



Hello and welcome to the wellbeing college.

What we're going to be looking at today is identifying and managing stress. This edited course has been adapted from the recognising and responding to stress course that we ran back in 2019 that was developed by Joanna Stock one of the NHS's psychologists. So thank you to her for that.



What we're going to cover in this short course is:

- What is stress?
- How does it affect us?
- We're going to look at short and long term stress.
- The impact it has on our emotions and mood.
- And finally, we're going to look at some immediate tips to coping with feeling overwhelmed by our stress.

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Why stress?



Our stress is probably our reaction to the way we live in the 21st century. We often are multi-tasking, living at a fast pace, being on call 24/7, via using smart devices such as phones or via our lap tops, we're bombarded with news 24/7 and we're not given a manual how to live in the 21st century. Most of us are just doing our best to get by.

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Stress is...

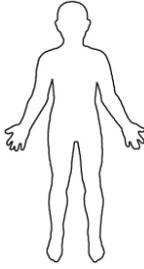
...Our body's way of responding to any situation that is demanding or threatening

One definition of stress which I find quite helpful is it's: **our body's way of responding to any situation that is demanding or threatening.**

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Activity

What parts of the body are affected when we're stressed?



And now I'd like to move onto stress and the body. And I'd like you to take a few moments just to think about, when you're feeling stressed, which parts of your body are affected and what does that feel like? Just have a wee think about that for a few minutes and we'll see you in the next slide.

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Physical impact of stress

- Heart races
- Heightened adrenaline in the body
- Changes to breathing
- Legs and hands tingly

So, what's happening to the body when we're undergoing stress?

- We can feel our heart racing, some people report palpitations.
- We can have heightened adrenaline circulating around the body.
- It's very likely if we're feeling stressed that our breathing changes; so we can breathe more quickly and perhaps more shallowly, maybe breathing into our chest more, maybe not being able to get a breath which may make us feel slightly dizzy.
- We can find that our hands and our legs are tingly as well.

Physical impact of stress

- Stomach upset
- Reduced blood flow to gut/non-essential human functions
- Bladder urgency
- Narrowed attention focus
- Advantages of stress in short term?

- Stress can also affect our stomachs so we can have a stomach upset. We might need to run to the toilet more often and we might have what's called a nervous stomach.
- The blood flow to the gut can also be reduced during this time, as it is to non-essential human functions, so really the body is concentrating on those areas which are going to help it to either fight or flee from the threat.
- We can also have bladder urgency; and
- Our attention and focus can be narrowed at this time, probably on the threat and nothing else around us.

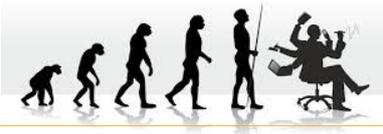
So, okay we might have all that going on, but can there be any advantages to stress?

And yes, if you think about an actor, when he or she is waiting to go on stage they often report of having nerves beforehand or feeling stressed - and that actually can help to focus that performance and it can give them energy etc.. and that adrenaline in the body can actually be really helpful.

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Evolution and stress

- Fight, Flight, Freeze
- Normal, biological response
- Produces hormones Cortisol and Adrenaline



So, there are really clear reasons why in the past stress, and what happened to our bodies because of that stress, were really helpful to us.

It evolved as a survival mechanism, so it allowed people and other mammals to react quickly to a life-threatening situation.

It allowed the body to prepare for flight, fight or freeze. And that's a normal, biological response to a threat.

It produces hormones called cortisol and adrenaline. Cortisol increases the glucose in our blood stream and helps the brain to use that glucose and also increases the availability of substances that repair our tissues.

Adrenaline on the other hand increases our blood pressure, elevates the heart rate and boosts our supplies of energy to the body.

So, you could imagine that these responses actually helped us to either fight the tiger, to run away from it or to freeze instead of facing it.

In everyday life if we constantly have a production of cortisol and adrenaline it can become damaging to our health.

Acute vs chronic stress

- Sitting your driving test in a week's time – acute onset of stress and pressure, but quick painless reduction in worry and stress once event is over. (*acute*)
 - Constant work tasks, household chores and family commitments! (*chronic*)
-

We have different kinds of stress. So, we can have acute stress which is if you can imagine you're sitting your driving test in a week's time and you are thinking about it a lot, you feel nervous, you really want to pass, it's really important for you; you could have acute stress and pressure. But as soon as that test is over, you have a quick painless reduction in the worry and stress.

Conversely chronic stress, which can be caused by a number of reasons, such as constant work tasks, feeling overloaded at work, not getting things done, feeling the housework is getting on top of you, dealing with the family etc. etc. And if that carries on day in and day out, then it's quite likely you will be suffering or you're likely to suffer from chronic stress.

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Impact of chronic stress

- Digestive issues, weight issues
- Heart problems
- Disturbed sleep, insomnia
- Poorer concentration
- Headaches and migraines
- Mind racing, heightened anxiety
- Lack of energy, low mood
- Mental health problems

So, we've looked at the health impacts of acute stress on the body so now we're going to look at what can happen if you have chronic stress in your life.

- It can cause us digestive issues, so we might have stomach upsets, we might have IBS (which is a stress related stomach condition), we might have diarrhoea, we might struggle with our weight - either eating too much because of our stress (comfort eating) or we might actually eat less because we're feeling really stressed - so it can affect our weight in either way.
- It can actually affect our heart as well.
- We can have disturbed sleep, insomnia, so we might not be able to get to sleep at night or might be waking up constantly during the night, not feeling rested by our sleep at all.
- Our concentration might be affected by this, we might experience headaches and migraines on a regular basis.
- We can have a mind which is racing - and that can heighten our anxiety.
- We can feel that we lack energy and our mood can struggle.
- We might feel low and that might lead onto mental health problems.

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Our emotions and stress

- Multi-tasking, tense, on high alert, rushed – feeling more worried
- Exhausted, fed-up, tired, sad – feeling low
- ‘Bored’, restless, can’t sit still – more stress!

Thinking about our emotions and stress, we might be:

- Multi-tasking, feeling tense or on high alert, or rushed. we feel more worried...
- Or we might be exhausted, fed-up, tired, sad or feeling low.
- We might feel bored, we’re restless, we can’t sit still - and this is causing us more stress.

So, there’s quite a range of different ways we might feel when we’re stressed and how that has an impact on our emotions.

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Mental health problems

- Emotional needs not met or ignored



If we're thinking about stress and our mental health, it can be a wee bit like a pressure cooker. So, if we're ignoring our emotional needs or we're not meeting them, then pressure can build up and up and eventually that pressure cooker lid could blow off entirely.

For example, if we have financial problems and we're really not doing anything about them, we're not acting on them, we're increasing our stress, so that pressure is building up within the cooker - and eventually it will get to a situation where that lid is going to blow off - and that is probably not a situation most people would like to be in.

So, it might be possible to have released some of that pressure by perhaps seeking advice from an advice centre or your bank or somewhere like that, just to start addressing our issue and releasing some of that stress.

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Activity

What can you do to manage your stress levels?



Okay, so far, we've talked about acute stress and chronic stress and we've looked at the pressure cooker.

So, what could we actually do to manage stress, particularly acute stress?

What techniques might we employ to actually make things a little bit easier to deal with?

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Managing immediate feelings of stress

- Breathing
- Grounding – 5 senses
- Take 5 mins break



When thinking about managing our immediate stress there's 3 main things I'm going to talk about today.

- The first one is breathing.
- The second one is grounding using our 5 senses; and
- The 3rd one is taking a 5-minute break.

So, when we're thinking about breathing, if we're breathing correctly, we're actually sending a signal to the brain to calm down and to relax. The brain then sends a message to the body and it helps us to relax, reduce tension and relieve some of that stress.

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Activity

Diaphragmatic breathing

Guided breathing practice

- **Step 1.** Sit comfortably in your chair with your head, neck and spine in a straight line

- **Step 2.** Focus on your breathing-don't try to change it-become aware of how fast or slow you are breathing and if you are breathing with your chest or diaphragm

- **Step 3.** Put one hand on your upper chest and one hand on your abdomen just below your rib cage. Relax your shoulders and hands

I'm now going to guide you through a diaphragmatic breathing practice which will just take a few minutes.

1. So, first of all, sit comfortably in your chair with your head, neck and spine in a straight line. If you'd like to close your eyes that's absolutely fine and if you'd like to or if you can, place your feet on the floor, if it's comfortable.

2. Start to focus on your breathing, don't try to change it, become aware of how fast or slow you are breathing or if you are breathing with your chest or diaphragm.

3. Then put one hand on your upper chest and one hand on your abdomen, just below your rib cage. Relax your shoulders and your hands.

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Activity

Diaphragmatic breathing

Guided breathing practice

- **Step 4.** As you breathe in allow the abdomen to rise and as you breathe out allow it to flatten –there should be little or no movement in the chest. Allow yourself a bit of time to get into a regular rhythm.
- **Step 5.** It may help to imagine when breathing in, drawing a half circle with your breath around your body and when you breathe out, drawing the other half of the circle. Allow your breathe to become smooth, easy and regular

4. As you breathe in allow the abdomen to rise and as you breathe out allow it to flatten –there should be little or no movement in the chest. Allow yourself a bit of time to get into a regular rhythm. So just thinking about the abdomen rising when you breath in and breathing out, flattening it. Abdomen rising and abdomen flattening.

5. It might help to imagine when you are breathing in you draw a half circle with your breath around your body and when you breathe out you are drawing the other half of the circle. Allow your breathe to become smooth, easy and regular and just keep doing that.

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Activity

Diaphragmatic breathing

Guided breathing practice

- **Step 6.** Now slow down your breathing out then be conscious of a comfortable pause before allowing your breath in to follow smoothly and easily.

If any worries come into your mind allow them to come, then allow them to go and bring your attention back to your breathing

6. Now slow down your breathing out and be conscious of a comfortable pause before allowing your breath in to follow smoothly and easily. It shouldn't be a struggle.

Just try that a couple of times, slow down your breathing out and pause; breathe in nice and smoothly and easily.

Just do that a couple more times. If any worries come into your mind allow them to come, then allow them to go and bring your attention back to your breathing.

Just keep doing that breathing out, pause; breathing in, breathing out, pause, breathing in....

Just battling those worries away once you've allowed them to come into your mind; you can always bring your attention back to your breathing.

Just keep going with that a few more breaths.



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Activity

Diaphragmatic breathing

Guided breathing practice

- **Step 7.** When you are ready to end this exercise, take a few deeper breaths in. Bring some feeling back to your fingers and toes. Open your eyes slowly.

7. And when you are ready to end this exercise, take a few deeper breaths in.

Bring some feeling back to your fingers and toes; you might want to give them a wee shake. And if you've had your eyes shut, open them slowly now.

You might want to have a stretch at this stage.

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Activity - Grounding

How our senses can help us

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste



The next activity I'd like to introduce you to, or for those of you who know it already remind you of, is using our 5 senses to help ground us. That can really help with our stress levels by changing our focus.

So, have a wee think and a look around and look at **five things you can see** (either in the room you're sitting in at the moment or you might want to look out the window and see what's happening out there).

Or you might want to keep this activity for later on, if you're out on a walk.

So...for me... certainly I can see the shadow of a gull crossing my neighbour's roof, I've just seen a pigeon fly across the sky at high speed and also I can see a bright blue sky with just a few wisps of white cloud. I can also see the sunlight hitting the house across the road and the bright red paint of a recently painted window of my neighbour's house.

And once you've done that – and you might be noticing things you don't normally see – is to think about **four things you can feel**.

So, it could be the feeling of the phone cover. Is it smooth? Is it rough? Is it cool? Focussing on all that...

It might be the feeling of the floor under your feet if you've got bear feet on, or what your feet feel like in the shows you're wearing.

Identifying and managing stress Transcript

It might be the feel of a jumper you're wearing or the feel of the fur of one of your pets. Or if you're out and about it might be the bark of a tree, it might be a leaf. Is it soft? Is it rough? How does it feel? Just focussing on the four things you can feel for the next wee while.

And then, once you've done that, **three things you can hear**. So, for me where I'm sitting, I can actually hear the rumble of a car passing which is less common than normal at the moment; I can just faintly hear the gulls in the background which again are pretty predominant where I live normally; and I can just hear a slight tapping from upstairs where I think there's is some DIY going on.

And then **two things you can smell**. Again, that can be anything at all, it might be a smell of some cooking that has gone on earlier in the day. It might be a smell of perfume that you've sprayed on or soap you've washed your hands with recently.

For me, I can smell some coffee that I had going earlier, a bit of a lingering smell of that; and I can actually smell a bit of wood smoke as we have a stove to heat our home.

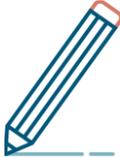
And once you've done that, finally **one thing you can taste**. So, for me I'm tasting the soup I had for my lunch, it might be toothpaste if you've just cleaned your teeth; it might be the taste of coffee that was drunk earlier on.

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Activity – Take a break

- Remember the importance of slowing down
- Write down what you feel you've learned today and how you could make changes in your own life



And the third activity which you might find useful when dealing with stress is really taking a break or slowing down.

So just taking yourself away from the situation, maybe finding a quiet place and writing down what you feel you might have learned from this short course and how you could make changes in your own life.

What might be the priorities that you can realistically achieve to reduce your stress?

It might be every so often doing the grounding activity. It might be as simple as doing the breathing exercise when you begin to feel stressed, or there might be other things that you've been inspired to think about today.

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Remember, small steps...



- Preparation
- Practice
- Patience

And remember, be kind to yourself. Think about taking small steps and putting into practice the three p's:

- Preparing
- Practicing; and
- Being Patient

And as the quote says:

'You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step'

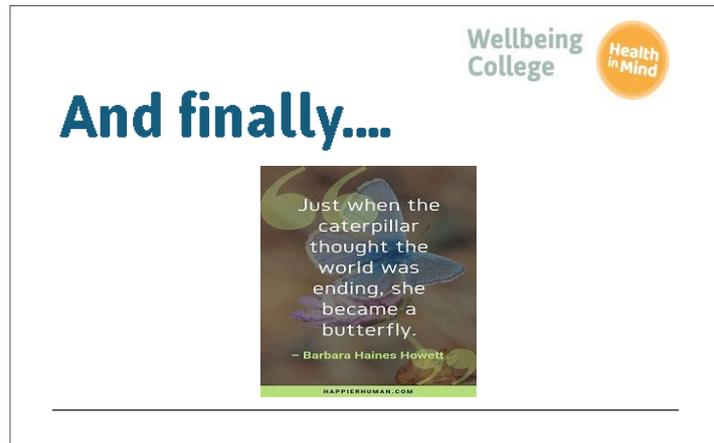


Course summary

- What is stress?
 - How does stress affect us?
 - Short and long term stress
 - Impact on emotions and mood
 - Immediate tips to coping with feeling overwhelmed
-

During this short course we've look at:

- What stress is.
- How it affects us.
- We've touched on short and long term stress.
- We've touched on how our mood and emotions are impacted on by stress.
- And finally, we've talked through some immediate tips to coping with feeling overwhelmed.



And just to finish off I'd like to share this little quote with you:

*'Just when the caterpillar thought the world was ending,
she became a butterfly'*



Thanks for joining us in this short course and I hope you'll join us again for one of the Wellbeing College's online courses in the future.