

Money Worries

and how to beat them



Introduction

Congratulations: by seeking debt advice you've just taken a giant step towards taking control of your money issues.

But dealing with the practical side of your situation is only part of the story. When you're facing any kind of money worries, feelings of stress, shame and putting yourself down can make things look even worse.

Here are some of the things people have said to us about their money issues.

"I feel like if I try to sort this stuff out, I'll probably just make things worse. I'm useless at this sort of stuff."

"You feel like you have done something wrong, and so people will look down on you."

"It took me a long time to face the issue, because the thought of dealing with it was so stressful."

Sound familiar?

This leaflet will help you to:

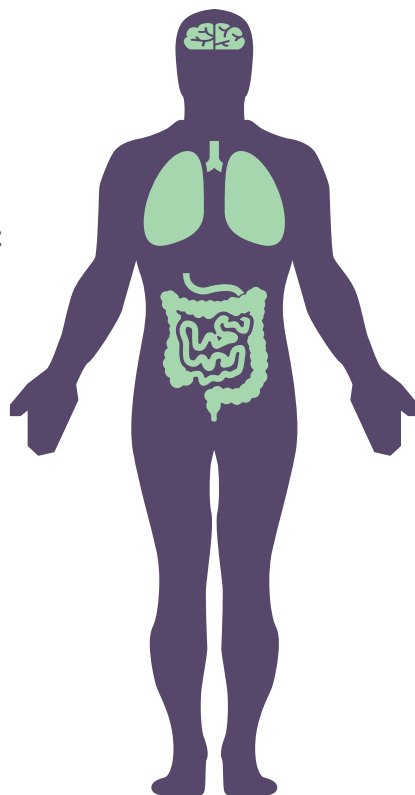
- Understand stress **(pg. 2)**
- Understand emotions such as shame, guilt, and embarrassment **(pg. 7-8)**
- Understand how we put ourselves down **(pg. 9-10)**
- Take action to get on top of your situation, step by step **(pg. 3-6, 11-14)**

Read on to find out how you can start to feel better, right now.

Are you too stressed?

Stress becomes a problem when we feel overwhelmed by our situation and can't see a way out. Stress affects your mind and your body, and can change the way you behave towards other people.

Here's a checklist of telltale signs that you're experiencing too much stress.



MOOD

- Feeling overwhelmed, upset
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Feeling restless
- Getting no enjoyment from life
- Can't relax
- Lashing out at people
- Making snap decisions – and regretting them later

BODY

- Dry mouth
- Headaches
- Nausea or 'butterflies' in your stomach
- Pain and tension in muscles
- Sweaty palms
- Low energy

HABITS

- Grinding teeth
- Biting nails
- Pacing
- Difficulty sleeping
- Eating too much, or too little
- Drinking or smoking too much

Stress Busters

Many people try to cope with stress in ways that do more harm than good:

- **Avoiding the issue** – by not answering the phone, or by stashing letters from creditors without opening them – means the problem just grows.
- **Burying your head in the sand** – denying that there's a problem means you may carry on spending or borrowing, leading to a breakdown.
- **Substance abuse** – more smoking, drinking or drugs – causes long-term physical and mental damage, and it's expensive, making money issues worse.
- **Self-harm** can lead to physical danger as well as major depression.

BUT THERE ARE SAFE, QUICK AND EASY WAYS TO REDUCE YOUR STRESS LEVELS RIGHT NOW.

Try these two simple exercises to reduce the effects of stress on body and mind, and ready yourself for tackling the problem at hand.

If you are struggling with self-harm or suicidal thoughts, please call Samaritans on 116 123. You can talk to someone any time – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Samaritans are trained to listen and not to judge. Calls are free, from a mobile or a landline.

1. DEEP BREATHING

This exercise is great for dealing with stress in the heat of the moment. Sometimes, stress hits you suddenly, and your body responds with something like a panic attack. Your heart rate speeds up, your breathing gets faster and shallower, and your mind becomes overwhelmed.

The good news is there's a fast, free solution: deep, slow breathing. Have you ever tried to calm someone down by saying, "take a deep breath"? Well, it really works. And it's not just for those moments of panic. Doing this breathing exercise regularly will help you cope with stress better, all through the day.

First, take a moment to rate how stressed you are feeling right now – from 1, not very stressed, to 10, extremely stressed. Now find a comfortable place to sit down, where you can close your eyes and you won't be disturbed

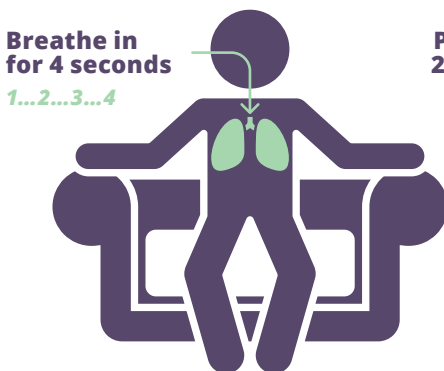
1. Place one hand flat on your belly, and the other hand up high on your chest.
2. Now breathe in through your nose, while you slowly count to 4.
3. Then breathe out through your mouth, while you slowly count to 4.
4. Once you start to feel a bit calmer, and your breathing is smooth and steady, add a short pause in between the breaths: breathe in for 4 seconds; hold for 2; breathe out for 4 seconds; hold for 2.

Carry on breathing like this for as long as you can – five to ten minutes is ideal. But even one minute is better than nothing.

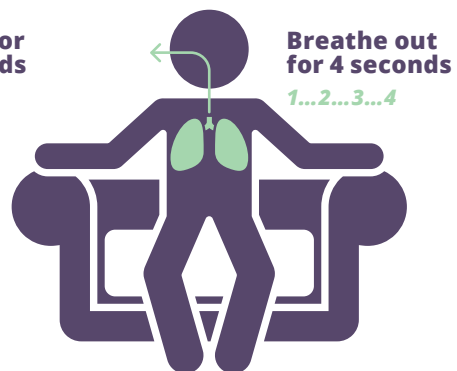
After you finish, ask yourself again how stressed you feel, right now, on a scale from 1 to 10.

TOP TIPS

- Your belly should move gently in and out as you breathe. The hand on your chest shouldn't move as much.
- Check that your out-breath is slow and smooth. It can help to purse your lips, as though you are blowing through a straw.
- Settle in, and enjoy. Deep breathing should feel steady and slow, not rushed or jerky.
- Practice makes perfect: don't wait until you're at maximum stress levels, try doing 5 minutes of deep breathing, three times a day.



Pause for 2 seconds
1...2



2. TOTAL CHILL-OUT

When our minds are full of stressful thoughts, our muscles get tense too. But it's a two-way street: by relaxing your body, you can help to relax your mind. This is a great exercise to try at the end of the day, especially if you find it hard to get to sleep.

The basic idea is to work your way from your toes up to the top of your head, according to the sequence below, tensing each part in turn, then completely relaxing it.

Choose a chair where you can sit upright, but comfortably.

For each step in the sequence, the instructions are the same:

1. Tense up (clench) while you slowly count to five.
2. Relax completely.

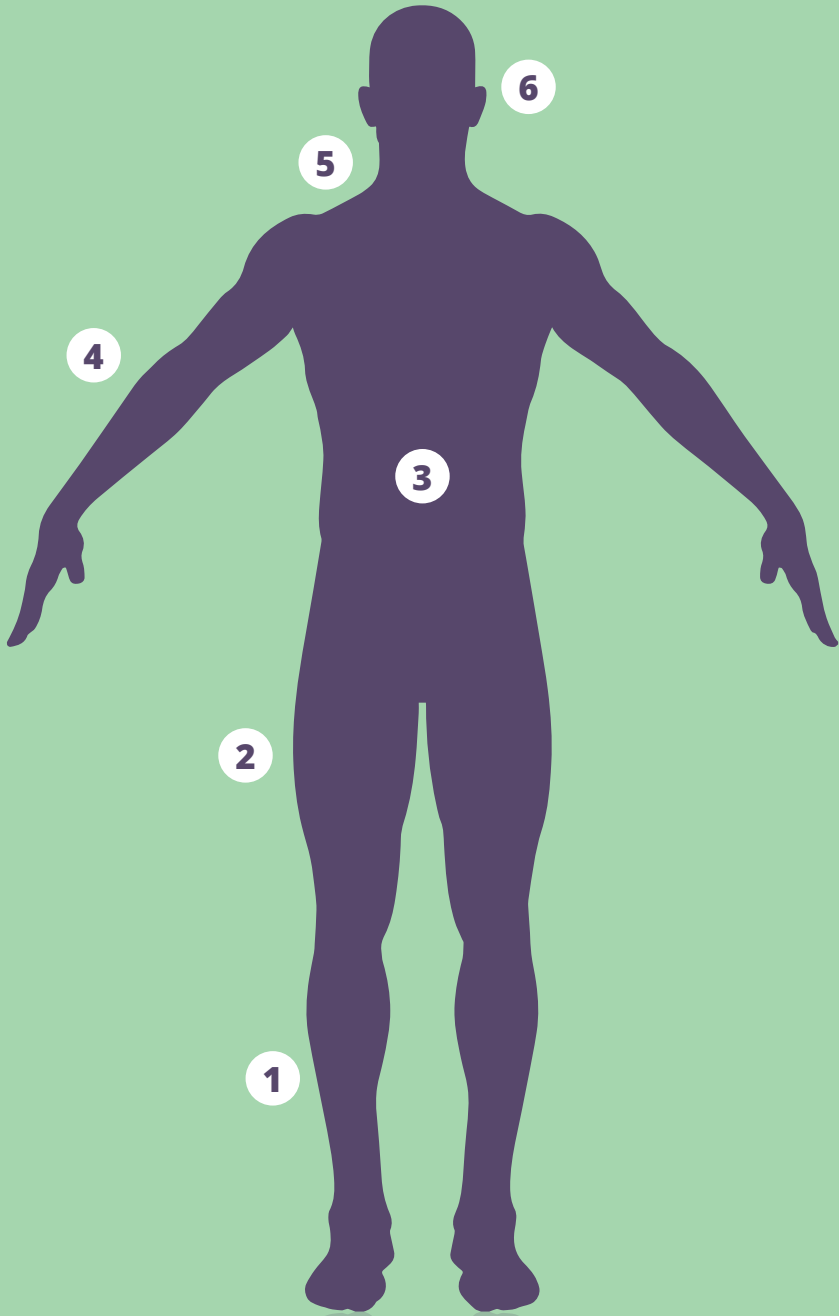
That's it! Simply pay attention to how it feels when you tense, and when you relax.

SEQUENCE:

1. **Lower Legs:** Point toes towards ceiling, keeping heels on ground
2. **Upper Legs:** Squeeze thighs together, keeping feet on ground
3. **Torso:** Arch your back, lift your chest and try to touch elbows together behind you
4. **Arms:** Clench your fists, keep arms straight, palms up, and curl wrists towards chest
5. **Neck:** Lift your chin and point it towards the ceiling
6. **Face:** Close your eyes and scrunch up your face; relax, then open your mouth as wide as possible, like a big yawn

TOP TIPS

- Relaxation should feel good! If any part of the exercise causes pain, tension or anxiety, or if it aggravates an existing injury, then skip that part for the moment.
- If you find your mind starts to wander, don't give up or get annoyed. Gently bring your attention back to the last part in the sequence and try again.
- You don't have to sit in a chair for this exercise. If you're having trouble sleeping, you could try a version of the sequence while you're lying in bed at night.



Feeling bad about money?

How to deal with guilt, shame and embarrassment

There's no need to feel guilty, ashamed or embarrassed about talking with a debt advisor. In fact, you should feel proud that you are taking such a positive step towards sorting out your finances.

But we know that many people in a similar position struggle with feelings like this.

Guilty thoughts

"I've let everyone down."

"How can I make it up to my family?"

Ashamed thoughts

"I'm such a mess."

"Everyone else can manage, why can't I?"

Embarrassed thoughts

"I'll never live this down."

"Everyone thinks I'm a loser."



These kinds of feelings can really get in the way. They can make you do things that actually make the money situation worse. For example, feeling ashamed can make you hide your problems, and feeling guilty can make you over-spend to try and compensate – like charging a family day out to a credit card because you feel you’ve let them down.

Here are three tips for times when you’re feeling bad about yourself because of your money issues:

1. Be your own best friend

We are usually kinder to other people than we are to ourselves. So imagine what you would say if a close friend of yours was feeling this way. How would you help them to find solutions, or take their mind off the bad feelings?

2. Remember the spotlight is not on you

Feelings like guilt, shame and embarrassment often come when we think everyone is looking at us, and judging us. But research shows that we greatly overestimate how much other people know about our situations – or how much time they spend thinking about us!

3. Ask yourself, “So what?”

Even if other people were looking at you, or judging you – would it really matter? So what? It’s much more important that you are taking positive steps to face the money issues, and fix them. Keep that at the front of your mind.

Putting yourself down?

How to deal with self-criticism

When money issues are weighing on your mind, it's easy to focus only on the negatives – and to overstate them.

DO YOU:

See everything in black and white?

- Holding yourself to high expectations, and seeing yourself as a total failure if you don't meet them
 - Feeling like it's pointless to try, because you'll only fail AGAIN
-

Filter out the good stuff?

- Letting a small negative overshadow everything else, like a drop of ink in a glass of water
 - Telling yourself that any positives are down to luck, rather than effort
-

Assume you know what people are thinking?

- Not speaking up about your issues because you assume people will think badly of you
 - Delaying asking for help because "everyone will think I'm a letdown"
-

Think things can only get worse?

- Telling yourself that things can only end badly, and there's no point trying to change anything
 - Avoiding positive steps because "it's just not worth it"
-

Try these two simple exercises to shake yourself out of the negative



OUT WITH THE NEGATIVE!

Ask yourself these four questions to challenge negative thinking:

- 1.** What good do I get out of putting myself down?
- 2.** Do I really believe I'm this bad, or am I exaggerating?
- 3.** Are there any positives I'm ignoring – no matter how small?
- 4.** What would be a more useful thing to do right now, instead of criticising myself?

IN WITH THE POSITIVE!

At the end of each day, make a note of positive steps you took today:

- 1.** Something I did well today was...
- 2.** Today I felt good about myself when...
- 3.** I had a good time with... (a person, place or experience)
- 4.** Something good I did for someone else was...

It's not easy to challenge negative thinking, and it doesn't happen all at once. Try reminding yourself to stay positive by keeping a note of these questions, perhaps on your phone.

Let's work it out

Step-by-step solutions for difficult situations

It's time to solve some problems! These two worksheets will help you break down your challenges into manageable steps, and take the necessary action. If you find them useful, you could make copies. It's just as good to write the headings on a blank piece of paper.

PROBLEMS, S.O.L.V.E.D.

Each letter in the S.O.L.V.E.D. system is a step towards thinking differently about the challenges you face, changing negative thought patterns into positive ones. Think about a difficult situation you faced recently – one that made you feel stressed or ashamed, for example. Then work through the six steps on the worksheet below.



THINKING DIFFERENTLY

<p>S - specific problem</p>	<p>What is the problem that is causing distress? <i>Example: "I got a phone call from the electricity company, but I didn't answer"</i></p>
<p>O - other steps you could take</p>	<p>What are some positive steps you could take? <i>Examples: "Rather than avoid the call, I should answer it and stay on top of things." "I should think about what I would say to a friend in this situation, rather than feeling so self-conscious."</i></p>
<p>L - list the pros and cons</p>	<p>Pro... Con... <i>Example: Answering the phone</i> Pro: It's one more step towards fixing the issue. I can be proud of that. Con: It might make me feel stressed.</p>
<p>V - verify the best step to take</p>	<p>Which of the steps above would work best for you? (Circle it)</p>
<p>E - enact the positive step</p>	<p>Can you break down the task into smaller steps? Now, take those steps! Examples: <i>"I will make some notes about what I want to say on the phone. I am taking control of the situation. There is no spotlight on me!" "Before I call, I will do some deep breathing to help me stay calm." "After the call, I will remind myself of the positive steps I've just taken."</i></p>
<p>D - decide if it has worked</p>	<p>How did it feel? Was any part not as bad as you feared? What was difficult? What could you do differently next time?</p>

Next steps

and how to take them

We hope that you feel you're in a better place now you you have spoken to a debt advisor. By arranging your appointment, you have already tackled one of the most difficult steps.

The most important thing now is to stay on track...

What are your next steps?

If you discussed next steps with your advisor, make a note of what these steps are. Think about each step one-by-one.

Next Step 1:

Example: I will work on my financial statement so that I can be aware of what I can afford

Next Step 2:

Example: I will contact a creditor to negotiate a repayment plan

Next Step 3:

Example: I aim to practice Deep Breathing for 5 minutes, twice a day

Are you worried that these tasks are too big, or too difficult to achieve? Instead of stressing out, try breaking each one down into smaller, simpler steps. Often, that's all it takes to see that actually you are capable of doing what's needed – you just need to take it step by step.

The worksheet opposite will help you do this for each of the **"Next Steps"** you've written down. Remember, the advice in the previous sections of this guide could help too.

NEXT STEPS

1. My Goal

Example: "Getting in contact with my creditors"

2. Step-by-step actions I need to take to achieve my goal

(you may not need all the steps)

BEFORE

How worried am I? (1-10)

AFTER

How bad was it really? (1-10)

Step A

"Make sure I know the numbers to call"

Step B

"Set aside time to make calls"

Step C

"Be clear how much I owe each creditor, and how much I can afford to pay"

Step D

"Make notes about what I want to say on the call"

Step E

"Practice some deep breathing before each call"

If your BEFORE worry level was 7 or higher for any step, ask yourself:

Am I using any of the harmful ways to cope on **pg. 03**

Am I thinking about this step using the negative patterns on **pg. 09**

If AFTER the task you found any of the steps more upsetting than you expected, ask yourself:

Was there something that went wrong this time that I could prepare for better next time?

Are there any other steps I should have taken before that one?

Do I need any other help to do this next time? Try asking your advisor about what you can do.

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