What is stress?

What stress is, what it does and when it becomes a problem.

Stress is what happens when the demands on you feel bigger than what you have to meet them with. Some pressure is helpful. It gets you up for an interview or through a deadline. The trouble comes when pressure is too high for too long, with no chance to recover.



What stress does

Body
Tense muscles, headaches, poor sleep, tiredness, stomach trouble, more colds and bugs.

Feelings
Irritable, anxious, overwhelmed, flat, tearful, quick to snap.

Thinking
Racing mind, forgetfulness, poor concentration, worry, seeing only problems.

Behaviour
Rushing, skipping breaks and meals, drinking or eating more, withdrawing, dropping the things that help.

Demands and resources

Stress is a balance between demands (work, money, caring, health, conflict, change) and resources (time, sleep, support, skills, money, a sense of control). You can reduce stress from either side: lower the load, or build up what you have to carry it.

Three questions

1. What can I change or remove?
2. What can I not change, but could handle differently?
3. What do I need more of to cope: rest, help, information, time to myself?

Note
Stress does the damage when there is no recovery from it. Short, regular breaks from pressure matter as much as reducing the pressure.

The pressure and performance curve is based on the Yerkes-Dodson law (1908).

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The stress bucket

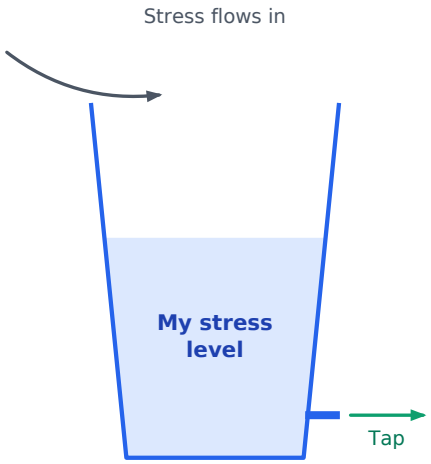
A picture of what adds to your stress and what lets it out.

Name _____ Date _____

Imagine your stress collecting in a bucket. Pressures pour in at the top. Helpful coping opens a tap at the bottom and lets some out. If more comes in than goes out, the bucket overflows: you snap, get ill, cannot sleep or feel you cannot cope. Tick what fits and add anything else.

What is filling my bucket

- [ ] Work
- [ ] Money
- [ ] Family
- [ ] Health
- [ ] Worries
- [ ] Change
- [ ] Poor sleep



What lets stress out

- [ ] Rest
- [ ] Sleep
- [ ] Movement
- [ ] Talking
- [ ] Outdoors
- [ ] Enjoyment

Signs my bucket is getting full

In my body, mood and behaviour

Taps that feel like relief but add to the load

- [ ] Drinking
- [ ] Overworking
- [ ] Avoiding
- [ ] Scrolling
- [ ] Comfort eating
- [ ] Snapping

What could I do to reduce what is flowing in?

Which tap will I open more this week, and when?

The stress bucket was described by Alison Brabban and Douglas Turkington (2002).

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