

Emotional Health Looking After Ourselves



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On Behalf of

Catalyst
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Signs and Symptoms of Stress

Try to identify at least two effects of stress under any of the headings below:

How do you feel?

e.g. anxious

How do you behave?

e.g. eat too much or too little

How do you think?

e.g. forgetful

What happens to your body?

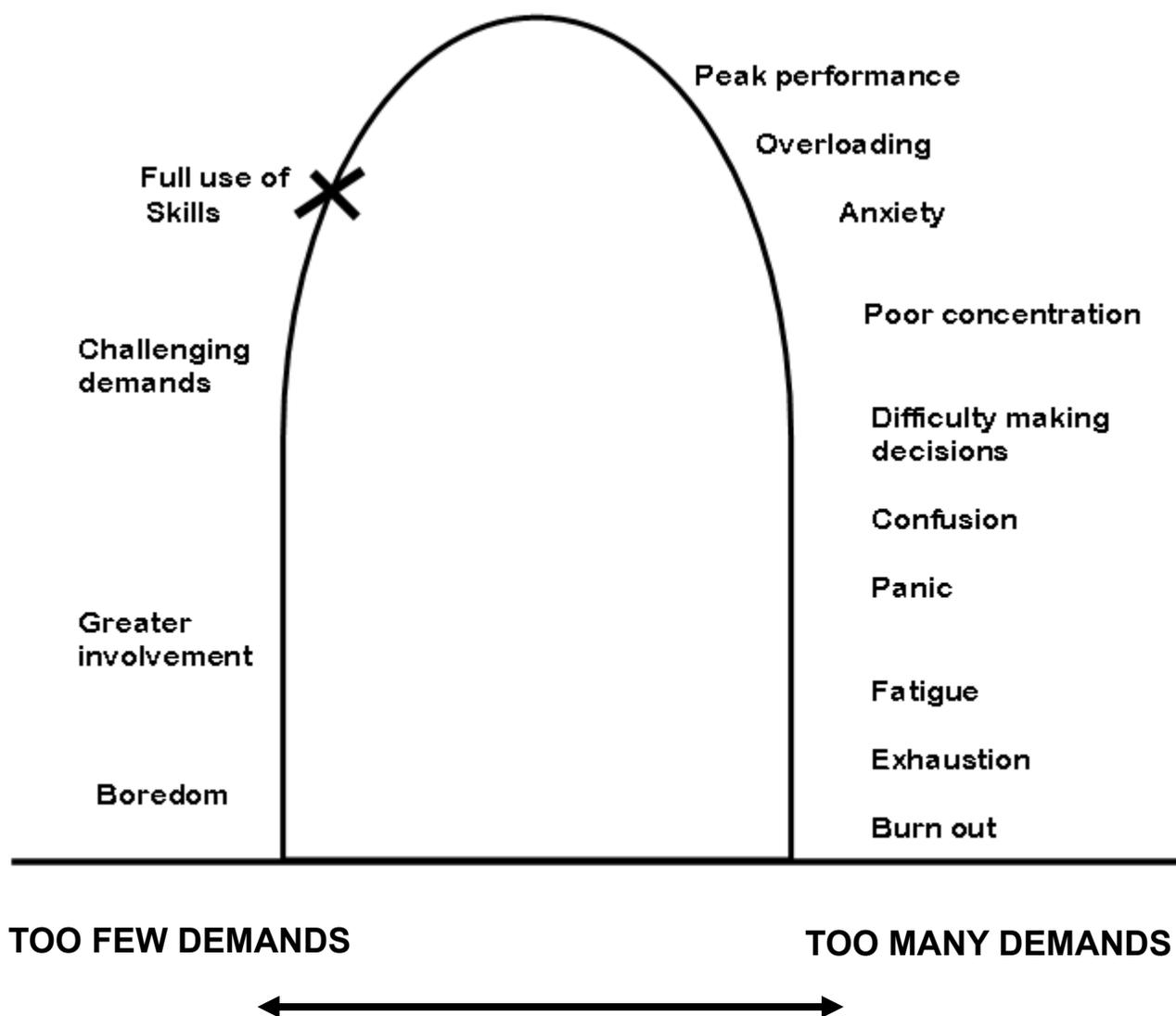
e.g. “butterflies in the stomach”

This is our individual early warning system.

It is important that we recognise the signs of stress in ourselves as well as others.

Stress Curve

Each of us needs to find the optimum level that is right for us. As individuals we vary in how we respond to stress. A few people thrive on stress and use it as a stimulus to help attain peak performances and seem to encourage situations which make the adrenaline flow. For others, stress is a destructive and debilitating force which can cause depression, anxiety, physical discomfort and illness. Most of us, most of the time, come somewhere in between.



Hebb, D 1972

Lifestyle Questionnaire

1. How many hours do you normally sleep? _____
2. Is this sufficient? Yes/No
3. If NO – how many hours do you need? _____
4. Do you eat regular meals? Yes/No
5. Do you eat a lot of junk food particularly those which are sweet and fatty: chocolate, doughnuts, puddings? Yes/No
6. Are you overweight? Yes/No
7. Do you lack an appetite or do you feel you want to eat all the time? Yes/No
8. Do you smoke? Yes/No
9. How much alcohol do you drink - per day? _____
- per week? _____
10. Do you think you drink too much? Yes/No
11. Do you think you need a drink to keep going? Yes/No
12. Do you play sport? Yes/No
13. If YES – how many hours do you spend each week on the sport? _____
14. Do you take regular exercise? Yes/No
15. If YES – how long do you spend exercising - per day? _____
- per week? _____
16. Do you spend time specifically to relax? Yes/No
17. If YES – how long do you spend daily? _____

It is up to you to decide on the basis of this whether you lead a healthy lifestyle.
The following guidelines should help you:

- 30 minutes exercise, three times a week
- Daily short periods of relaxation
- High fibre, low fat, low sugar diet
- Sufficient sleep
- No smoking
- Drinking in moderation (alcohol, coffee, tea)
- Being an appropriate weight for height

Questions on Lifestyle Questionnaire

After completing the lifestyle questionnaire, ask yourself the following questions, then discuss your answers with a partner.

1. Did anything surprise you about your answers to the questionnaire?
2. What aspects of your lifestyle are positive and need to be maintained?
3. Is there one area from diet, sleep, exercise or relaxation which you think requires more attention/time in your life?

How might you try to do this?

Ways to Relax

Relaxation strategies help us to reduce both physical and psychological symptoms of stress.

An important point about all techniques is that they require **REGULAR DAILY PRACTICE**. The following four techniques are commonly used and are described for you to practise if you wish.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Sitting or lying in a relaxed position, that is, arms and legs uncrossed, neck, head and spine comfortably supported, concentrate on **slowly** tensing and relaxing parts of the body, starting with the toes and moving up to the ankles, calf muscles, knees, thigh muscles, stomach muscles, chest muscles, shoulders, neck, hands and upper arms. Finally relax the face by clenching and unclenching the teeth, squinting and relaxing the eyes, frowning and relaxing the forehead.

Remembering the physiological model of stress, through **regular** relaxation you are reducing the effects of the stress reaction, decreasing your level of arousal.

DEEP BREATHING (1 to 8 count)

Ideally when practising deep breathing, breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth taking longer over the out breath, for example, breathing in to the count of 1 and out to the count of 2 for a count of 8. Deep breathing can also be incorporated into our daily routine, for example, taking a deep breath before answering the telephone, entering a room or looking at the time. It can be useful to imagine breathing in energy and breathing out tension. Three minutes deep breathing can reduce physical and psychological stress markedly.

NB When under stress we tend to take shallow, rapid breaths through the mouth holding carbon dioxide in the lungs and keeping oxygen out, creating a sense of tension and panic.

Ways to Relax continued

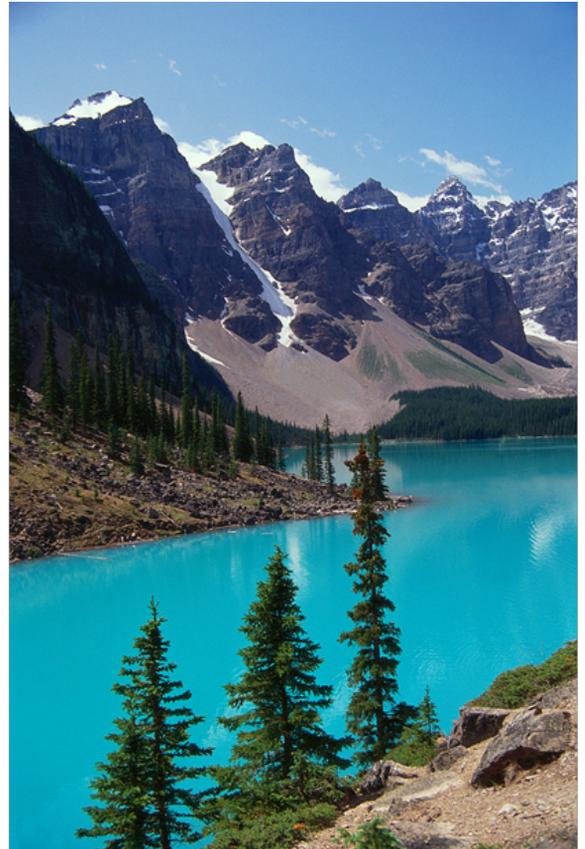
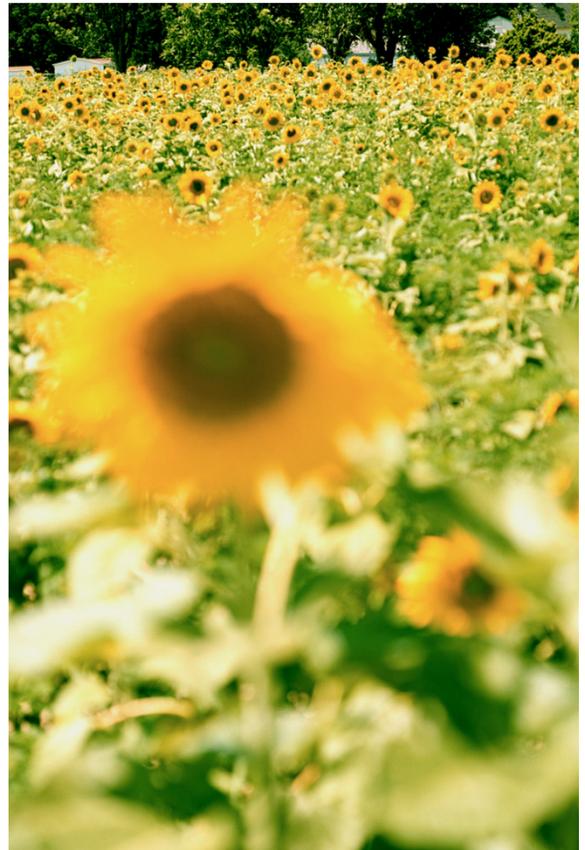
VISUAL IMAGERY

It is useful to precede this technique with a progressive muscle relaxation or some deep breathing. NEXT:

- a) Keeping your eyes closed and breathing quite calmly, imagine a favourite place, a pleasant relaxing setting in the past or one you would enjoy visiting in the future. Perhaps a beach, an island, a mountain glade, a boat on a calm lake, relaxing before a cosy fire.
- b) Look at your scene. Think about the sounds, the colours, the smells, the shapes in your favourite place.
- c) Now put yourself there. If your scene includes people, have them vague and at a distance, rather like part of the scenery.
- d) You may find your mind wandering a bit, but simply allow yourself to drift back to the scene again after a short while.
- e) Take a little time to explore your scene and enjoy yourself.

MINDFULNESS

Focus your attention on being in the moment. Become aware of the sights, sounds and other sensory impressions all around you. If possible go for a walk, for example, in your garden and notice the natural world.



I Work Well If...

- I choose to do my most demanding tasks in the morning.
- I work in short concentrated bursts.
- I measure what I have achieved rather than only focusing on tasks which remain to be done.
- I am satisfied to do a “good enough” job.
- I have a place for key items of equipment.
- I can share ideas with other people.
- I have somewhere peaceful to work on my own away from interruptions.
- I take time to reflect on my work.
- I can enjoy my leisure time with a clear conscience.
- I break large tasks into manageable chunks.
- I have a filing system which includes the bin.
- I receive at least weekly praise or acknowledgement that my work is valued.

Task Management

- Does this task need to be done?
- Do I need to do it?
- How long am I prepared to spend on it?
- When will I do it?

NB: The Pareto time principle or the 80:20 Principle, i.e. 20% of the time you spend on something is likely to produce 80% of your final input.

Delegation

Tasks may be upwardly delegated to, for example, the Head of Department/Key Stage Co-ordinator, as well as downwardly delegated to, for example, a teaching assistant.

Appropriate delegation helps others feel valued as it acknowledges their strengths and expertise.

A reluctance to delegate may stem from a belief that:

- To ask for help is a sign of weakness.
- No one else will do the job as well.
- Someone else may do a better job and take the credit.
- There is no one who can help anyway.
- We should be able to do all aspects of our job well.
- We enjoy our work so much that we want to do it all ourselves.

Guidelines for Saying “No”

Categorise and assign priorities to the tasks you are likely to be asked to do. When very busy, you may decide that you can only take on tasks which fall into the top categories.

Decide how far ahead you want to commit yourself. If your commitments ahead are uncertain, only agree to something that's in the foreseeable future.

- If you are caught unprepared, take time to consider the request. Don't be bounced into agreeing to a request too quickly.
- Don't sound too apologetic: be brief, clear and definite.
- Use a form of words in a convincing tone which:
 - Expresses regret
 - Is definite
 - Is polite
 - Contains a reason

Giving a reason does help the other person to see that you are not turning down their request because you simply cannot be bothered with it. Reasons may include:

- The fact that if you take on more work you will not be able to do your existing tasks properly
- That you are already under too much pressure for the good of your health
- You've been saying “No” to similar requests from others
- That the task does not lie in your field of competence.

Practical Hints to Boost Resiliency

- Ask yourself what is the worst thing that could happen.
- Ask yourself whether what you are worrying about will matter in five years time.
- Ask yourself is this worry worth five minutes of your time, an hour, the whole evening, the whole weekend, or your whole holiday?
- Cultivate a colleague/friend you can trust to talk through any worries at an early stage.
- Aim to turn your worries into problems – by definition, problems are something to be solved.
- Come to a decision and act on it – even a “bad” decision is likely to be less stressful than remaining in a state of indecision.
- Rehearse beforehand how you will deal with a situation – prepare a script if a delicate negotiation is required.
- Catch a stressful situation early – before it escalates.
- Try to look for the positive aspects of a situation - this will help you to feel better.
- Schedule the difficult, the important or unpleasant tasks first.
- When tired, or not at your best, complete mundane tasks.
- Try to avoid making too many changes in your life all at once.
- Be your own best friend, be kind to yourself and give yourself recognition.