



TAMING STRESS

Not Always The "Bad Guy"

Inside this issue:

Not Always The "Bad Guy" 1

The Down Side of Stress 2

Dealing With Stress Breakdown 2

Holding Back The Tide 3

"Stress-Busters!" 3

How Much Pressure Are You Really Under? 4

How Well Are You Coping? 5

10 Places To Find Happiness 6

Newsletter highlights:

- A degree of stress prevents boredom, enhances quality of life, and helps us survive threats.
- Too much, though, can result in burnout or even breakdown.
- Take action to control your stress before it controls you!
- Test your stress health pages 4 & 5.

Why is it important to manage stress?

We've all heard about the importance of learning to manage our stress. It helps us to minimise fatigue and ill health, have more time for the things we really enjoy, and ultimately to live a long and happy life. But a degree of stress can serve some very important purposes for us.

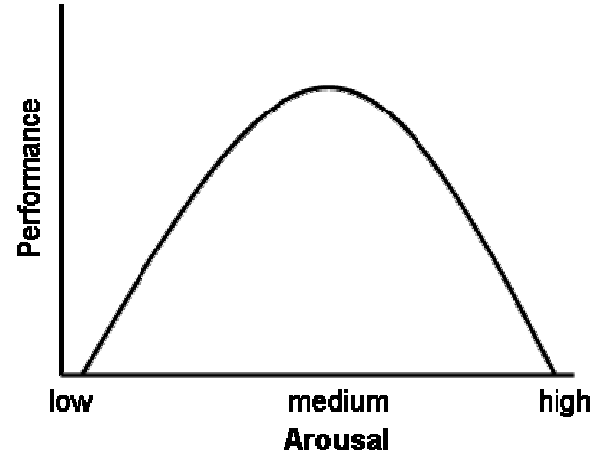
Stress and Performance

The more stimulation, challenge, pressure or "arousal" we encounter, the better our performance. This can make life exciting and interesting, as well as operating as an important survival function.

The Price of Boredom

When arousal is low, we become bored. This can result in a range of potential negative repercussions, such as:

- Sensation seeking / risk-taking
- Delinquency & gang membership
- Violent crime
- Drug abuse
- Depression & loss of purpose for living
- Self harm or defeatist behaviour



The Upside of Stress - Survival

Stress plays a crucial role in survival during a crisis or situation of threat or danger.

- It enhances attention, motivation & memory – essential for handling emergencies
- It increases heart rate, blood pressure, oxygen intake, & blood flow to large muscles – important where a physical response to danger is needed
- It produces endorphins for pain relief – reassuring if you're injured

Around the middle zone in the performance / arousal curve is optimum performance, but after a point, performance declines. That's when the trouble starts.

The Down Side of Stress

When Things Start to Unravel

Once our challenges start to overwhelm us, we find ourselves on the downhill side of the curve. A few things start to happen on this downwards slide. The physiological effects can build up, causing muscular tension, headaches, and poor quality sleep. These effects can reduce our immunity, making us more prone to coughs, colds, flu's and all sorts of other "nasties". Our memory, concentration, and judgment can be affected and we can become intolerant and irritable.

When these symptoms linger for a while, chronic health problems can set in. These can include hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and mental illness. In the worst case scenario, the effects of stress build-up can be fatal - there's a clearly established link between stress and chronic disease, heart failure, stroke, suicide, and even accidental deaths.



Signs of Burnout

In the first instance, it's a fair bet that "Burnout" has set in, when the following are present:

- Work overload, in paid work and/or family responsibilities
- Sense of having no control or say in responsibilities
- Disengagement from the meaning or purpose of what you do
- Detachment from people you work / live with (becoming withdrawn &/or alienated)
- Physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion
- Escapist behaviour, such as avoiding responsibilities where possible
- Reduced performance

Breakdown

A "Breakdown" can occur in response to either an extreme chronic (built up) stress reaction or an acute or traumatic life event. Certainly, stress overload makes us more vulnerable to the effects of critical events. Sometimes it's our body that gives way first, via a heart attack or stroke. Often, though, we cease to function psychologically, developing debilitating depression or anxiety. Tell-tale signs can include irrational and uncontrollable behaviour, destructive or self-destructive actions, poor choices, or risk taking.

"Stress makes us more vulnerable to the effects of critical events".

Dealing With Stress Breakdown

Psychological First Aid

In the case of psychological breakdown, there are some important "first aid" measures you can apply:

- For urgent all hours counselling advice, call Lifeline on **13 11 14**
- Get professional help from a GP and/or Registered Psychologist
- Talk openly to loved ones
- Look after your physical needs
- Take time out if you can



To locate an registered and accredited psychologist contact the Australian Psychological Society.

1800 333 497

www.psychology.org.au



Holding Back the Tide

Sorting Out Burnout

If you've started down the path to burning out, it's not too late to turn things around. Review your goals and priorities to clarify what's important to your happiness and health. Identify your limitations. You're only human and there are only 24 hours in a day! Reorganise your workload to make it more realistic and fair. Start saying "no". Don't wait for someone else to intervene – they probably won't!

Learn to manage stress by taking a course or workshop, locating a good book on the subject, or seeing a specialist. The team at Performance Psychology has made a career of this. Maybe it's time to give us a call?

Look after your health by attending to your nutrition, getting some regular exercise, and making sure you're getting enough sleep.



Life Audit

Before you can make any significant and enduring changes to how you manage your stress, you'll first need to do a little soul searching. Are you able to answer these questions?

- Are you *ready* to do things differently?
- Is something keeping you in your self-destructive habits?
- What exactly needs to change?
- What should stay the same?
- What do you *need* (that you don't currently have) that can help you?

How Can You "De-clutter"?

When you're ready to make some changes, here are some useful starting points for "de-cluttering" your lifestyle.

Improve your time management. Buy a book on the subject, or have a chat to one of us at Performance Psychology. Or, if you already know what to do - take some action!

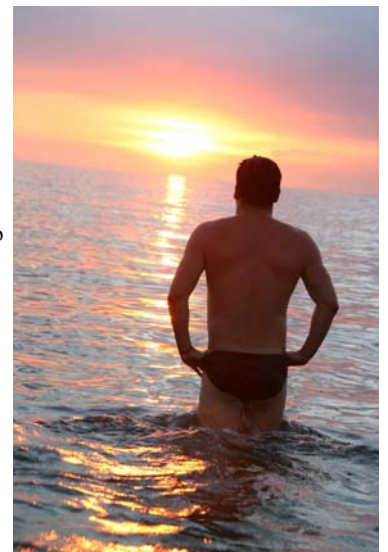
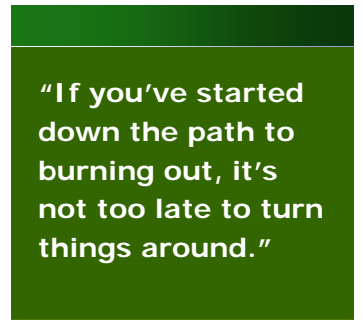
Start delegating, at work and at home. Challenge yourself to accept an imperfect result for the benefit of having someone else carry part of the load. Comfort yourself in the knowledge that you are demonstrating a measure of trust and confidence towards someone else. Learn to be assertive, neither a passive "doormat" nor an aggressive bully. It's possible to respect someone else's needs and rights whilst respecting your own at the same time.

"Stress-busters!"

When your leaky boat full is filling up fast with life's "challenges", try some of these things to help bail you out of trouble.

Things that...

- Make you laugh (lighten up, have more fun)
- Make your soul sing (stirring experiences – music, nature, spirituality etc)
- Make you feel proud (set small but rewarding goals & go for them)
- Make you think outside the square (challenge & stimulate your mind)
- Make you sweat (stay active, reduce TV & computer time, burn off adrenalin)



Assess Your Stress - Try out the tests on the next 2 pages...

How Much Pressure Are You Really Under?

The Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory

INSTRUCTIONS: Record the point value of each of these life events that has happened to you during the past year. (If an event has happened more than once, multiply the points accordingly.)

LIFE EVENT	VALUE
1. Death of spouse or de facto partner	100
2. Divorce	73
3. Separation from spouse or de facto partner	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 or commencing de facto relationship	50
8. Losing your job	47
9. Marital reconciliation with partner	45
10. Retirement from work	45
11. Major change in the health or behaviour of a family member	44
12. Pregnancy	40
13. Sexual Difficulties	39
14. Gaining a new family member (birth, adoption, older adult moving in, etc)	39
15. Major business readjustment	39
16. Major change in financial state (i.e. a lot worse or better off than usual)	38
17. Death of a close friend	37
18. Changing to a different line of work or to fly in/fly out job	36
19. Major change in the number of arguments with partner (i.e. either a lot more or a lot less)	35
20. Taking on a mortgage (for home, investment property, etc)	31
21. Foreclosure on a mortgage or loan	30
22. Major change in responsibilities at work (promotion, demotion, etc)	29
23. Son or daughter leaving home	29
24. Troubles with relatives or in-laws	29
25. Outstanding personal achievement	28
26. Spouse or de facto partner beginning or ceasing work outside the home	26
27. Beginning or ceasing formal education	26
28. Major change in living condition (new home, renovating etc)	25
29. Revision of personal habits (associations, quitting smoking)	24
30. Trouble with the boss	23
31. Major changes in working hours or conditions	20
32. Changes in residence	20
33. Changing to a new school	20
34. Major change in usual type and/or amount of recreation	19
35. Major change in club or church activity (i.e. a lot more or less than usual)	19
36. Major change in social activities (clubs, movies, visiting, etc)	18
37. Taking on a personal loan	17
38. Major change in sleeping habits (a lot more or a lot less than usual)	16
39. Major change in frequency of family get-togethers (""")	15
40. Major change in eating habits (eg significant change of diet)	15
41. Vacation away	13
42. Christmas	12
43. Minor violations of the law (parking tickets, speeding fines, etc)	11

Total of 150 pts or less = relatively low amount of life change & low susceptibility to stress-induced health breakdown.

Total of 150 to 300 pts = about a 50% chance of a major health breakdown in the next 2 years.

Total of 300 pts or more = about 80% chance of a major health breakdown in the next 2 years.

How Well Are You Coping?

The Kessler Symptom Scale

This scale is used globally as a measure of psychological distress. Record your responses for the past 4 week period, total up your scores, and see how you're coping.

K10					
For all questions, circle the score under the appropriate response.					
In the past 4 weeks:	None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
1. About how often did you feel tired out for no good reason?	1	2	3	4	5
2. About how often did you feel nervous?	1	2	3	4	5
3. About how often did you feel so nervous that nothing could calm you down?	1	2	3	4	5
4. About how often did you feel hopeless?	1	2	3	4	5
5. About how often did you feel restless or fidgety?	1	2	3	4	5
6. About how often did you feel so restless you could not sit still?	1	2	3	4	5
7. About how often did you feel depressed?	1	2	3	4	5
8. About how often did you feel that everything is an effort?	1	2	3	4	5
9. About how often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up?	1	2	3	4	5
10. About how often did you feel worthless?	1	2	3	4	5

Scoring Key

10-15 Low Risk (coping well)

16-30 Moderate Risk (would benefit from stress management education)

30-50 High Risk (strongly encouraged to see a doctor)

PO Box 700
Ashgrove QLD 4060

Now consulting in:
Petrie Terrace; Paddington; and The Gap

Phone: **0411 039 443**
Fax: 07 3300 4517
E-mail: info@performwell.com.au

We're on the web!

www.performwell.com.au

Helping ordinary people do
extraordinary things.



PERFORMANCE
PSYCHOLOGY

At Performance Psychology, we believe strongly in the value of preventative mental health. That's why we specialize in helping our clients increase their capacity for withstanding life stress. We do this in a number of ways. We conduct a "needs analysis" to determine the nature of clients particular challenges and audit their strengths and weaknesses in their personal tools for coping. Next we design and conduct interventions in close cooperation with the client. These could include sleep optimization, moods management, assertiveness training, health education, and facilitation of practical resources. The focus is on equipping clients, in as short a time frame as possible, with everything they need to enhance their enjoyment of life.

When you're ready to make some real changes for the better, call us for an appointment on:

0411 039 443

Or email: info@performwell.com.au

10 Places To Find Happiness

Taming stress is partly about limiting and managing the amount of pressure on ourselves, and partly about behaving in ways that increase our levels of happiness and satisfaction.

There's been lots of research in this field, which shows it's often the simple changes we make that can make a difference to our quality of life. Here's a sample of some of the findings.

Watch what you eat. As an indication of how important nutrition is to self-care, *fruit-eaters* have an 11% higher probability of feeling capable and satisfied.

Turn off the TV. Our level of personal contentment is reduced by 5% for every hour a day of TV watched.

Get a pet. Interaction with a loved animal has a very significant impact on happiness levels. People with pets score 22% higher on scales of satisfaction than people without pets.

Cheer your team on. Supporting a local sports team provides a common interest with others in the community and increases happiness by 4%.

See the glass half-full. People who dwell on negative subjects and their own misery are 70% less likely to feel content than those who don't.

Join something. Belonging to a group with mutual interests makes people feel more connected to each other, and increases confidence and satisfaction by 7%.

Turn up the volume. One study showed that 92% of people experienced a positive effect on their mood when they listened to music of their choice.

Volunteer. Community volunteers, on average, are twice as likely to feel happy about themselves as non-volunteers. Altruistic acts, generally, have been shown to increase life satisfaction by 24%.

Talk it up. Open and honest communication with a partner adds 40% to satisfaction scores.

Let it go. When people fixate on aggression and disagreement in relationships, their overall satisfaction drops an average of 70%.

