

Looking after your Mental Health and Wellbeing

We are living through uncertain times and it's more important than ever to remember that as well as physical health, all of us have mental health too. Many of us will be feeling some of the symptoms of Stress, Anxiety or Depression at the moment. Although we cannot change our situation, we can all learn to recognise the signs that we need extra self-care, and learn what works for us to improve our mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Stress - the tension we feel in response to changes in our lives. A little can be a good thing, giving us focus and motivation. Too much can leave us on 'high alert' all the time and unable to switch off.

Too much stress can make us feel irritable, anxious and lower our self-esteem, and can affect our behaviour, making us drink or smoke more or bite our nails. When we're stressed, we often struggle to concentrate and find it hard to make decisions. Our bodies can also respond physically with headaches, aches and pains, dizzy spells, and trouble sleeping.

Anxiety - a feeling of unease, like worry or fear. We often feel some anxiety when circumstances are out of our control, but some people find it very hard to control their worries and rarely feel relaxed.

Anxiety can cause both mental and physical symptoms. You may feel restless or worried most of the time, and have trouble concentrating on anything or switching off to go to sleep. You may even have short spells of dizziness or a rapid heartbeat when thinking about your worries.

Depression - a low mood that lasts for a long time. Depression can be mild, where your mood is constantly low, or severe, so you feel life is no longer worth living.

Depression can cause us to feel sad and hopeless, lose interest in things you usually enjoy, and feel tearful. You may feel more tired than usual, sleep badly and lose your appetite. You may also make less of an effort to speak to family and friends.

If any of these symptoms above are having a serious impact on your life you can still seek help from your GP. **If you feel like you are in crisis and your life is not worth living, please call 999 or The Samaritans on 116 123.**

For most of us, these symptoms will not seriously impact our lives. Making time to do the things we enjoy and finding time for ourselves can help us feel better. Talking to someone we trust can offload feelings and give us some perspective, as can mindfulness and gratitude exercises. And making an effort to eat healthily, drink more water and not rely on unhealthy habits will also help.

If none of these strategies improve your mood, try finding a support service where you can talk about your feelings, attend a self-help course or find coping strategies. Try our directory at <http://www.cassbristol.org/covid19-directory/> to see what support is available online or by phone or video call, and see the other resources on our website for more help. Your local community hub will be able to help you with practical and emotional support, you can be referred to your local hub by contacting Bristol City Council on 0800 694 0184.