

Introduction to recognising stress and stress management

Alastair Robertson

What is Stress?

- A state of tension created when a person responds to demands and pressures from work, family, external sources, and internal self-imposed demands, obligations and self-criticism.
- The perception of physical or psychological threat or danger.
 - › Involves the perception that the threat or danger is beyond our ability to cope.

What is Stress?

- Dis-ease created by the abuse we give our minds and bodies.
 - › By our personality.
 - › How we handle daily situations in our environment.
- Can be damaging or unpleasant – “**DISTRESS**”.
- Can be fantastic or fatal. Is an individual matter.
- Complete freedom from stress is death.

Causes - Stressors

- Situations that make strong demands on you;
- Situations that are imminent & challenging;
- Life transitions;
- Timing (e.g. being rushed);
- Ambiguity;
- Desirability;
- Controllability.

Not All Stress is Bad...

Distress is a continuous experience of feeling overwhelmed, oppressed, and behind in our responsibilities. It is the all encompassing sense of being imposed upon by difficulties with no light at the end of the tunnel.

Eustress is the other form of stress that is positive and beneficial. We may feel challenged but the sources of the stress are opportunities that are meaningful to us. Eustress helps provide us with energy and motivation to meet our responsibilities and achieve our goals.

Stress Response: Example

An example of a situation that many people find stressful is taking a test.

If you find testing to be stressful, you might notice certain physical, behavioural, mental, and emotional responses.

Symptoms of Distress

- Shortness of temper, irritability, anger, apprehension, worry, suspiciousness, nervous tics, muscle spasms.
- Tension & migraine headaches, forgetfulness.
- Weariness, burnout, mental breakdown.
- Older appearance, sagging eyes, creasing forehead.
- Skin disorders: acne, eczema, psoriasis.

Symptoms of Distress

- Chronic head and neck aches, stiff muscles, low back pain, painful joints, arthritis.
- Weight gain, upset stomach, high cholesterol.
- Viruses such as colds and influenza, other infections, asthma.
- Overuse of drugs, tranquilizers, night sedation.
- Addictions, depression, anxiety.
- Chronic physical illness.

Categories of Symptoms

These symptoms can be collected into 4 main categories of symptoms

- Physical
- Behavioural
- Emotional
- Cognitive

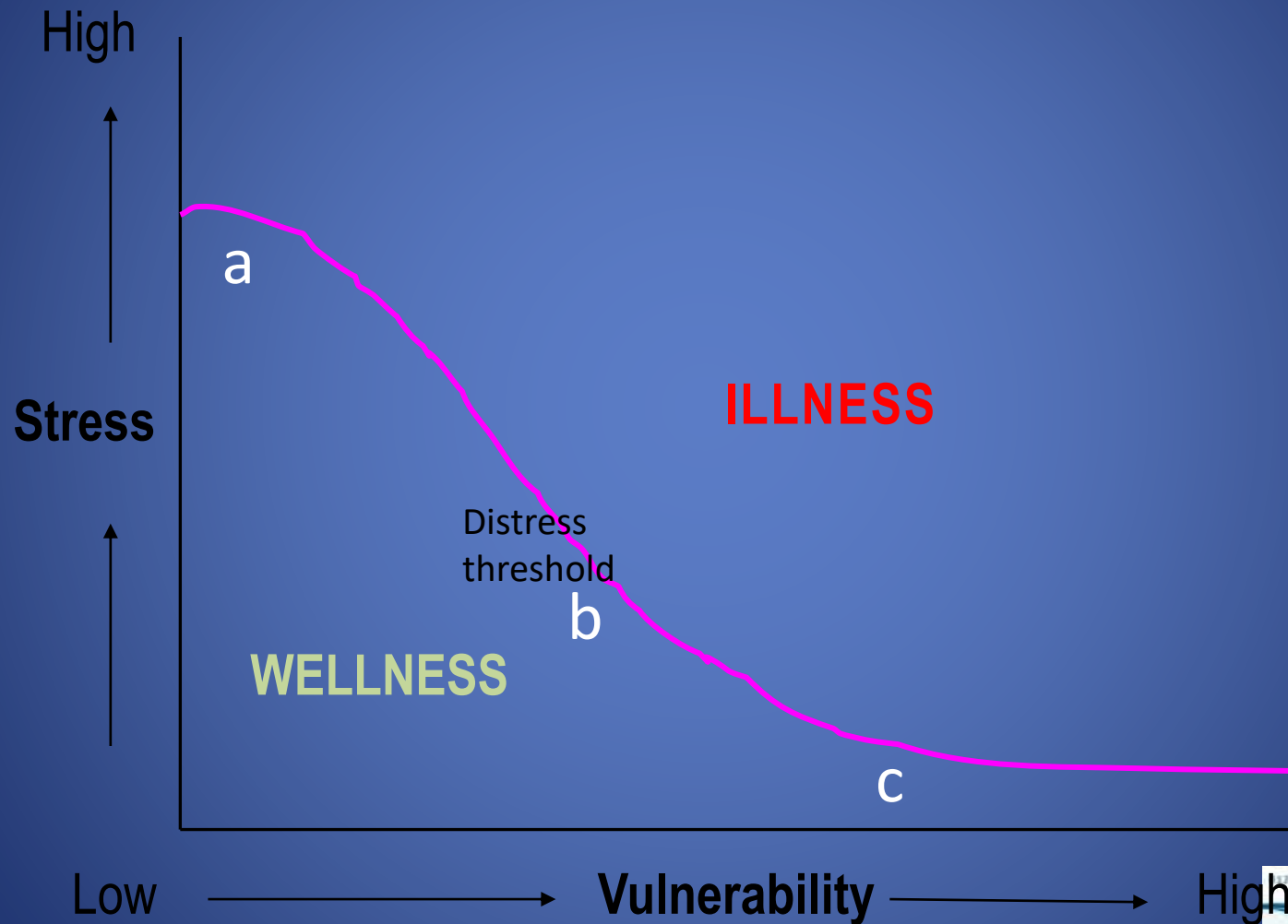
Undertake the **Stress Warning Signals Questionnaire** to assess how you respond to excessive stress

Vulnerability to Stress

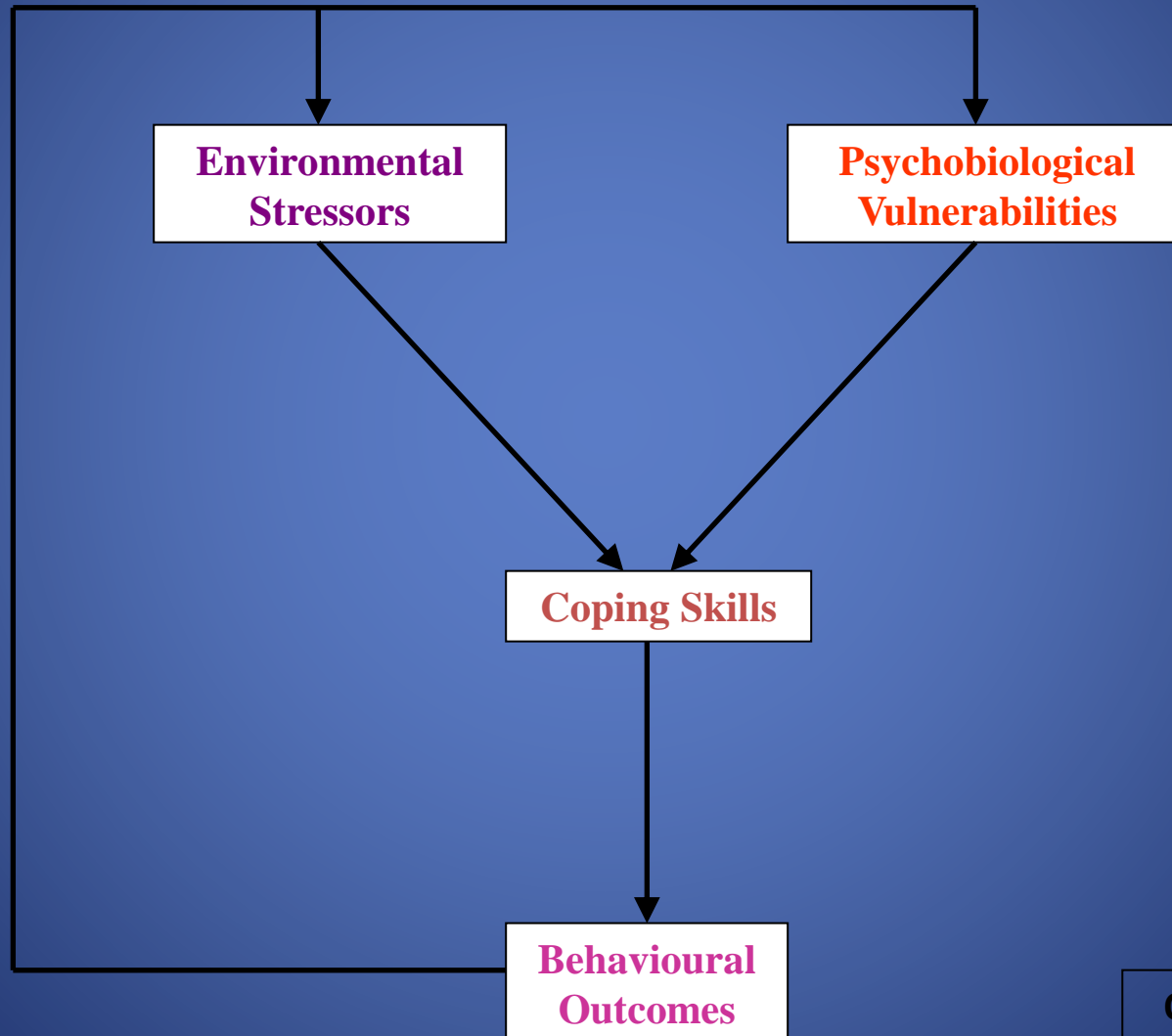
Some people are more vulnerable to stress than others.

Determine your level of vulnerability to stress by completing the **Stress Vulnerability Scale**.

Stress-vulnerability



Stress-vulnerability



Onyett, 1992

Environmental Stressors

Life Event

| | |
|---|-----|
| 1. Death of spouse | 100 |
| 2. Divorce | 73 |
| 3. Marital Separation from mate | 65 |
| 4. Detention in jail or other institution | 63 |
| 5. Death of a close family member | 63 |
| 6. Major personal injury or illness | 53 |
| 7. Marriage | 50 |
| 8. Being fired at work | 47 |
| 9. Marital reconciliation with mate | 45 |
| 10. Retirement from work | 45 |
| 11. Major change in the health or behavior of a family member | 44 |
| 12. Pregnancy | 40 |
| 13. Sexual Difficulties | 39 |
| 14. Gaining a new family member (i.e. birth, adoption, older adult moving in, etc.) | 39 |
| 15. Major business adjustment | 39 |
| 16. Major change in financial state (i.e. a lot worse or better than usual) | 38 |
| 17. Death of a close friend | 37 |
| 18. Changing to a different line of work | 36 |
| 19. Major change in number of arguments with spouse (i.e. a lot more or less) | 35 |
| 20. Taking on a mortgage (for home, business, etc.) | 31 |
| 21. Foreclosure on a mortgage or loan | 30 |
| 22. Major change in responsibilities at work (i.e. promotion, demotion, etc.) | 29 |
| 23. Son or daughter leaving home (marriage, college, military, etc.) | 29 |
| 24. In-law troubles | 29 |
| 25. Outstanding personal achievement | 28 |
| 26. Spouse beginning or ceasing work outside the home | 26 |
| 27. Beginning or ceasing formal schooling | 26 |
| 28. Major change in living condition (i.e. new home, room, etc.) | 25 |
| 29. Revision of personal habits (i.e. dress, associations, quit smoking, etc.) | 24 |
| 30. Troubles with the boss | 23 |

The Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory (1967)

The “Fight or Flight” Response

When situations seem threatening to us, our bodies react quickly to supply protection by preparing to take action.

This physiological reaction is known as the "fight or flight" response.

- The physiological response to a stressor is known as reactivity;
- Physiological responses can accumulate and result in long-term wear and tear of our bodies.

physical signs OF FIGHT or Flight

- **Rapid Heart Beat and Breathing:** The body increases heartbeat and respiration rate in order to provide the energy and oxygen to the body that will be needed to fuel a rapid response to the danger.
- **Pale or Flushed Skin:** As the stress response starts to take hold, blood flow to the surface areas of the body is reduced and flow to the muscles, brain, legs, and arms are increased. You might become pale as a result, or your face may alternate between pale and flushed as blood rushes to your head and brain. The body's blood clotting ability also increases in order to prevent excess blood loss in the event of injury.
- **Dilated Pupils:** The body also prepares itself to be more aware and observant of the surroundings during times of danger. Another common symptom of the fight-or-flight response is the dilation of the pupils, which allows more light into the eyes and results in a better vision of the surroundings.
- **Trembling:** In the face of stress or danger, your muscles become tense and primed for action. This tension can result in trembling or shaking.

Coping Mechanisms

Maladaptive Coping Mechanisms

- Drugs.
- Gambling.
- Over-eating.
- Ignoring or bottling up feelings.
- Taking sedatives.
- Taking stimulants.
- Working too much.
- Avoiding your problems.
- Denial.

Adaptive Coping Mechanisms

- Meditation and relaxation techniques.
- Having time to yourself.
- Physical activity or exercise.
- Reading.
- Spending time with friends.
- Finding humour.
- Spending time on your hobbies.
- Spirituality.

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

- Controlled breathing
- Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR)
- Shortened form of PMR
- Cue-controlled relaxation
- Guided Imagery

Controlled breathing

- Simplest way to manage stress
- Take a deep breath and hold for as long as possible
- Exhale slowly imagining your stressful thoughts being exhaled with the air
- Repeat 4-5 times

PROGRESSIVE Muscle relaxation

- Exercise that relaxes mind and body
- It helps in recognising the difference between tension
- Progressively tense and relax each muscle throughout your body
- Tense each muscle for 5 seconds then release
- Tensing then suddenly relaxing the muscle increases the sensation of relaxation – a rebound effect!
- It is important to breath steadily throughout



<https://stresscontrolaudio.com/home>



Follow Tidal on Facebook

Facebook

www.facebook.com/TidalTrainingLTD

Twitter

<https://twitter.com/TidalTraining>