



CNWL Talking Therapies

Managing Stress Workbook



My appointments:

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My main learning points:

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My weekly challenge:

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Crisis numbers:

Out of Hours Urgent
Advice Line: **0800
0234 650**

Samaritans: **116 123**

Stress Management

Stress is the word that many people use to describe how the demands of their life are becoming too great for them to cope with. Our ability to cope varies from person to person and what one person finds stressful may not be a problem for someone else.

Stress can impact us in many ways, affecting how we feel, think and behave. This book will help you learn more about how stress is affecting you and how to manage it better.

Remember – The body's stress response evolved to HELP us survive. The experience of anxiety is harmless though it serves an important purpose; it makes our body respond and draws attention to danger in what is known as the 'fight or flight' response. We sometimes perceive harmless events as dangerous; this can cause stress.

The Stress Balance

It can be helpful to think of ourselves as being like a balance, or a pair of scales:

Demands

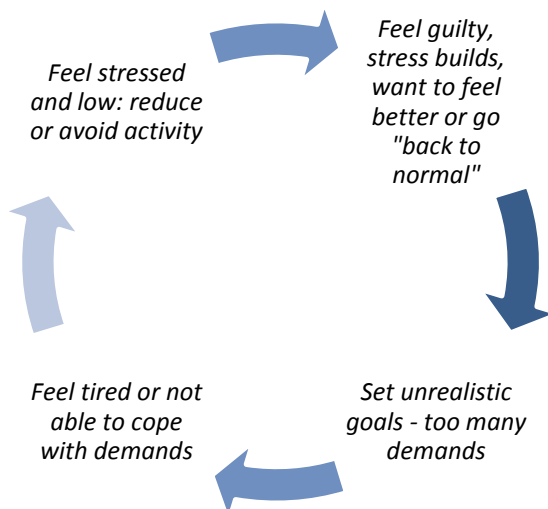
Coping strategies



On one side of the balance we see the demands placed on us, things such as pressure at work, relationships with others, or particular situations. On the other side we see how we cope with those demands. Our coping abilities should be great enough to deal with most stresses, and to keep the balance straight. If we have a high level of demands, the balance will become tipped and we may feel stressed.

To make the balance even again, and to reduce feeling stressed or anxious, we can:
(a) reduce the demands, b) increase our ability to cope or c) do both!

When we feel stressed, we often feel tired or unmotivated, so we may lose balance in our lives. This means we get fewer opportunities to experience positive emotions like pleasure, achievement, pride or acceptance. This can become a vicious cycle.

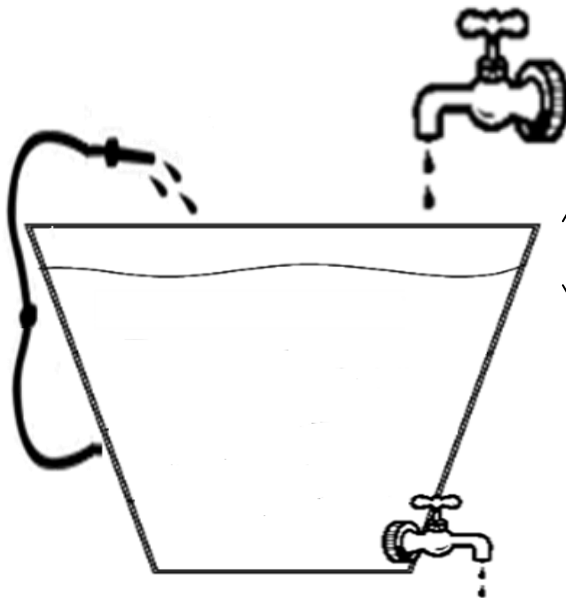


The Stress Bucket – Understanding our own stress

To avoid falling into this vicious cycle, it is important to understand your triggers, the unhelpful behaviours that keep stress going and the helpful behaviours for coping.

- **Triggers include:** Physical health problems, financial problems, relationship difficulties, care or parental responsibilities, changes in life circumstances, work pressures, conflicts
- **Unhelpful behaviours include:** Neglecting personal needs and 'me' time, avoiding socialising, smoking, drinking excessively, eating junk food, avoiding tasks, and avoiding say 'no.'
- **Helpful behaviours include:** Exercising, prioritising demands, relaxing, using resources (e.g. seeking support from others), and being assertive.

My stress triggers/risk factors



The buffer zone:

The area of resilience before we reach the tipping point of stress

Unhelpful behaviours that keep my stress going:

Helpful coping strategies that reduce my stress:

The 9 areas of a Balanced Life

Imagine a ceiling which stands on 9 different pillars, and suppose only one or two of these pillars were to fall down, what would happen to the ceiling? **It will still stand.**

Now imagine if the ceiling was relying on just one or two pillars. If these pillars were to break down, what would happen to the ceiling then? **It will most likely collapse.**

Our life is a bit like the ceiling. We rely on pillars to keep us going (e.g. activities, interests, roles and responsibilities). If we only have one or two pillars, we are at a greater risk of our ceiling collapsing (i.e. becoming stressed).

For instance, some people might work 80/90 hours a week, and their main focus in life (i.e. their pillar), is their work. If that role is removed, they have nothing else to fall back on. Similarly some people put all their effort into their relationship or family and, when something goes wrong in their relationship, they have nothing else to fall back on. Interestingly, the more we depend on just one pillar, one area of our life, the more stress we put on ourselves.

Fill out the table below with activities that are currently included or lacking in your life:

Contribution e.g. volunteering at the local cake sale	Hobbies/leisure e.g. gardening on a Saturday morning	Exercise e.g. gym
Family e.g. Sunday roast	Alone Time e.g. having a relaxing bath	Personal Growth e.g. attending a class/workshop
Work	Relationship e.g. meal with partner	Friends e.g. going to the cinema with friends

How to find a balance

- Identify and list the activities you are not currently doing
- Use a diary to PLAN your week ahead
- Ensure there is an equal balance of these activities in your week

- Rate your mood before and after each activity
- Recognise that all these activity groups are equally important for our wellbeing

Scheduling a Balanced Week:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Early AM (6-9)							
Late AM (9-12)							
Early PM (12-3)							
Late PM (3-6)							
Early eve (6-9)							
Late eve (9-12)							
Night (12-6)							

“But I don’t have enough time”

For some, part of the problem will be simply feeling like you don’t have enough time in the day to do everything. In this case, there are often choices that we need to make to ensure we use our resources (time and energy) to help ourselves.

We all often spend time completing tasks which do not use our time and energy in the most efficient way. Although we cannot always change the demands that are placed on us, what we can do is find a more effective way of managing them.

Prioritising Your Demands

Important & Urgent	Important & Not Urgent
e.g. going grocery shopping, crying baby, kitchen fire, exams/deadlines,	e.g. exercise, calling or seeing family/friends, reading a book
Not Important & Urgent	Not Important & Not Urgent
e.g. answering emails, work-related calls, a neighbour visits, interruptions	e.g. watching excessive TV, checking social media, sorting through junk mail

Categorisation of tasks

The most effective people tend to focus most of their attention on the 'Important, Not Urgent' category. As time passes, tasks from this area will slowly begin to shift into the 'Important & Urgent' section and if you are constantly focusing your attention on urgent and important tasks, then you are likely to be constantly working under incredible pressure and your stress levels are probably very high for extended periods of time leading to exhaustion.

Tips to Reduce Your Stressful Lifestyle

- Make time for the things that you enjoy. If you aren't doing many enjoyable or pleasurable things at the moment, think about taking up a relaxing hobby.
- Are you getting much exercise? Stress can have a negative effect on the body, so exercising will help you feel healthier and stronger. (Three times a week for at least 20min is a general rule. E.g. a walk to the park or shops.)
- Good nutrition is also a basic human need – try to get into the routine of eating a well-balanced diet, and eat at regular times.
- Very often people feel stressed or anxious if they take on too much – learn how to organise your time, and say 'no' if it's too much for you.
- Sleep is a basic human need and if your sleep pattern is disturbed you will be more prone to stress, anxiety and depression. Try to get into a routine.

Rumination (Thinking things over)

Rumination often involves us repeatedly thinking about difficulties and things from our past, to such a point that we find it hard to get it out of our mind.

It can cover a lot of different types of behaviours. Here are some other behaviours that are similar to ruminating. Put a check next to the behaviours that you have observed yourself doing when you feel stressed:

- ☐ ☐ worrying
- ☐ ☐ overanalysing or over-thinking things
- ☐ ☐ obsessing
- ☐ ☐ turning a problem over and over in your mind
- ☐ ☐ stewing about a problem for long periods of time

Rumination is not problem solving and does not lead to any changes to our life. It often involves: “Why?” and “If only?” ways of thinking. We need to change the ‘Why’ to a ‘How’ way of thinking and focus on problem solving and taking action.

The Two Minute Rule for Recognising Rumination:

Once you think you might be ruminating, continue this thought process for two minutes. Then stop and ask yourself the following three questions:

1. Have I made any progress towards solving a problem?
2. Do I understand something about a problem (or my feelings about it) that I haven't understood before?
3. Do I feel less stressed or self-critical than before I started thinking about this?

If the answer to any of these **is a clear YES**, then it means that thinking about your difficulty has been constructive. If the answer to one of these questions **is a clear NO**, chances are you're ruminating.

Managing and Monitoring Rumination

Labelling

First, see if you can recognise and label rumination when it occurs. When you recognise it, say to yourself “This is ruminating”. It can be powerful to simply increase your awareness of what you’re doing. Labelling your rumination can help control it.

The table below shows how you can lay this out. In the first column, record the situation in which you observed yourself ruminating. In the second column record exactly what you were ruminating about. In the third column identify the consequences of this.

Situation	Rumination	Consequence
e.g. Driving to work on Monday	I’ve got so much to do today, I’ll never get it all done. What if I don’t get home on time to cook?	Felt more stressed. Almost ran a red light

Notice the patterns

Usually we will find that there are patterns to when we ruminate. Because we now know that rumination is unhelpful for our mood and we aren't likely to come to conclusions around what we are thinking about after 2 minutes, then it is more helpful to think about the environment that we ruminate in.

What do you notice? Are there similar situations that you ruminate in, or particularly times of the day when it is worse for you? Consider how you might make practical changes in these situations. Below are some examples:

Current situation that I ruminate in....	How I will change it...
When I'm in the car driving to and from work	Put upbeat music on that I enjoy
When the house is messy	Put a load of washing on as soon as I come home from work
At night before I go to sleep	Have a clear wind-down routine before bed

Refocusing Your Attention: Mindfulness and Distraction

Mindfulness is about taking a non-judgemental approach to your thoughts and worries. The idea of mindfulness is to notice what you are worrying about, and then let go without making any attempts to push them away or get involved with them.

- ***Observe and listen:*** Try to not react to the worry. Instead, observe the worry and listen with interest to what it is about.
- ***Let go:*** Visualise the worry as a transitional thought, much like a passing cloud or wave on a beach, which comes and goes.
- ***Focus on the here and now:*** Focus on your breathing, any physical sensations you are currently feeling (e.g. your feet on the floor) and your surroundings.
- ***Practice makes perfect:*** Keep practising and it should get easier.
- ***Relaxation:*** Try to make relaxation a part of your daily routine. A good time to do

relaxation exercises is before bed, as this will help with sleep. There are many different relaxation exercises available. A good idea is to buy a CD or find one on Youtube. E.g. www.allaboutdepression.com/relax

Distraction

- **Refocus attention:** If you find it difficult to relax and the worry keeps popping back, then refocus your attention. When our attention is on a task which we are engaged and absorbed into, we will not be attending to the worry.
- To stop the worry, get up and do something which is going to take your full attention (E.g. doing a crossword, calling a friend or making the dinner.) If you are already doing something and your mind cannot focus, take a break and do something else. Go back to the task later.