

What can I do to cope with stress and anxiety?

We know that looking after a child with a heart condition can be extremely worrying and difficult. Due to the circumstances parents are facing self-care can be overlooked and mental wellbeing can often suffer greatly when absorbed in the stressful and demanding environment of caring for a heart child.

When experiencing stress and anxiety it can be helpful to have some tools in your back pocket which you can instantly access to help you in the moment.

Most importantly remember to **BREATHE**.

Breathe

Take time to come back into your body. Feel your feet placed firmly on the ground. Know you are safe. Place your hand onto your heart and focus on your breath. Focus only on the present moment and slow your breath until you feel calmer.

Meditate

Try to take ten minutes a day to sit quietly and meditate. Taking this small amount of time each day will cultivate a personal resource bank which you can rely on when in highly stressful moments. You can tap back into your feeling of inner calm and stillness and work through any stressful moments with greater control.

Simply google 'guided meditation' and you can access lots of free online tools.

Self help books

There are lots of great self-help books with hints and tips on how to alleviate stress and anxiety. Keep one with you which you can use for motivation or help and advice when things are tough.

Get outdoors

Fresh air can be a great antidote and help to relieve stress. It's important to ensure you get outside each day, a short walk is better than no walk at all.

Be creative

Having a creative outlet can reduce stress and focus energy and attention into a positive project.

Activities such as drawing, painting, knitting can all be very therapeutic and soothing – they can also be a welcome distraction at stressful times when you have little control over your circumstances.

Mindful colouring can also be a peaceful activity to engage with.

Socialise

Spending time with friends and loved ones is beneficial to well-being. Try and connect with people and reach out. The power of human connection, empathy and compassion is real. If you are not able to physically visit or see people, keeping in touch online can be a great way to ensure you are interacting with people.

Exercise & eat well

Fuelling and feeding your body is critical to mental wellbeing and reducing anxiety and stress. Try to make sensible and healthy choices in your physical well-being and your mental health will improve. If it's not possible to exercise, make sure you take short walks throughout the day.