



Live Well, Work Well

April 2020

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How You Can Make the Most of Stress Awareness Month

Health organisations across the UK recognise April as Stress Awareness Month each year. This annual campaign—which has been running for nearly 30 years—encourages Britons to educate themselves about the causes and potential health implications of excess stress, as well as how to implement proper coping mechanisms to reduce their stress levels.

Excess stress can be extremely damaging to both your physical and mental health. Indeed, the NHS confirmed that frequently experiencing high levels of stress can increase your risk of suffering from a wide range of complications—including anxiety, depression, insomnia, digestive problems and heart disease.

What's more, excess stress is more common than you might think. A recent study from the [Mental Health Foundation](#) revealed that over 70 per cent of Britons had felt so stressed at some point in the past year that they were unable to cope.

Don't let excess stress wreak havoc on your well-being. Utilise the following guidance this month (and every month) to help keep your stress levels under control:

- **Know the signs**—While experiencing occasional stress is normal, consistently high stress levels can quickly become evident through additional physical and mental health symptoms. Although everyone

experiences stress differently, here are some common signs to keep in mind:

- Difficulty focusing or relaxing
- Frequent mood swings and irritability
- Changes in your appetite and sleep routine
- Increased body aches and muscle tension
- **Identify the causes**—Before you can reduce your stress levels, it's important to identify the underlying cause(s). Top sources of stress include increased pressure at work, family or friendship difficulties (eg caring for someone, divorce or bereavement), financial struggles and ongoing health problems.
- **Practise mindfulness**—According to the Mental Health Foundation, mindfulness is a mind-body approach to life that emphasises paying closer attention to your thoughts and feelings in a way that increases your ability to manage difficult situations and make healthy choices. Further, research provides that mindfulness can be effective in reducing stress levels. Consider practising [mindfulness meditation](#) on a regular basis or signing up for a local mindfulness course.

If you have been experiencing excess stress for a prolonged period of time and feel as though your stress is debilitating to your daily routine, be sure to contact your GP for additional support. For further NHS guidance on controlling your stress levels, click [here](#).

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Challenging Convention

Use These Top Methods to Help Reap the Health Benefits of Improved Flexibility

How often do you forget (or neglect) to stretch before and after you exercise? While it might not seem like that big of a deal, recent research revealed stretching is a key factor in promoting your body's flexibility. And maintaining flexibility offers several tangible health benefits—including a lowered risk of injury during physical activity, decreased muscle aches and cramps, improved posture and balance, a more positive mindset and greater overall strength. Consider these tips to promote top-notch stretching techniques and reap the numerous health advantages of improved flexibility:

- **Make it a habit**—Ideally, you should be stretching your body every day. To accomplish this goal, it's important to find a way to implement stretching into your daily routine. This could entail allotting for additional stretching time at the gym before and after your workout, purchasing a yoga mat to allow you to stretch at home or joining an exercise class that promotes flexibility (eg tai chi or pilates).
- **Don't rush it**—One of the biggest mistakes that people make when they stretch is moving too quickly. Nevertheless, rushing through your stretches won't give your body enough time to benefit from them. Health experts recommend that you hold each stretch for at least 30 seconds.
- **Stretch smart**—Lastly, be sure to select stretches that are right for your body. After all, everyone's flexibility levels, and muscle and joint capabilities are unique. Pushing your body to do stretches that are too difficult could end up causing more harm than good, leading to sprain and strain injuries. Rather, try to work your way up to more difficult stretches as you gain increased flexibility over time.

Research Reveals the Serious Consequences of Excess Salt Intake: What You Can Do

Although it's no secret that eating too much salt comes with health risks, the latest research from the World Health Organisation (WHO) discovered that this ingredient is even more deadly than you might realise. The WHO reported that salt is considered one of the most dangerous substances to your health, second only to tobacco. In fact, eating too much salt can carry life-threatening consequences—including high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease.

What's worse, the WHO confirmed that the average person consumes twice the recommended intake of salt each day, with almost 75 per cent of the salt you eat being added to processed foods before it even lands on your plate. With this data in mind, use the following guidance to lower your salt intake:

- When cooking, add flavour to your food with fresh herbs, spices or black pepper rather than seasoning with salt.
- Swap processed foods with healthy alternatives, such as fresh fruit, vegetables and whole grains.
- Compare nutrition labels on food packaging to ensure you are purchasing items without added salt.

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Pasta



Ratatouille Bake

Pasta Ratatouille Bake

Makes 4 servings

Ingredients

- 200g macaroni
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 4 tomatoes, chopped
- 4 courgettes, sliced
- 200g green beans
- 125ml vegetable or chicken stock
- 25g hard cheese, grated
- 1 pinch ground black pepper

Preparations

- 1) Preheat the oven to 180C. Cook the macaroni according to pack instructions, then drain.
- 2) Heat the oil in a large saucepan, then cook the onions and garlic slowly until tender and golden.
- 3) Stir in the herbs, tomatoes, courgettes, green beans and stock. Simmer for 5 minutes.
- 4) Combine the pasta and vegetables, then season with black pepper. Transfer to a baking dish and sprinkle the cheese on top. Bake for 30-35 minutes and serve.

Nutritional Information (per serving)

Kcal	293
Total fat	6.5g
Protein	12g
Carbohydrates	50g
Dietary fibre	5g
Total sugars	10g

Source: NHS