

THE WELLNESS HUB

SIGNS OF STRESS

Mental wellness every day



SIGNS OF STRESS

Stress is a part of life and can be healthy. A healthy amount of stress can help to motivate us. It could be financial motivation or the motivation to be productive. Both use the same neurochemical- adrenaline to help us get out of bed. It can help us to fulfil our responsibilities. This is often referred to as *acute* stress (short-lived and there is a purpose, i.e. to help you meet a deadline). The impact is noticeable, such as feeling nausea before a presentation, and it passes quickly.

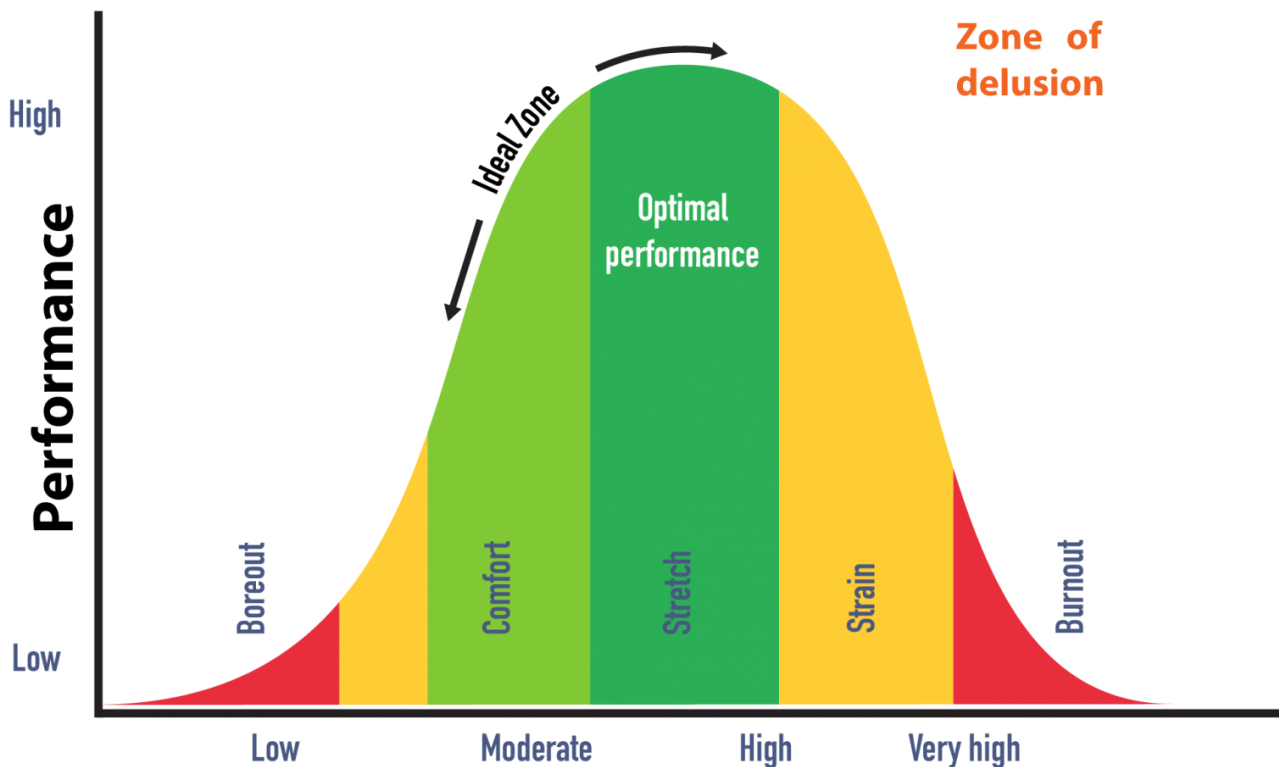
However, prolonged stress is generally associated with struggling and being unable to cope. When life can be 'stressful', tasks and demands become more difficult to manage. Feelings of exhaustion and overwhelm are common. This is often referred to as *chronic* stress.

When unmonitored, stress can lead to a myriad of mental and physical health issues. Triggers for stress (stressors) are more likely to be long-term commitments such as employment, relationships, financial. They are also less likely to be apparent and they can go unnoticed. Unfortunately, we can also become accustomed to persistent stress leading to chronic stress. It is only when stress has a detrimental impact on our physical and mental wellbeing that we may question the cause of the symptoms(1).

Psychologists Yerkes and Dodson created a model explaining how pressure can improve performance, but when the pressure becomes excessive, performance declines. It is important to recognise that when feeling sufficiently challenged, we are more likely to experience a sense of purpose and achievement. The graph below demonstrates the trajectory between boredom and burnout (2).

There is substantial research demonstrating that those in caring professions are more likely to experience burn-out, particularly in a sector offering psychological support (3). Therefore, it is imperative to be able to recognise cues indicating an increase of (unmanageable) stress (4).

SIGNS OF STRESS



It is critical to our well-being to flow between comfort and stretch. This enables the learning of new skills and when embedded, we return to the comfort zone. It is between these zones that we experience a sense of purpose. However, remaining in the stretch zone for prolonged periods can result in falling into the strain zone. It is in this phase that we often push through and exert more energy. We begin to doubt our abilities and capacities to overcome hurdles. Therefore recognising how this may present (physically and emotionally) and how to combat it can prevent burnout.

Recognising alarm bells can support the use of preventative measures helping a return to the stretch/ comfort zone. The following is a comprehensive but not exhaustive list of some of the typical symptoms associated with the strain zone. How many might you recognise in yourself? How many do you see in your peers? Following this, there are worksheets to help you identify your personal stress cues and strategies to move from the stretch/strain zone to the comfort zone.

SIGNS OF STRESS

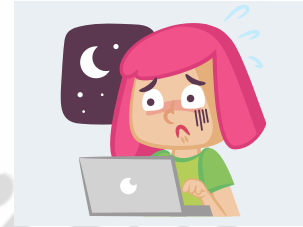
This is not an exhaustive list of PHYSICAL/EXTERNAL cues of stress/excessive pressure.



IBS



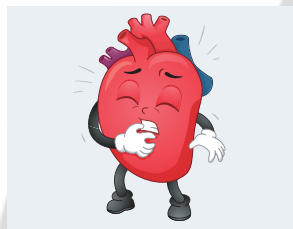
Migraine



panic attacks



reduced immunity



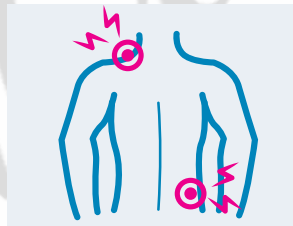
heart attack/strokes



hair loss/alopecia



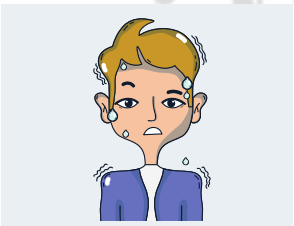
too much/little sleep



muscle fatigue



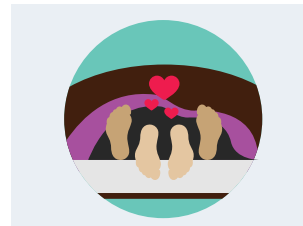
excess substance use



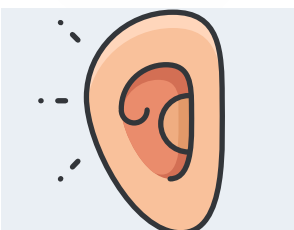
hot/cold sweats



too much/little food



lower Libido



ringing/tinnitus



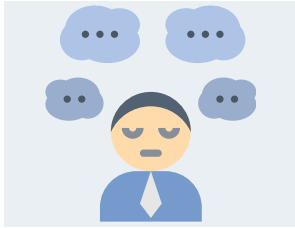
teeth grinding



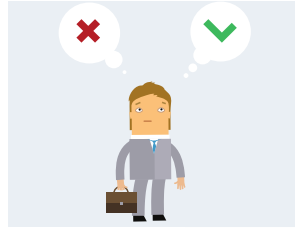
bloated/flatulence

SIGNS OF STRESS

This is not an exhaustive list of EMOTIONAL/INTERNAL cues of stress./ excessive pressure.



worrying



poor decision making



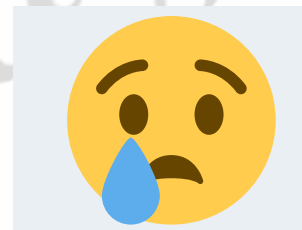
procrastination



angry



negative thoughts



sadness



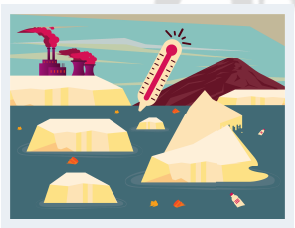
nightmares



mental fatigue



negative outlook



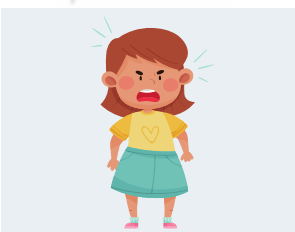
catastrophising



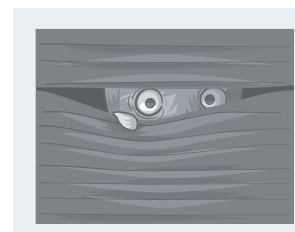
overwhelmed



lack confidence



Irritable



withdrawn



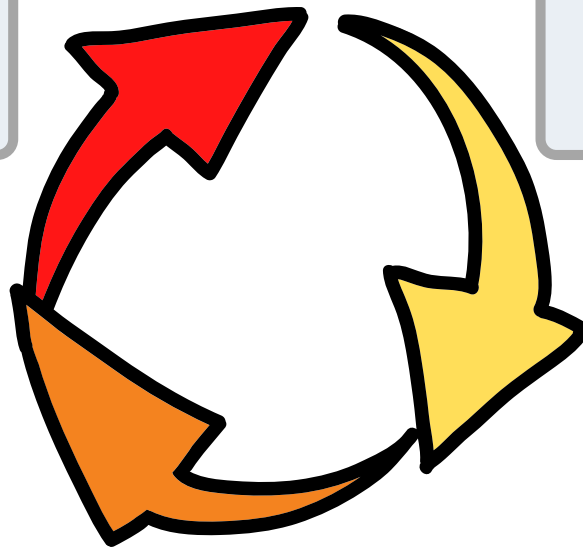
hyper-vigilant

SIGNS OF STRESS

Take the time to consider your signs of transitioning between the stretched and strain zone. We often choose to ignore these initial signs. This could be for a variety of reasons- we don't think they are serious or we become accustomed to them becoming the 'norm'. If the initial signs are not acted upon, what further changes might you observe? These are usually harder to ignore as others begin to notice, either a change in mood or behaviour. And if applicable, consider a time when excessive pressure was persistent. What were the symptoms? It tends to be an accumulation of physical and emotional ones.

Burnout

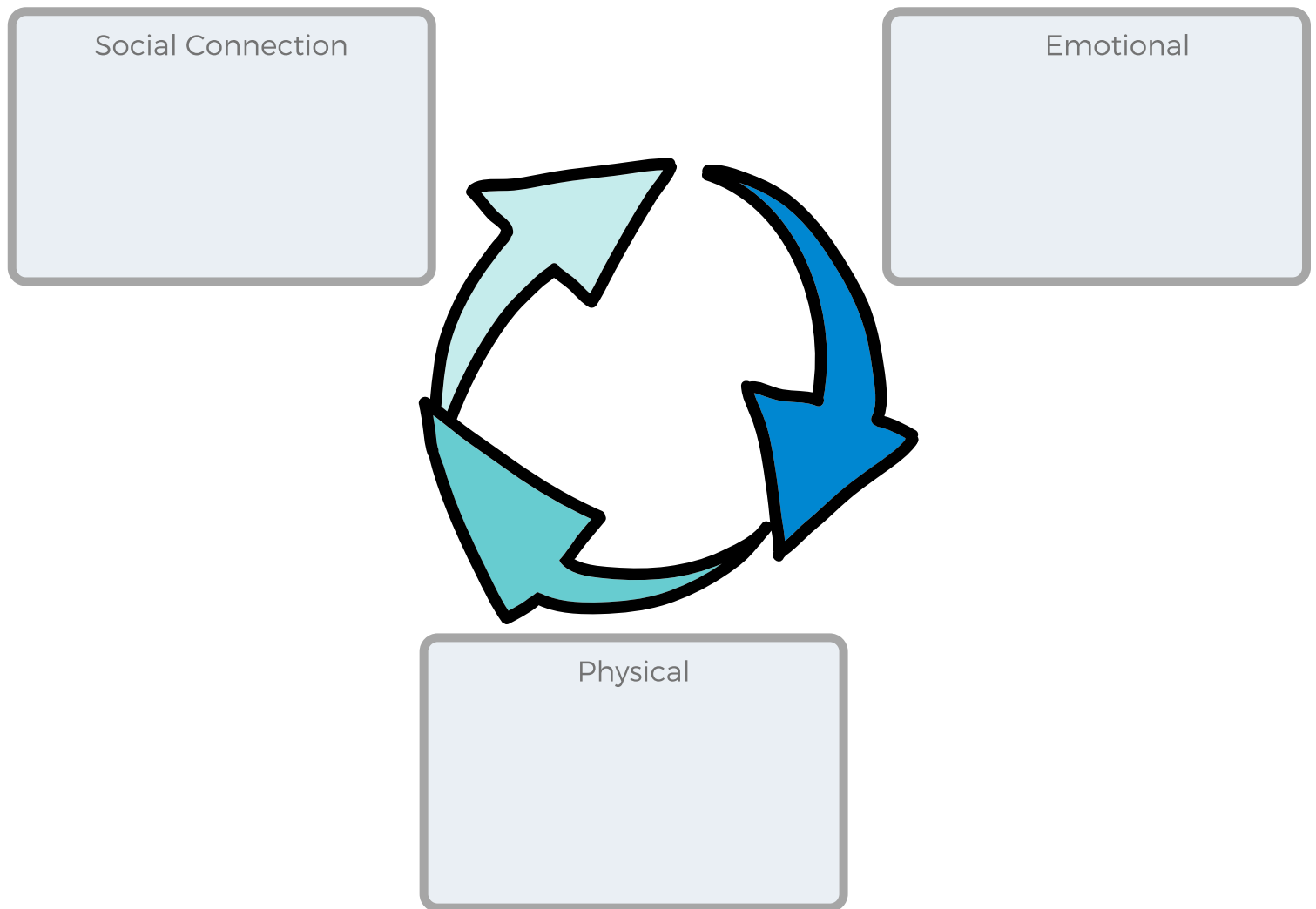
Stretch



Strain

RESPONDING TO STRESS

Taking the time to observe the 'alarm bells' provides an opportunity to intervene, reduce the impact of stress and prevent the cycle from escalating. Using the same cycle consider which strategies are helpful at returning control to the stretch/comfort zone. Implementing these strategies can increase the body's response to stressors and sense of emotional control. Consider all strategies that can help reduce the pressure. These may FULFIL an emotional (reading an inspiring book), physical (going for a walk) or social connection (speaking to a friend) need. Ultimately, this will help you to return to optimal functioning zones. You can also add other sections too (ie spiritual).



SIGNS OF STRESS

References

- 1 <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/body>
- 2) <https://www.psychestudy.com/general/motivation-emotion/yerkes-dodson-law>
- 3) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6198075/>
- 4) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5014501/>

