books or hobbies that help

Looking After Your Basic Needs

When we're stressed, we often neglect the things that help us feel well.

This week I will aim to:

- ☐ Drink enough water.
- ☐ Eat regular meals.
- ☐ Move my body.
- ☐ Get enough sleep.
- ☐ Spend time outdoors.
- ☐ Take regular breaks.
- ☐ Be kind to myself.
- ☐ Ask for help if I need it.

Reflection

Which coping strategy do you think would help you the most?

What usually prevents you from looking after yourself?

What is one small act of self-care you can do today?

Remember

Managing chronic stress isn't about never feeling stressed. It's about recognising when stress is building and responding with healthy habits that protect your wellbeing.

Every small step you take is a positive investment in your physical and mental health.

> "You don't have to solve everything today. Focus on taking one small step towards feeling calmer and healthier."

Next: Module 4 – Building Long-Term Stress Resilience, where you'll learn how to create healthy routines, set boundaries, manage your time, and strengthen your ability to cope with life's challenges.

Module 4 – Building Long-Term Stress Resilience

Stress is a part of life, but resilience is what helps us recover from challenges and continue moving forward.

Resilience doesn't mean you never struggle. It means developing habits, skills, and support systems that help you cope with difficult times.

Like any skill, resilience grows through practice.

Creating Healthy Daily Routines

Simple routines can help reduce uncertainty and make life feel more manageable.

Consider including:

- ☐ Waking up at a regular time
- ☐ Eating regular meals
- ☐ Taking short breaks

- ☐ Spending time outdoors
- ☐ Moving your body
- ☐ Relaxation before bed
- ☐ Time for hobbies
- ☐ Staying connected with others
- ☐ Other:

Setting Healthy Boundaries

Sometimes stress increases because we try to do too much.

Healthy boundaries might include:

Saying "no" when you're overwhelmed.

Asking for help.

Taking breaks without feeling guilty.

Limiting time with people who increase your stress.

Protecting time for rest and self-care.

Remember, looking after yourself isn't selfish—it's necessary.

Managing Your Time

When everything feels urgent, it can help to prioritise.

My Top Priorities Today

1.

2.

3.

Ask yourself:

Does this need doing today?

Can someone help?

Can it wait until tomorrow?

Building a Strong Support Network

You don't have to manage stress on your own.

People who support me include:

Family:

Friends:

Work colleagues:

Community groups:

Professional support:

Activity – My Stress Resilience Plan

When I notice stress increasing, I will:

- ☐ Slow my breathing.
- ☐ Take a short walk.
- ☐ Speak to someone I trust.
- ☐ Complete one task at a time.
- ☐ Take a break.
- ☐ Practise self-kindness.
- ☐ Remind myself that difficult moments pass.
- ☐ Other:

Reflection

What has helped you cope with difficult situations in the past?

What personal strengths do you have?

What new habit would you like to build over the next month?

Remember

Resilience isn't about avoiding stress—it's about learning that you have the ability to recover, adapt, and continue moving forward.

Every healthy choice you make strengthens your ability to cope with future challenges.

> "Resilience grows every time you choose hope, kindness, and perseverance, even on difficult days."

Next: Module 5 – My Personal Stress Management Plan, where you'll create your own long-term plan, review what you've learned, and complete the workbook with a summary, congratulations, disclaimer, copyright, and information about Safe Haven Connect CIC.

Module 5 – My Personal Stress Management Plan

You've reached the final module of this workbook. By understanding your stress, recognising your triggers, and learning healthy coping strategies, you've already taken important steps towards improving your wellbeing.

Managing chronic stress is an ongoing process. Some days will be easier than others, and that's okay. The goal is progress, not perfection.

My Biggest Sources of Stress

Write down the main things causing you stress right now.

1.

2.

3.

My Healthy Coping Strategies

When I notice my stress increasing, I will:

- ☐ Take slow, deep breaths.
- ☐ Go for a walk.
- ☐ Speak to someone I trust.
- ☐ Take a short break.
- ☐ Listen to calming music.
- ☐ Journal my thoughts.
- ☐ Stretch or exercise.
- ☐ Spend time outdoors.
- ☐ Practise mindfulness.
- ☐ Be kind to myself.
- ☐ Other:

My Support Network

People I can contact when I need support:

Name

Phone/email

Name

Phone/email

Name

Phone/email

Professional support available to me:

My Wellbeing Goals

Over the next month I would like to:

- ☐ Improve my sleep.
- ☐ Reduce my stress levels.
- ☐ Exercise more regularly.
- ☐ Take regular breaks.
- ☐ Spend more time outdoors.
- ☐ Build healthier routines.
- ☐ Improve my work-life balance.
- ☐ Ask for help when I need it.
- ☐ Make more time for hobbies.
- ☐ Other:

Weekly Wellbeing Review

This week I feel:

- ☐ 😊 Very calm
- ☐ 😊 Mostly okay
- ☐ 😐 Managing
- ☐ 😞 Stressed
- ☐ 😫 Overwhelmed

One thing that went well

One challenge I faced

One thing I learned about myself

One thing I will focus on next week

My Personal Commitment

I choose to:

- ☐ Prioritise my wellbeing.
- ☐ Accept that I cannot control everything.
- ☐ Take one day at a time.
- ☐ Ask for support when I need it.
- ☐ Celebrate small achievements.
- ☐ Continue building healthy habits.

Signed:

Date:

Final Thoughts

Living with chronic stress can feel overwhelming, but you don't have to face it alone. Every healthy habit you build, every boundary you set, and every moment of self-care contributes to your overall wellbeing.

Remember that managing stress isn't about eliminating every challenge—it's about learning how to respond in ways that protect your mental and physical health.

Progress is made through small, consistent steps. Be patient with yourself and celebrate every success, no matter how small.

Congratulations!

Well done on completing the Living with Chronic Stress Workbook.

We hope this workbook has given you practical tools and greater confidence to understand and manage stress in healthier ways. Keep returning to the exercises whenever you need a reminder that your wellbeing matters.

> "You are stronger than your stress. Every small step you take today is helping to build a calmer, healthier tomorrow."

Disclaimer

This workbook has been created by Safe Haven Connect CIC for educational and self-help purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical, psychological, or therapeutic advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

If you are experiencing severe distress, have concerns about your mental health, or feel that you may be at risk of harming yourself or others, seek immediate support from a qualified healthcare professional or your local emergency services.

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About Safe Haven Connect CIC

Safe Haven Connect CIC is dedicated to providing free mental health and wellbeing resources, practical self-help tools, and supportive information to help people improve their wellbeing, build resilience, and access support whenever they need it.

Website: <https://safehavenconnect.org>

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