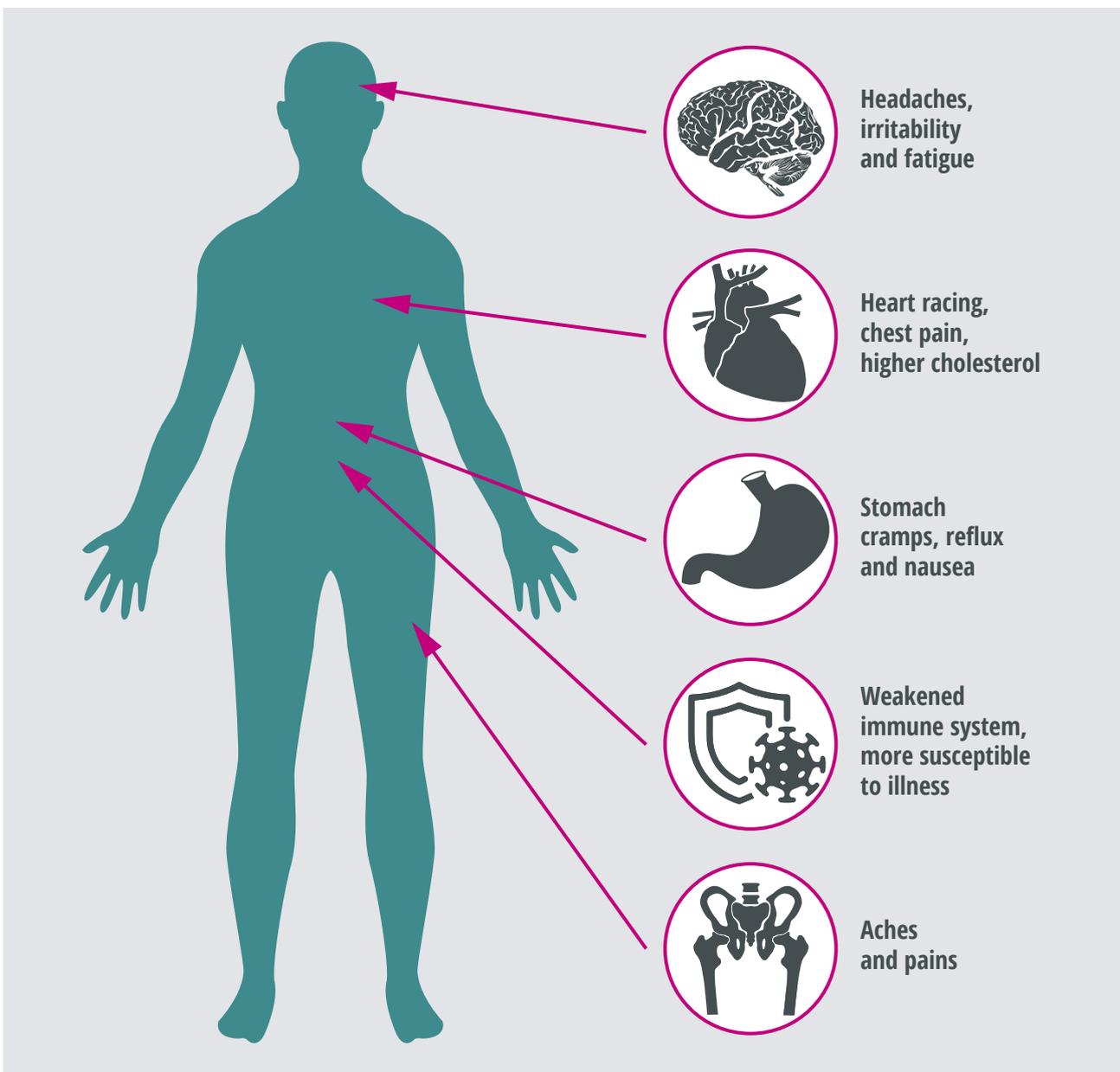


## What is stress?

Stress is a perfectly natural human reaction. It's our brain's way of telling us we're being confronted with a dangerous situation. Stress is not bad in itself; it can help you to take action, meet deadlines or get things done. Stress can become a problem if you begin to feel overwhelmed or that you can't cope.

Stress is not a mental illness in itself. However, too much stress can cause mental health problems. It's important that we develop an awareness of how our own bodies perceive stress and begin to take the necessary steps to keep ourselves well.

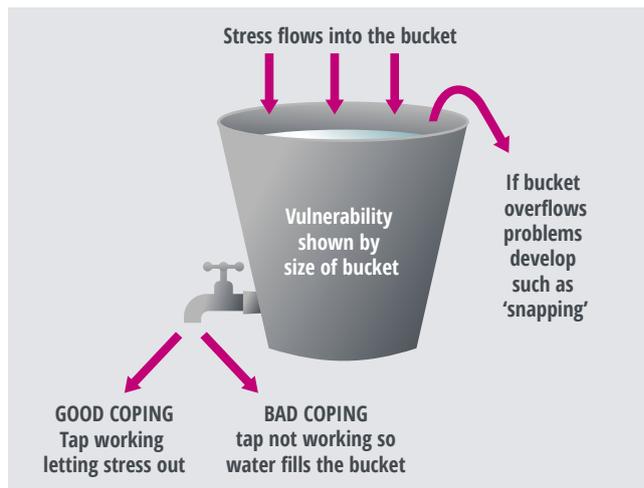


## Knowing yourself – the Stress Bucket

The Stress Bucket is a useful way of thinking about stress. Everything causing you stress flows into a bucket whose size depends on how vulnerable or resilient you are. The tap on the side can help you reduce your stress levels by using good stress management techniques.

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- How can I read the early signs that tell me I'm stressed? This may be the time to take action.
- What are my particular triggers? We don't all find the same things stressful.
- What works for me? We are all different. Take time to learn about what could help you to reduce your stress levels.



## The Worry Tree



The Worry Tree can be a great way of breaking down the feelings of stress, encouraging us to regain control of our thoughts by reframing them. The first and often hardest step is recognising and acknowledging the root causes of what is causing the stress in the first place.

The left-hand path of the tree demonstrates that if we have no control over the situation, we should practice just letting the worry go.

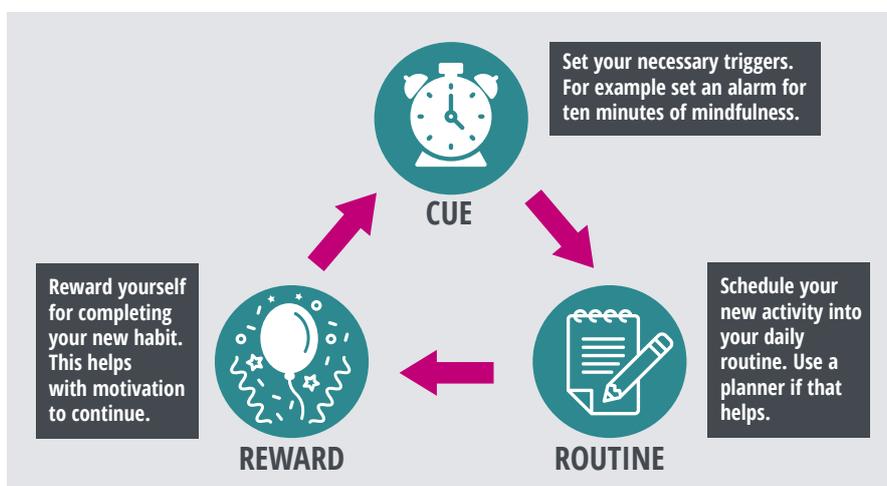
If you determine that the problem is something within your control, it's important to prioritise it and take action. Dealing with the situation now allows you to let it go quicker. If you are unable to deal with the issue right away, be sure to schedule time to resolve it.

## Creating new habits

When we experience stress, some of our more unhelpful habits can be the source of the problem.

When our regular routine is disturbed, it can be natural to turn to unhelpful habits to help us get through. It can be much better for us to use this time of disruption to form some new, improved habits for the future.

Habits are formed in a pattern called the **habit loop**.



## Three good things

When we are stressed, it can be easy to focus solely on what is not going so well in our lives. Over the course of the week, try taking five or ten minutes each evening and use this time to write down three things that have gone well for you that day. Level of importance, big or small, really doesn't matter. Anything positive counts. It's extremely important to be kind to yourself.

Recognising what we have to be grateful for can be a really good start. At the end of the week, take time to reflect on what you have written and notice how this makes you feel.

## Physical stress busters

Not only does physical activity lead to improvements in our physical health, it can also increase our self-esteem, making us feel better about ourselves.

Being active can trigger the reward pathway in our brains, secreting the chemical dopamine. We get a sense of achievement, increasing our motivation to do it again. The release of dopamine can be affected by how surprising or unexpected the activity is. Trying something new or challenging can therefore make us feel better for longer.



## Connecting with others

We are sociable beings, and we need other people:

- Try talking rather than bottling things up.
- Prioritize your important relationships.
- Pick up the phone to someone you haven't spoken to for ages.
- Even listening to someone else's problems can be a good distraction. People who do things for others often have better wellbeing so long as they look after themselves too.

## Time for me

Think about what is important to you, the things that nurture you or give your life meaning. This might be hobbies, interests, mindfulness, laughing and having fun, doing something creative, spiritual or cultural... the list is endless.

If there isn't enough of that in your life, perhaps you need to think about how it could change. Don't lose sight of yourself while under pressure and getting on with your life.

Sometimes your good stress management techniques can get you through. Sometimes the challenges are too much and asking for help is the best thing you can do. **The Charity for Civil Servants** is here for you when times are tough, providing practical, financial and emotional help and support. We recognise stress can sometimes lead to burnout – if you'd like to know more please visit our [BURNOUT HUB](#).