



BENENDEN HOSPITAL:

Helping you to Check In With Your Wellbeing This National Stress Awareness Month

APRIL IS NATIONAL STRESS AWARENESS MONTH, HELD SINCE 1992 TO INCREASE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF STRESS, BREAK THE STIGMA AROUND IT AND GET PEOPLE TALKING TO FRIENDS, FAMILY AND COLLEAGUES ABOUT HOW IT AFFECTS THEM.

The last three years have brought stress into stark focus as a public health challenge, emphasising the need to ensure that we're looking after ourselves and being compassionate to others. A 2021 survey commissioned by CIPHR found that 79% of UK adults feel stressed at least one day a month, with nearly half (49%) of UK adults admitting to feeling stressed five or more days each month.

All of us experience stress as an unavoidable aspect of our everyday lives, but sometimes it can play a helpful role. When stressed, our adrenal glands release cortisol, a hormone produced when your sympathetic nervous system goes into 'fight or flight' mode. This short-term release of cortisol can function as a motivator, making us more alert and able to react quickly to situations, as well as regulating our blood pressure, blood sugar and metabolism.

However, when you experience a prolonged release of this hormone, it can have a negative effect, decreasing our feel-good hormones and making us irritable, anxious and depressed. Common signs and symptoms of high cortisol levels can include weight

gain, disrupted sleep, lack of energy, high blood pressure and a general brain fog or difficulty focusing.

If you suspect you may have high levels of the stress hormone, Benenden Hospital, based near Cranbrook, offers fast access to 25-minute face-to-face private GP appointments where you can request a cortisol test. Depending on the results, you may be referred for treatment or lifestyle changes.

You may also consider a nutritional therapy consultation, and Benenden Hospital's expert Nutritional Therapy team can help you achieve the lifestyle and dietary changes needed to reduce your levels of cortisol naturally. With a personalised approach informed by the latest nutrition science, Benenden's BANT-registered nutritional therapist can make recommendations based on your unique needs to help you feel better both physically and mentally. This will likely include a nutrient-dense diet full of whole fruits and vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats, and foods high in prebiotics and probiotics. And the good news is that dark chocolate can reduce stress!

Other lifestyle changes can also play an important part in getting you off the hormonal roller coaster. Getting better sleep, practising mindfulness and deep breathing, low-impact exercise and making time for fostering happy relationships with family and friends can all play a key role in reducing stress.

If you are affected by stress or suspect you may suffer from high cortisol levels, it's important not to ignore it. Take action today and book an appointment with a GP to get your wellbeing back on track.

To find out more about Benenden Hospital's private GP service or their nutritional therapy, visit www.benendenhospital.org.uk or call their private patient team on 01580 363 156.

