

HOW TO HANDLE PRESSURE



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BITESIZE

Manage stress and get on top of challenges by building your resources.

THE PURPOSE OF STRESS



All of us will get stressed at some point in our lives. What is surprising is how little we are taught about it, or how to handle it. We find ways to get through stressful situations, but not how to avoid them in the first place.

Pressure doesn't have to make us stressed. Some pressures can be motivating, and most of us enjoy a challenge. So how can we tell the good pressures from the bad, and handle pressure better to avoid stress and stay effective? The answer lies in understanding what stress is for, and why we developed it.

The stress response is a natural part of how we all function. It is our mind's **emergency system**, a primal response to help us react swiftly to danger. Imagine you are being attacked by a tiger. Your stress response is triggered, energy rushes around your body, and you focus only on the tiger. You are now equipped to 'fight' the tiger or 'flee' from it – **the 'fight or flight' response**.

The trouble is that we have this same primal fear response to more complex threats like deadlines and presentations, and we can't easily run away or fight these threats. We need to find better ways to handle pressure.

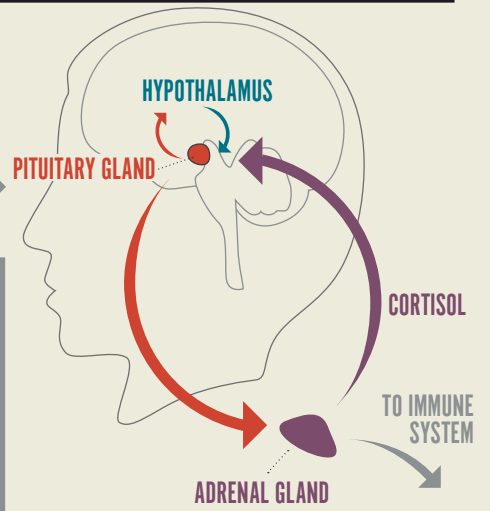
COPING WITH STRESS

Stress redirects energy from maintenance tasks, like digesting food and fighting infections, and towards an urgent response. This makes sense in an emergency: who cares about catching a cold when you're being attacked by a tiger? But stay in this state of emergency too long and it will affect your health.

Stress has a psychological impact too. Because it focusses your mind on the threat, you will find it harder to think about other things. Stressed people miss obvious information and get stuck on simple problems, unable to think clearly. Stress is bad for creativity too, and impacts how we see risks and rewards.

So what do you do when you feel stressed? Some actions can reduce cortisol, calming your mind in the short term. Vigorous exercise helps, as do hobbies and activities, and a healthy diet. However, when you feel stressed you often don't have time for these things. You skip doing them - and then feel stressed about skipping them. What's more, as long as your mind thinks there's a threat it will keep giving you more cortisol, so you end up fighting your own mind to calm yourself down.

THREAT



SIGNS OF STRESS

PHYSICAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL
HEADACHES	SHORT TEMPER
POUNGING HEART	HYPERACTIVITY
INSOMNIA	RISK TAKING
DRY MOUTH	DIFFICULTY THINKING
EXHAUSTION	LOSS OF PERSPECTIVE

Watch for the signs of stress in yourself and others. If you don't know you're stressed, you can't manage it!

RESOURCEFULNESS

Stress is not inevitable. Whenever we face a pressurised situation, we can react in one of two different ways.

If the situation feels too much to handle, we may fall into stress or panic. If we feel we can handle it, we may actually find it quite exciting.

Our perceived ability to handle situations comes from our resources, the tools and skills we use to handle challenges.

PRESSURE



COGNITIVE APPRAISAL



Your resources include anything you use to accomplish tasks, like:

- Your knowledge, skills and abilities
- Your self-belief and confidence
- Your adaptability and ability to learn
- Social status and support relationships
- Money, tools and physical assets

Map out your resources, because they are tools for managing stress.

Deploying your resources is key to reducing stress. When we feel stressed, we focus only on the threat, forgetting people who could help us and losing confidence in our abilities. Try to map out your strengths regularly so you remember them when you need them.

We also find it harder to learn new skills under stress - so don't wait until you're stressed to build your resources. When things are good, take the opportunities to build skills and relationships so you can handle new pressures better.

The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago.

The second best time is today.



Here are three tips for handling pressure better:

- 1. Get perspective.** Keep asking yourself what you've missed, and talk things through with others.
- 2. Protect your resources.** Identify the skills, assets and people you rely on most, and keep them safe.
- 3. Build your resources.** The more you have, the more you can handle - so look for chances to grow.

And remember to **say 'no'** too: we all have our limits!

This free tip sheet was created by Mindapples to support people during the COVID-19 pandemic. To find out more about our apps, e-learning, webinars, face-to-face training and charitable work, visit www.mindapples.org.