

The Analysis Comment

Stress - what is it, and how do you manage it?

At this time of heightened stress concerns, what useful strategies can you put in place to give yourself the best chance?

Athol Abrahams

Accredited coach and author

athol@cognition.org.uk

Stress means different things to different people, a widely accepted definition is “a relationship between the person and environment that is appraised by the person as exceeding their resources and endangering their well-being” *Lazarus and Folkman (1984)*.

Stress has a number of components. Firstly, your environment, secondly, your cognitive interaction with your environment and thirdly, your resilience. The truth is, you can control all three of these components to an extent in order to live a life, which is balanced and fulfilled.

Stress is psychological and physiological. When you are stressed, your brain reacts, and your body produces adrenaline, cortisol and other hormones. They profoundly affect energy levels, emotional states, and general sense of well-being.

However, excess levels have an adverse effect on our bodies. According to *Holden, et al (1998)*, prolonged stress-response conditions have been shown to predispose for illnesses including hypertension, immune disfunction, and cancer.

Your environment

Your work may determine the types of stresses you face. An example is COVID 19 frontline workers. They have been plunged into an environment which is challenging, and in this case, their most successful coping mechanisms will be through their cognitive processes, and resilience. For most of us, however, we have more control over our environment, and three things we can do to manage it are:

- Learning to say no. Consistently taking on more responsibilities and burdens, which take you to the point of saturation, is simply not an acceptable and sustainable strategy.
- Test the culture, or if you can, change it. If your work environment is toxic, your interactions stressful, and colleagues unsupportive, take steps to change it or find a better environment. No job is worth your health.



Stress is psychological and physiological. When you are stressed, your brain reacts, and your body produces adrenaline, cortisol and other hormones. They profoundly affect energy levels, emotional states, and general sense of well-being

- Balance your day. Insert me time into your diary and stick to it. Time for a walk, time for lunch, time for sunshine, time for nature even if you are the city.

Your cognitive processing

In NLP terms, we say, “the map is not the territory”. Simply, how you perceive the world is your reality, but not the totality. In order to process information, your brain applies cognitive filters, typically deletion, distortion, and generalisation.

Therefore, the way you teach yourself to interpret your environment, is how you will respond to it.

- Practice the art of reflection. Learn to think objectively about stressful situations that have occurred, and how you respond to them. Ask a genuine friend what they think. If you see things based on others’ maps, it expands your territory.
- Accept that your own perceptions are incomplete, and this awareness creates self-compassion.
- Create behavioural flexibility. Remember you have choices, and you are responsible for your own life. Doing the same thing is likely to result in the same outcomes.

Your resilience

Look after yourself. After all, your body and mind are your most valuable assets.

- Diet. Kill the caffeine, it makes things worse, and it lasts in your body for 40 hours. It also makes you wired, which exacerbates your reaction to stress. Start eating healthily, your body will thank you for it.
- Exercise your mind. Mindfulness, quiet breathing, yoga, and a creative hobby. Learn to play a musical instrument, paint, bake, or make things. Find time for it every week.
- Set goals. Ensure they cover your whole life, not just work, and you will feel in control. **CCR**