

UNDERSTANDING STRESS

And making it work for you

STRESS what does it really mean?



Stress is a term that originated from engineering and the loads applied to heavy metals using forces that cause something to change or deform. It has been coined by people around the world and used for describing how we feel when we are under pressure and challenged.

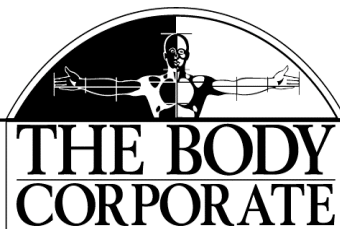
Stress is not something that happens to us. Stress is any event or circumstance, which we *perceive* to be a challenge. It is a result of what is happening inside our heads rather than outside our heads as a response to these events (stressors). All of the hassles, problems, change and constant battles we face are actually **STRESSORS** (things that lead to our reactions). How we think about these events or circumstances and how we react to them determines how stressful they are.

What triggers your stress? [Click here for a list of common stressors \(pop up box\)](#)

- Family problems
- Workplace problems
- Unemployment
- Lifestyle changes
- Developmental changes
- Gender based changes
- Geographical Isolation
- Technology
- Commerce
- Positive Events
- Internal stress triggers
- Cultural stresses
- Discrimination
- Pressure to achieve status
- City life
- Rural life
- Noise
- Others (list some of yours that are not on this list)

It is important to realise that as human beings we need a certain amount of stress in our lives to get up out of bed every morning. We are not designed to have a stress free life and I am sure you will agree it would be fairly boring if that was the case. The key is to find the right balance for you and this is what we will work on during this module.

Mismanaged stress is costing the business world millions of dollars per year. It is linked to 65% to 90% of all illnesses. We read about the negative effects of stress everyday. Everyone is concerned about it but how many of us educate ourselves on how to manage it? How we perceive or react to stress determines the amount of stress we feel.



Dr Hans Selye – Austrian Endocrinologist (also known as the father of Stress) claims

- It's not stress that harms us, but DISTRESS!
- DISTRESS occurs when we prolong emotional stress and don't deal with it in a positive way.
- Shows up as Extreme levels of emotional upset and high anxiety of panic to depths of depression.
- Hinders coping effectively

Homes and Rahe Schedule of Life Events

This schedule has been developed as a predictive measure for assessing how certain levels of stress may predispose us to lifestyle illnesses if we don't take good care of ourselves.

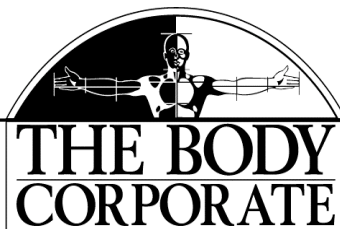
(pop up box of the schedule)

Homes and Rahe Schedule of Recent Life Events

If you cast your mind back over the past 12 months, circle any event, which you have experienced. When complete add up the numbers to get a total score and then at the end of the schedule you will be able to translate what the score means.

Remember this is very subjective, it is an exercise to bring about your awareness as to the pressures you may or may not be under and the idea is to use it as a positive tool. If you score quite highly then ensure you have tools in place to manage the pressures you are under.

Event	Stress Points
Death of spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation	65
Jail term	63
Death of a close family member	63
Personal injury or illness	53
Marriage	50
Fired at work	47
Marital reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Change in family member's health	44
Pregnancy	40
Sex difficulties	39
Addition to family	39
Business readjustment	39
Change in financial state	38
Death of a close friend	37
Change to different line of work	36
Change in number of arguments with spouse	35
Taking out of a mortgage or loan	31
Foreclosure on a mortgage or loan	30
Change in work responsibilities	29



Son or daughter leaving home	29
Trouble with in-laws	29
Outstanding personal achievement	28
Spouse begins or stops work	26
Starting or finishing school	26
Change in living conditions	25
Revision of personal habits	24
Trouble with boss	23
Change in work hours or conditions	20
Change in residence	20
Change in school	20
Change in recreational habits	19
Change in church activities	19
Change in social activities	18
Taking out a small mortgage or loan	17
Change in sleeping habits	16
Change in number of family gatherings	15
Change in eating habits	15
Holiday	13
Christmas season	12
Minor violation of law	11
Total Score _____	

What does the score mean?

Less than 150	30 per cent probability of developing an illness, i.e. no more than average risk.
Between 150 and 299	50 per cent probability of developing an illness.
Over 300	80 per cent probability of developing an illness.

Please note:

One of the problems of such predictive measures is the possibility of their becoming self- fulfilling prophecies. The purpose behind the exercise however is not to notify us of the probability of becoming ill but rather to encourage us to take preventative measures.

(main text)

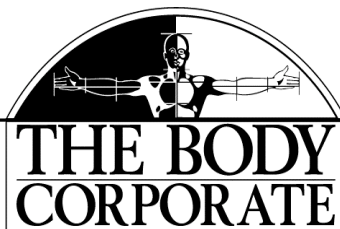
Exercise

Take a look at these three words.

WORK

FAMILY

SELF



Now I want you to put them in order in terms of which gets the greatest amount of priority and focus for you right now. Place your greatest priority and focus at the top, then sequentially in descending order as they fall. Remember the one you have chosen for the top does not have to take the greatest amount of time.

If you have anything other than

SELF

FAMILY

WORK

I want you to cross it out and write down the Wellness Equation as I have it above. Consider this, what good is anyone of us on a hospital bed with an illness to our family or our work. It is not selfish to put yourself at the top of the list, it is self-responsible and that is what I want you to remember and strive for. You probably won't get it right every day (if you are human) but if your priority and focus is here then you will keep coming back to it and get better at achieving it.

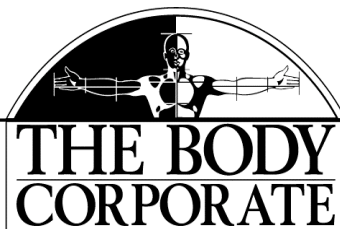
Exercise:

1. Take a minute to write down what the greatest challenges are in your work life right now.
2. Then write down what the greatest challenges are in your personal life right now.
3. When you compare the two lists, what are you currently doing to manage the balance between both work and personal life to ensure you don't get too overloaded and overwhelmed?
4. Does your answer to number 3 surprise you? Are you planning ahead to ensure you are managing the process and not just reacting to it? If not is there anything that you could do that would take some pressure off between work life and personal life?

Stop for a minute and just think about a normal workday, and then the 24 hours that surrounds that day. If you were to describe it to me, how much of it would be stimulation (tasks) and how much of it would be relaxation (activities that allow you to switch off)? Try filling out the "24 hour day" form in the box and you may be surprised. (POP UP BOX)

The 24 hour day

Time	<i>Stimulation</i>	Relaxation	Conclusion
Midnight			
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			



6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12 noon			
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			

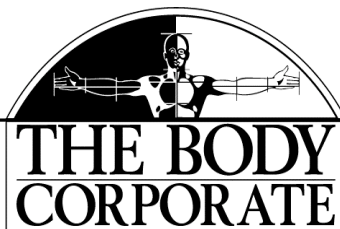
When you take a look at the total 24 hours, how does it look? Are you being responsible and taking adequate breaks throughout your working day or are you sitting at your desk through your breaks? Have you planned in time for exercise to take care of your health, and do you have adequate time for yourself and your personal relationships? What conclusions have you come to?

(main text)

Now we are getting a feel for how much managing of stress we are doing versus avoiding stress, it is time to take a look at the different types of stress and our responses.

Fight or flight

You have at some stage most likely heard of the “fight or flight” stress response. This is acute stress and our bodies have been hard wired to our old physiology to gear up for action – get into a prime state of readiness to deal with any danger, challenge or other real or imaginary demands. This is our body deciding to fight it out or



flee the situation. We experience fight or flight anytime we perceive a threat or a danger or get really excited. When we do our body will automatically go through certain stress responses such as

- The liver releases sugar and fats into the bloodstream as fuel for quick energy
- Our breathing becomes faster to provide more oxygen to the working muscles
- Red blood cells flood the bloodstream, carrying more oxygen to the muscles and brain
- Our heart beats faster, blood pressure rises
- We have a blood clotting mechanism that is activated in anticipation of injury (in the caveman days it prevented us from bleeding to death if we were bitten by the sabre tooth tiger)
- Our muscles tense in preparation for strenuous action
- Our saliva dries up, digestion ceases and blood is diverted away from the stomach to the working muscles and brain where it is needed. This may cause a sinking feeling in the stomach.
- We perspire more to cool the body down
- Our bowel and bladder may become loose.
- Our pupils dilate, allowing more light to enter so we can see in the dark
- All our senses are heightened enabling us to take swift actions and make swift decisions.

Some common Acute Stressors are:

- Noise
- Isolation
- Crowding
- Hunger
- Danger
- Infection
- Imagining a threat or remembering a dangerous event

Chronic Stress

Ongoing stressful situations that are not short lived and the urge to act “fight or flight” must be suppressed.

Some common Chronic Stressors include:

- On-going highly pressured work
- Long term relationship problems
- Loneliness
- Persistent financial worries

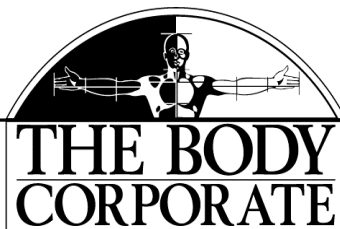
The effects of stress will be influenced by your personality traits and how you were conditioned as a child to cope with stress.

Stress and the Individual

We all experience different levels of stress during the same or similar experiences because...

- Everyone’s perception of what constitutes a threat or demand is different.
- It is not your actual coping ability but your perception of your ability to cope i.e. if you believe you will cope even if you do not have the skills, you will cope.
- We all have different tolerance levels.
- We each need to assess whether our individuals reactions are beneficial or harmful.

Some personality traits have special risk factors for distress



- Constant drive to succeed, excessive fear of failure, ultra competitiveness.
- Tendency to react excessively to any real or perceived loss of control.
- Hostility and aggressiveness toward others.
- Preferring work to recreation and socialising.
- Feeling guilty when on holiday or not working.
- Tension, restlessness, impatience and irritability, especially when things seem to be happening slowly.
- Highly pressured by time and what has to be done.

Negative Stress / Distress

Negative stress / distress affects the body, emotions and the mind. So how do you recognise when you are experiencing negative stress / distress?



For most people, when the brain becomes exhausted it becomes difficult to concentrate. Making a simple decision may seem like a big problem. Some people will drink more alcohol or smoke more cigarettes when under stress. Others will eat more or less food. Some people wake in the early hours between 3am to 5am and just get back to sleep and the alarm goes off at 6am. Some people experience tiredness, irritability, upset stomach, vomiting, and diarrhoea, trouble in relationships, skin rashes, hay fever, allergies and depression. Each of us responds to stress physically, mentally, emotionally and in the way we behave.

When under prolonged stress (chronic stress) both males and females are at increased risk of conditions such as ulcers, hypertension, indigestion, tight muscles and chronic fatigue (to name a few).

Women under stress often suffer harsher PMT, infertility, anxiety and neurosis.

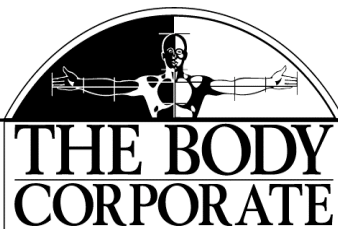
Men under stress often suffer muscle ache, headache, decision-making difficulties and chronic disease.

Exercise:

1. **Do you know what you do on a mental, physical, emotional and behavioural level when you are under undue stress?**
2. **Have you actually paid attention?**
3. **What are the feelings you experience?**
4. **Has anyone ever commented about your behaviour during a stressful event?**
5. **Take a look at your answer to numbers 1 and 3. If you make a note of these and become aware of how you react, next time you notice yourself beginning to do/feel any or all of these it is time to tell yourself that the pressure is rising and that this is where you start managing the process. To manage effectively work through the remainder of the module and pay special attention to the SOLUTIONS section, as these are tools you can work with.**

Now let's take a closer look for you at the early warning bells for negative stress and try to identify those that can be useful tools for managing the level of pressure you are under.

Early Warning Bells for Negative Stress (pop up box)



Below are four sections of warning bells for negative stress. Work through each section and place a tick beside anything you have experienced in the past 12 months. Don't be concerned if you feel you are ticking entire sections. When you are complete, note which one or two sections most of your ticks appear in. Now take a look at what they are. You can use these warning bells to gauge when the pressure is rising. Remember it is healthy to be stressed provided you manage it. So, when you start to do the things you have ticked more often it simply means the pressure is rising and you need to put extra tools in place for managing stress. We will cover these under solutions.

(pop up box)....

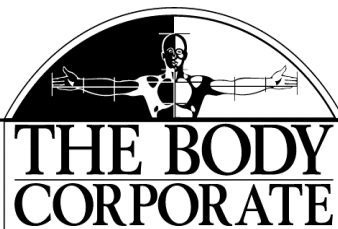
EARLY WARNING BELLS FOR NEGATIVE STRESS AND HOW TO RECOGNISE THEM

SOME OF THE MENTAL SYMPTOMS:

- Unable to concentrate
- Making simple decisions is difficult
- Loss of self confidence
- Fatigue
- Forgetfulness
- Constant feeling of "lack of time"
- Confused thinking
- Tendency to lose perspective
- Impulsive or premature decision making

SOME OF THE EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS:

- Anxious
- Irritable or angry outbursts
- Panic attacks
- Irrational fear
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feeling of resentment, hostility or animosity



- Guilt ridden
- Cynical and aggressive
- Feelings of depression
- Nightmares
- Uncontrollable moods
- Feeling of insecurity
- Crying or weeping, on the verge of tears
- Fears of not being good enough, or being criticised

SOME OF THE PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS:

- Tight, tense muscles (normally shoulders and back)
- Shallow or erratic breathing
- Sweaty palms
- Cold fingers
- Dry mouth
- Dizzy spells
- Chest pain or palpitations
- High pitched voice
- Knot in stomach, nausea
- Frequency of urination
- Diarrhoea
- Stiff jaw
- Restlessness, eg. Pacing
- Shaky hands

SOME OF THE BEHAVIOURAL SYMPTOMS:

- Increased smoking or alcohol drinking
- Increased or decreased eating
- Increased or decreased sleep
- Nail biting
- Pulling hair



- Social withdrawal
- Neglecting looks, and or personal hygiene
- Reckless driving (unable to concentrate)
- Knee jiggling, finger tapping, grimacing, lip smacking and other mannerisms
- Non-stop talking
- Obsessive Compulsive Behaviour (checking locks, needless shopping, or washing)
- Workaholism or absenteeism

(REF adapted from P. Chandra Patel – “The Complete Guide to Stress Management”)

(main text)

Some of the Solutions

There are no revolutionary techniques for stress management; it comes back to self-management and taking personal responsibility. During times of stress we need to get back to basics and take care of ourselves more than ever so that we are in the best of health to work through our stress.

Some of the best techniques / solutions are....

- Stop
- Breathe
- Take time out
- Remove yourself and do something completely different
- Bring back the laughter
- Delegate, delegate, delegate
- Ask for help
- Learn to pause or nothing worthwhile will ever catch up to you
- Begin or continue to exercise (please see the “Moving for Life” module)
- Eat a balanced diet most of the time (please see the “Eating for Energy” and Vitality module)
- Try therapeutic Massage, Meditation, Yoga, Pilates, naturopathy, iridology, acupuncture or any other complimentary therapy that works for you.
- Put parallel lines in your diary and ink them in (time out)
- Allow yourself 20 minutes of quiet time a day – just enough to let the great ideas pop in!
- Wake up on one of your days off and have absolutely nothing planned.
- Know your value and belief systems
- Plan regular short breaks throughout the year – not just one big one.
- Invest in your personal relationships every single day. Take time to be with family and friends.
- Contribute to the community
- Have more intimacy in your life
- Practice random acts of kindness.
- Reintroduce the things you have given up that you love to do

Your Solutions for Staying Sane **Exercise**



Sit quietly with no interruptions and answer the following questions.

1. **What are the rituals (things you love to do) that you have given up over the years because you got too busy?**
2. **What is your favourite way to lose yourself (relax)?**
3. **Your action plan – make a list of the tools that you are going to put in to place to manage and not avoid your stress.**
4. **Now complete the Manage Your Stress Don't Avoid it Pop Up box below – is there anything else you need to add into your action plan?**

Manage Your Stress Don't Avoid It (pop up box)

MANAGE YOUR STRESS...
DON'T AVOID IT
You have to be tough to perform mentally, physically and emotionally.
Toughness is the ability to perform under pressure, to thrive on stress.

How tough are you?
<input type="checkbox"/> Do you exercise 3-4 times per week?
<input type="checkbox"/> Do you eat well 75% of the time?
<input type="checkbox"/> Do you sleep 6-8 hours per night?
<input type="checkbox"/> Do you limit coffee and tea to less than 3 cups per day?
<input type="checkbox"/> Do you limit alcohol to less than 14 drinks per week, with at least 2 alcohol free days?
<input type="checkbox"/> Do you drink 6-8 glass of water per day?



<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you have planned periods of relaxation in your day?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you enjoy your work?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you nurture your personal relationships?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you have solid value and belief systems?
<input type="checkbox"/>	When travelling, do you plan ahead to keep your health and fitness routines

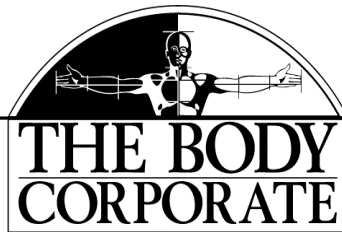
The empty boxes are the ones you need to work on for now. Try this again in one month and see how it looks.

Breathing Exercise (pop up box)

USING THE CONTROL SWITCH ON YOUR PRESSURE COOKER

When all else fails, remember to breathe!!

1. Sit quietly and comfortably
2. Give yourself permission to use the next 5 minutes to rest or balance and relax yourself.
3. Release the tension from the entire body, like a dead weight melting into the chair.
4. Close your eyes and detach from the office activity.
5. Take a deep breath in, filling up your belly, feeling the chest rise.
6. Hold this breath for 2-3 seconds, and then exhale through the nostrils.
7. Continue with those low and deep breaths, repeating to yourself *"I feel calm and relaxed – the tension has left my body"*
8. Repeat until you truly feel calm.
9. Slowly bring yourself back to consciousness.
10. Open your eyes, smile brightly and move on.



CONCLUSION

When it comes to managing stress, there are no hard and fast rules. It is not a case of getting it wrong; it is about making a choice to start managing stress and not avoiding it. To manage stress we have to practice a certain amount of self-discipline and be responsible for ourselves. No one can do it for us. Try taking small steps. Two of the best things you can do to make a start are to begin or continue to exercise and eat balanced meals most of the time. As mentioned earlier there are two excellent modules on these topics to help you: Moving for Life and Eating for Energy and Vitality.

There are many excellent resources available to you; here are a few to get you started, if you would like to know more please email us at enquiries@bodycorp.co.nz

1. The Body Corporate Limited - www.bodycorp.co.nz
 - i. Healthy Lifestyle Newsletters, Wellness Shop, Support
2. Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand - www.mhf.org.nz – excellent books and resources.
3. Don't Sweat the Small Stuff... and it's all small stuff, *Richard Carlson*
4. Calm for Life, *Paul Wilson*
5. The Less Stress Book – How to turn stress to your Advantage
David Winsborough & Kay Allen, The Consumers' Institute of New Zealand Inc
6. 7 Day Weekend, *Sefan Smith*

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