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Could the energy crisis fuel a mental health emergency?

Having to choose between putting the heating on and buying food is a choice nobody should have to make. However, this is becoming the reality for many amid the ongoing energy crisis and the soaring cost of living – and it is taking its toll on our mental health.

Mental health and money worries are intrinsically linked¹, leading many experts to warn that the current economic climate will have a significant and lasting impact on our psychological well-being.

Psychologist **Lee Chambers**: "Energy is something we don't always think about, but we cherish and value what it can do for us, from warmth to cooking, mobility to connection, to washing and how we present ourselves.

"Losing access to these, or the fear of this potentially happening, has the ability to cause psychological distress and impact mental well-being," he says. "The increased costs can put a strain on **personal finances** and fuel debt worries, especially among those on lower incomes. People have to make difficult decisions on which outgoings to prioritise."

These worries around rising energy prices can lead people to feel overwhelmed, anxious and even guilty, especially if they are having to make choices that impact their families. Additionally, Chambers adds, financial **stress** can lead to feelings of isolation and hopelessness which can fuel mental health problems such as **anxiety** and **depression**². And over winter, when we use more energy to heat our homes, the energy crisis is expected to hit households even harder.

"Fuel poverty has the potential to cause a significant impact on individuals and this could become a public health risk, especially over the winter months," says Chambers.

Impact of the news

While watching the [news](#) can help you stay informed, consuming too much can negatively impact mental health. A constant stream of sensationalist news – or [disaster reporting](#) – can contribute to feelings of anxiety. However, striking a balance between being in the know and not becoming overwhelmed is challenging, especially during a cost of living crisis.

[Counselling Directory member, Jenny Warwick](#), says: "The cost of living crisis has left many of us feeling like we're struggling to cope. We are bombarded with news about it and it feels hard to escape the endless cycle."

"Many of us are having to make major changes to our day-to-day lives. This isn't about cutting back on luxuries, but essentials like food, petrol and the energy we use. This will likely be having an impact on our [mental health](#)."

What to do if you're struggling with energy costs

Talk to your financial providers

It can be challenging to open up about financial [worries](#) as prices rise, but it's important to speak to your energy providers to see if you can alter what you're paying for your energy bills.

Psychologist Chambers says: "Suppliers have methods to support customers, talking to them early is vital so they can help relieve some of the pressure".

Seek financial support

There are various ways to get support if you're struggling financially. You can check if you are eligible for benefits on [GOV.UK](#).

The government will send you a 'cost of living payment' if you get certain benefits, such as Universal Credit, PIP or Attendance Allowance. You will also be eligible if you are over State Pension age and get Winter Fuel Payments.

You may be able to apply to your council's local welfare assistance scheme. Each local authority runs their own scheme – some offer small grants or food vouchers.

Some charities offer support schemes which will include ways to help with your energy bills and help people access grants and benefits, including [Turn2Us](#) and the debt charity [StepChange](#).

What to do if you're struggling with your mental health

Speak to your GP

If you are struggling with your [mental health](#) or mood, it is important to speak to your doctor. From counselling and [therapy](#) to medication, there are many different ways to manage and treat mental health problems. You can also [self-refer for therapy on the NHS](#).

Talk to friends and family

Financial [anxiety](#) around energy prices can feel very isolating. However, it's important to remember that you aren't alone - and to [speak to friends and family](#) about how you feel. "Being able to share concerns in a supportive environment can also make a difference in how we feel," says Chambers.

You could also speak to a financial advisor or financial counsellor through a charity.

Take a break from the news

Thinking about how much information we consume around energy and inflation is also important. "While complete avoidance may not be beneficial, finding a balance is essential given the current climate," says Chambers.

Be kind to yourself

Warwick says: "[Look after yourself](#) on a day-to-day basis. Take things one day at a time and make sure that you give yourself the time to do the things that make you feel a little bit better. Give yourself some breathing space. Sometimes, a five-minute [walk](#) is all it takes."

Further reading

1. [Understanding Society: High fuel prices affect mental and physical health.](#)

2. [Money & Pensions Service: More than half of people with mental health problems feel anxious when thinking about money.](#)

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