

# Wellbeing Focus

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## Stress

### Winter wellbeing

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Most people have experienced feeling stressed at some point in their lives and National Stress Awareness Day (Wednesday 6th November) is a reminder to us all to take a moment to think about our wellbeing. When stress builds up it can lead to mental health problems, such as low mood and anxiety, so it is important for us to know how to manage our stress levels.

#### What are the signs of stress?

The first step in managing stress is to recognise it. Stress can affect how we feel emotionally and physically, how we think about things, and how we behave or react to situations. If you are stressed you may notice yourself feeling overwhelmed, anxious or irritable. You could be experiencing headaches, difficulty concentrating, sleep problems or a change in appetite. Stress can also often lead to worrying and racing thoughts. You may even find yourself snapping at people, avoiding situations or drinking more.

Stress and anxiety can sometimes trigger our fight or flight response. This response is a physical change in our body and is designed to help keep us safe in times when we are faced with threats. The fight or flight response is not dangerous or harmful, although it can feel uncomfortable when we experience symptoms such as a pounding heart, faster breathing or muscle tension. These feelings will pass but if you are often stressed your body will be producing more stress-related hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol, which may impact your health in the long-term.

#### How can I manage stress?

The NHS and Mental Health Foundation provide tips for managing stress:

**Identify the triggers** – Identifying your triggers for stress can help you to plan ahead and think of ways to solve any problems that you might come across. We cannot always avoid triggers but being prepared can make them easier to manage.

**Make a plan** – Take control by making a plan to address the issues that are causing you stress. Try to break your plan down into small, manageable steps and focus on the things that are within your control.



**Avoid unhealthy habits** – Avoid using alcohol, smoking, caffeine or other unhelpful behaviours as ways of coping. Although these may provide short term relief, it doesn't solve the problems and may even lead to new ones. It is also worth remembering that alcohol is a depressant and caffeine can lead to feelings of anxiety.

**Not taking on too much at once** – Sometimes stress can be caused by taking on too much. Consider what to prioritise and whether you are doing anything that could be handed over to someone else.

**Exercise** – Our bodies produce endorphins when we exercise, which can help to improve our mood and reduce stress.

**Take time for you** – Sometimes we might feel that we are too busy to take time out for ourselves or that we 'should' be doing other things instead, however making time to relax or do things that we enjoy is vital in managing stress and improving our wellbeing.

**Connect with others** – Having a good support network can make it easier to cope with stressful situations. Spending time with friends and family can help us to relax and it can also be useful to talk things through with someone close to us.

**Accept or let go of the things you can't change** – Sometimes our stress is caused by situations that we cannot change. By accepting the things that are outside of our control, we allow ourselves the space to focus on the issues that we can do something about.

More information and support can be found at:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/understanding-stress/> and  
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stress>

# Parsnip Soup

This easy parsnip soup is made extra-filling with the addition of chunky croutons. Add the Gruyère if you want a touch of luxury. For this recipe you will need a blender.

## Ingredients

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 600g/1lb 5oz parsnips, cut into 1cm/½ inch cubes
- ½ tsp dried red chilli flakes, plus extra to serve
- 1 litre/1¾ pints hot vegetable stock
- 200ml/7fl oz double cream
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

## For the croutons

- 3 thick slices good bread, such as sourdough, cut into 2.5cm/1 inch pieces
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 55g/2oz Gruyère cheese, finely grated (optional)

## Method

1. Preheat the oven to 200C/180C Fan/Gas 6. Heat the oil in a heavy-based saucepan over a medium heat. Add the garlic and parsnips and fry for 4-5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until coloured. Add the chilli and fry for 1 minute.
2. Pour in the stock, stir and bring to a simmer. Cook with the lid on for 12-15 minutes, or until the parsnips are tender.
3. Meanwhile, for the croutons, put the bread on a baking tray in a single layer and drizzle with the oil. Sprinkle over the cheese, if using, and season with salt and pepper. Bake for 5-10 minutes, or until crisp and golden.
4. Remove the soup from the heat and blitz with a stick blender until smooth. Return to the heat, stir in the cream and heat through. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve the soup topped with the croutons and a sprinkling of chilli flakes if you wish.

-  Preparation: Less than 30 minutes  
Cook: 10 to 30 minutes
-  Easy
-  Serves 4
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Recipe from BBC Food