



What is stress?

Building healthier lives

UHB is a no smoking Trust

What is stress?

Stress can be defined as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives. Everyone experiences stress to some degree. The way we respond to stress, however, makes a big difference to our overall well-being.



We all know certain life situations are stressful – divorce, death, and moving house all spring to mind. But how many of us are aware of the long-term damage all the constant daily hassles of traffic jams, work deadlines, and family life can do to our health and wellbeing.

These days our challenges tend to be more emotional than physical and come too fast to allow the body to recover – a row with your partner, a delayed train, and running late for a meeting can all happen one after the other.

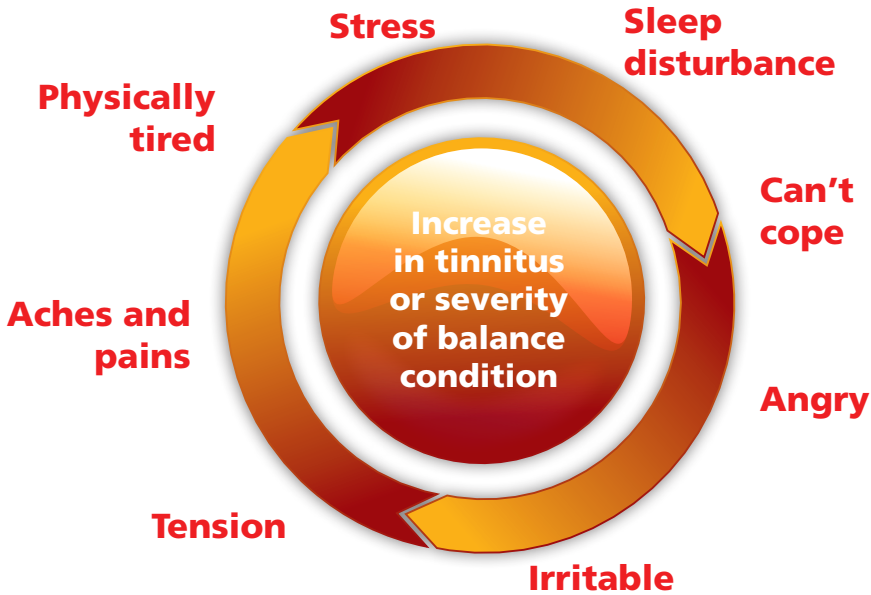
Stress chemicals have no chance to disappear for months, even years, so our minds and bodies begin to behave and feel as if they're under constant threat.

How stress damages YOUR health

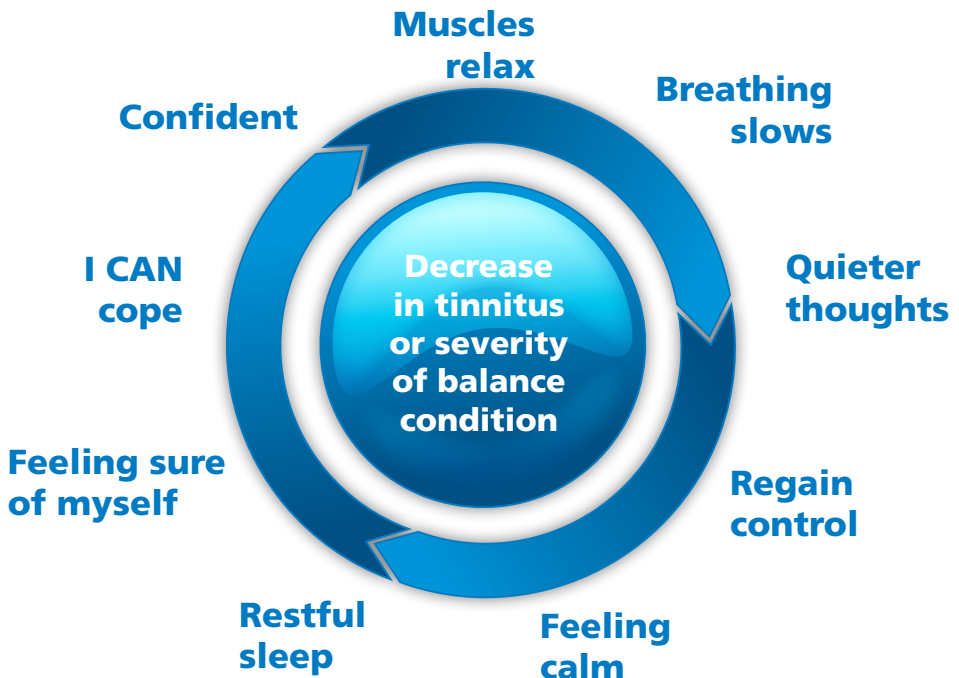
Do you recognise any of these signs?



The spiral of stress



The spiral of relaxation

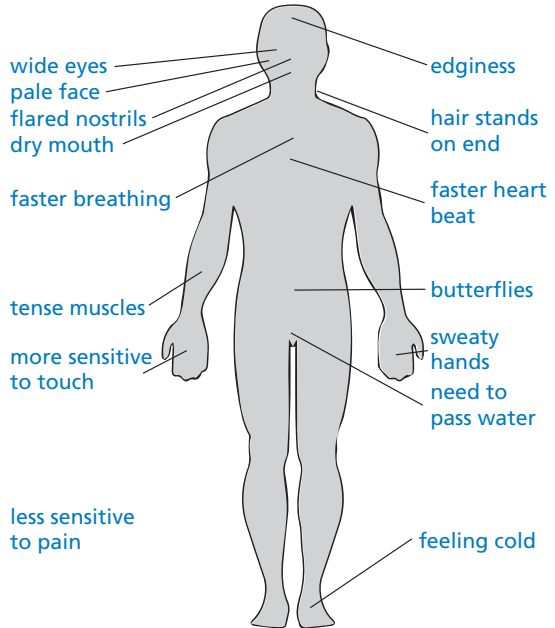


The Fight or Flight Response

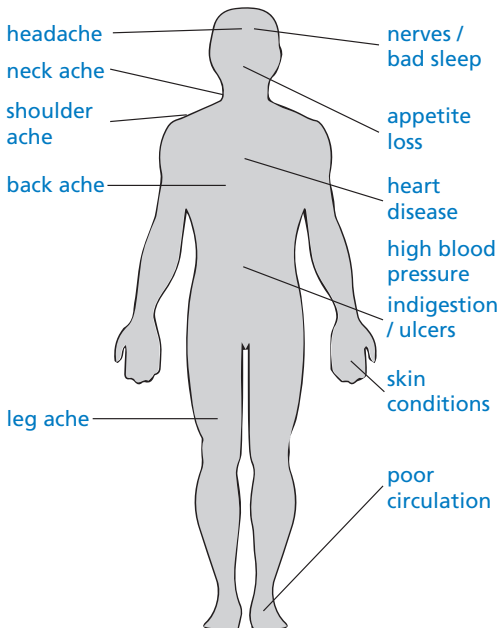
The Fight and Flight response is a short-term stress response. It enables us to react when we are threatened or in danger. When we are threatened the brain assesses the situation and works out the best way to meet the danger we are facing - do we run away or stay and fight?

A cocktail of chemicals is released to enable the body to deal with the danger it faces. These chemicals are called neurotransmitters and they are released by the nerve endings into the cells of the organs to alter their activity. Hormones are produced to prepare the body to deal with the stress. The stress response is caused by the action of adrenalin, noradrenaline, and cortisol on the body's organs.

Short term effects of stress



Long term effects of stress



Long-term stress is the result of the Fight or Flight response being triggered over and over again. As the body does not use up the stress chemicals, this begins to affect our health and well-being.

Relaxation

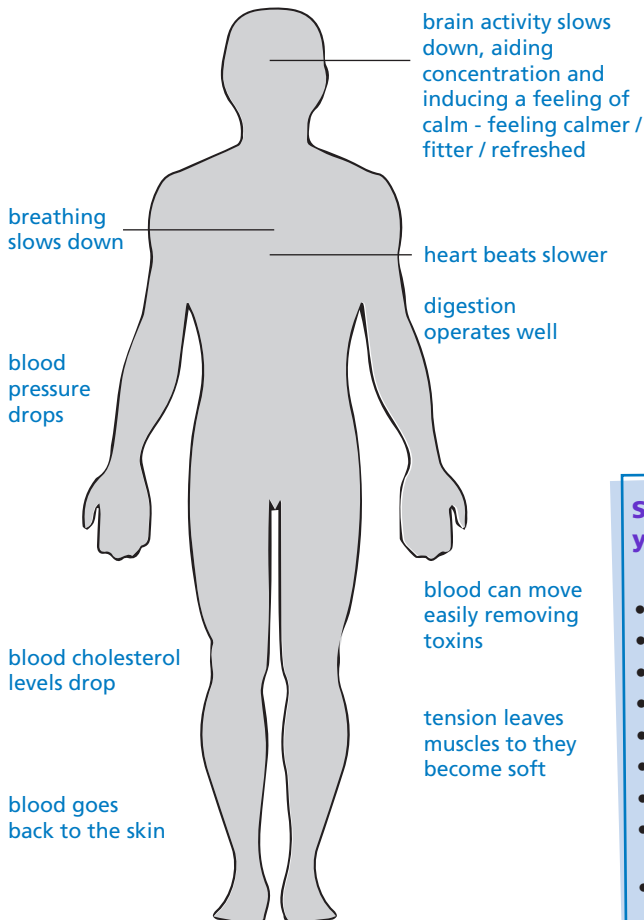
What works for you?

It is important to learn to recognise the signs and symptoms of stress and react to prevent it from building up. This means finding the techniques that work for you and using them.

Relaxation can enable us to deal with the physical effects of anxiety and tension. Relaxation techniques reverse the fight or flight response by lowering heart and breathing rates and reducing stress hormone levels.

How will this affect my health?

Relaxation



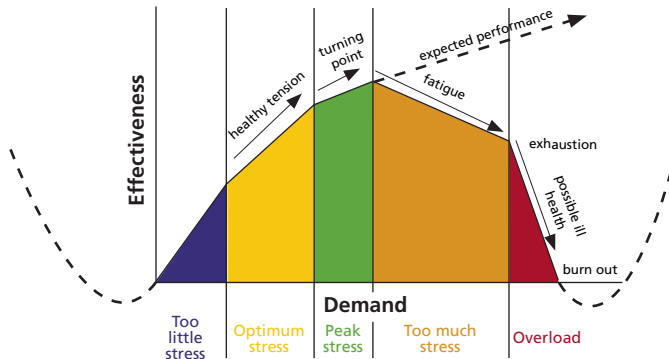
Some relaxation techniques you can use are:

- Breathing techniques
- Muscular relaxation
- Meditation exercises
- Visualisation techniques
- Physical exercise
- Healthy lifestyle choices
- The ability to say "No"
- Delegation and management skills
- Know how to lessen demands

Peter Nixon human function curve

We all need a certain level of stress (demand) to achieve anything. Too much affects our ability to do things and may lead to our health breaking down. Too little stress can stop us from doing things as well as we could and we may feel bored. Optimum stress means having a healthy level of stress in which we feel well, relaxed and in control. We have a good balance between our different daily demands. At this level a good night's sleep, relaxation, having a break will help us keep going.

Stress & Performance Curve



Level 1 - too little stress:

Characteristics displayed

- Under utilisation of skills
- Frustration
- Boredom
- Under challenged
- Not looking forward to life in general
- Unmotivated
- Depression

Suggested strategy

- Medical / social support
- Maintain basic routine
- Increase social contact
- Increase appropriate exercise
- Increase stimulation and interests

Level 2 - optimum stress:

Characteristics displayed

- Stimulated
- Positive and feeling balanced
- Alert
- Motivated
- Decisive
- Creative
- Able to intergrate additional demand
- Appears relaxed and calm
- Relates well to others
- Good restorative sleep patterns

Suggested strategy

- Maintain good stress management strategy
- Allow time for work, relaxation, hobbies and sleep
- Maintain good lifestyle habits e.g. Exercise, eating, relaxation etc.
- Say "No" now to reduce pressure building later
- Be assertive
- Maintain good time management techniques
- Plan well ahead

Level 3 - peak stress:

Characteristics displayed

- Razor sharp focus and concentration
- Attention to specific detail
- Intense activity
- Loss of balance
- Unaware of costs to people and relationships around them
- Display poor communication skills
- Life maintenance skills diminished
- Poor delegating skills
- Appears to be buzzing but at a cost
- No notice of advice will be taken

Suggested strategy

- Make colleagues aware of what is going on
- Avoid confrontation
- Attempt to support by encouraging good eating etc
- Don't be judgemental
- Take pressure off where possible
- Support after the period is over

Level 4 - too much stress:

Characteristics displayed

- Loss of humour
- Reduced efficiency
- Irritability
- Feelings of anxiety
- Indecisive
- Disturbed sleep patterns
- Mood swings
- Feeling uncreative
- Unable to integrate additional demands
- Makes silly mistakes
- Have small accidents
- Confusion
- Unexplained memory lapses

Suggested strategy

- Delegate more
- Ask for help, make your situation known
- Don't try to carry on as if nothing is wrong
- Plan time out
- Increase use of relaxation techniques
- Ensure that positive lifestyle habits are maintained
- Increase planning time to reduce effort

Level 4 - overload:

Characteristics displayed

- Serious fatigue
- Sleep disturbances, however exhausted
- Unrestorative sleep
- Anger outbursts
- Fighting to stay in control but losing the perceived fight
- Loss of meaning, dreading the day ahead
- Exhaustion
- Ill health
- Burn out

Suggested strategy

- Pressure must be relieved
- External medical and psychological help may be needed
- Short term supervised drug intervention may be needed (if manic or depressive states arise)
- Reduction of demand on all fronts
- Increase relaxation
- Long term understanding and support may be needed (possibly several months)

Managing stress

Thinking about managing stress in YOUR life, what can you do now to exit YOUR stress roundabout?

Improving Coping Skills and Making a Stress Reduction Plan

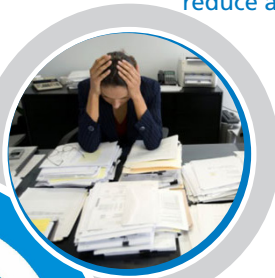
Review lifestyle

e.g. appropriate exercise / diet



Lessen demands

e.g. avoidance or reduce actual cause



**Stress
roundabout**



Reduce stress response

e.g. learn relaxation skills



Change attitude

e.g. talk over the problem

Please use the space below to write down any questions you may have and bring this with you to your next appointment.

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Audiology
University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust
