



International
Wellbeing Insights
People, Culture & Wellbeing



Stress Management Society
from distress to de-stress

RAF Waddington

Excelling Under Pressure

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WELCOME

Stress is the driving force that keeps us on our toes and ensures that we push to be the best we can be. However that is only valid up to a certain point. If we have too much stress and endless wear and tear, it can drive us into physical, mental and emotional exhaustion.

Certainly we can't avoid the problem. Situations arise on a day-to-day basis, which make physical, mental and emotional demands on us. There may be decisions that need to be made, deadlines that need to be met, and lessons to be learned.

Unreasonable stress affects one in five of the working population and after acute medical conditions it is the most common cause of long term sickness absence from work (CIPD Absence Management 2019).

Stress undoubtedly makes people ill. It is now known to contribute to heart disease, hypertension and high blood pressure, it affects the immune system, is linked to strokes, IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome), ulcers, diabetes, muscle and joint pain, miscarriage, allergies, alopecia and even premature tooth loss.

Therefore it is imperative to strike the right balance. As individuals, we must take stock of all aspects of our life and situations and learn to cope better.

Treat it early, and your prospects are good. Ignore the problem, and there is a risk that 'burnout' may become a permanent state of affairs.



UNDERSTANDING STRESS

Stress is a physical response. Under stress, the body thinks it is under attack and switches to

'FIGHT, FLIGHT OR FREEZE' MODE

releasing substances such as adrenaline, cortisol and norepinephrine to prepare the body for physical action. This causes a number of reactions, from blood being diverted to muscles, to shutting down unnecessary bodily functions such as digestion.

The common physical symptoms when we are faced with a highly stressful situation are:

HEART RATE INCREASES

BREATHING BECOMES SHALLOW AND FAST MUSCULAR TENSION INCREASES

FEELING OF ANGER AND HOSTILITY INCREASE

TEETH GRITTED BLADDER RELAXES

BLOOD PRESSURE INCREASES BLOOD SUGAR INCREASES

Our bodies have evolved to produce this stressed state in order to survive life-threatening situations like attacks from sabre-tooth tigers, however, in modern times we're no longer living in caves and running away from sabre-toothed tigers so becoming stressed is more of a hindrance than a useful tool.

There are still situations where it is beneficial to work yourself into a stressful state, such as participating in competitive sports; so the challenge is being able to control the effects of stress when it isn't beneficial to the situation.

What is fight, flight or freeze mode?

Fight or flight means building up the energy to be able to respond to a life-threatening situation.

For many people however this life-threatening experience sets the stage for 'dysregulation'. The energy mobilised by the perceived threat gets "locked" into the nervous system when we go into

freeze. This freeze response sometimes reveals itself when you breathe. Holding your breath and shallow breathing are both forms of freeze. The occasional deep sigh after a period of stress is the nervous system catching up on its oxygen intake.

IS 'STRESS' GOOD OR BAD? THE PERFORMANCE ZONE

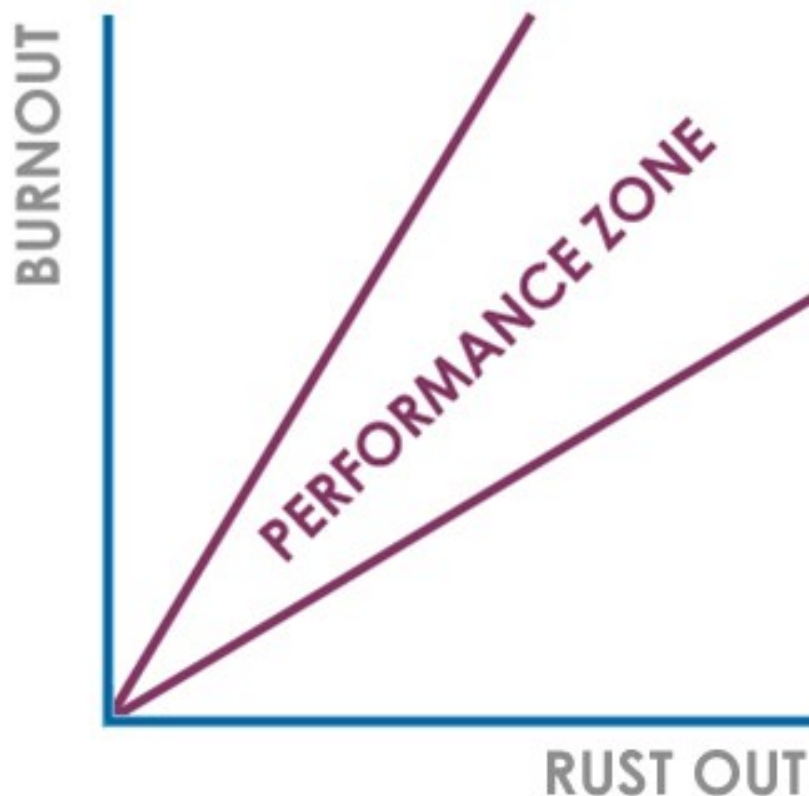
Manageable levels of stress are not a problem, a stress-free environment is not the ultimate goal - we need pressure in our lives in order to perform. The issue is long stages of inactivity causing distress from stagnation or prolonged exposure to high levels without a rest or reset period.

The Performance Zone is the area that drives optimal performance, whether applied to sports, work or even driving. Burnout and Rustout present in different ways but are both as traumatic to experience.

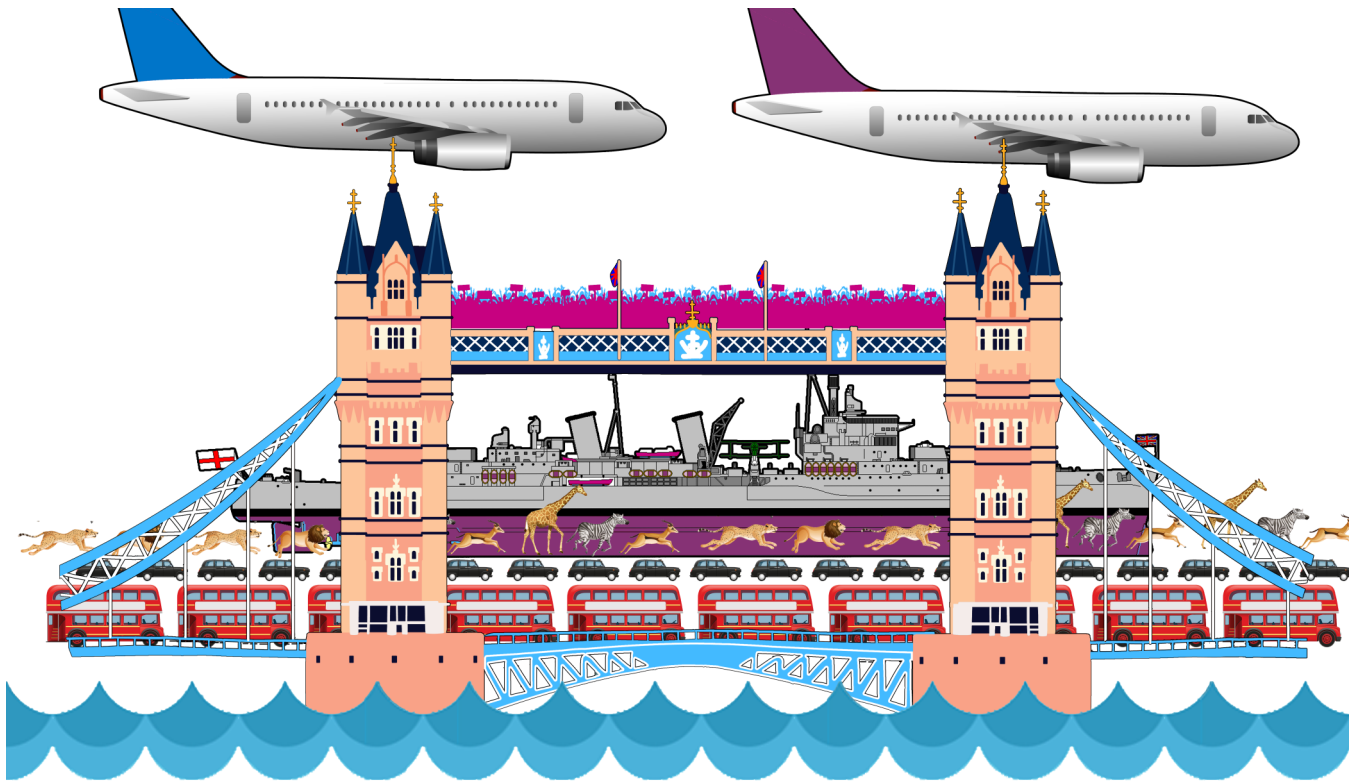
When our stress levels move beyond the Performance Zone and edge towards Burnout we will struggle; problem solving, lateral thinking and creative thinking diminish. We are unable to think clearly and make good decisions, and can become reactive, angry and sometimes even aggressive.

Below the Performance Zone is Rustout where we may find ourselves unable to motivate ourselves; energy and enthusiasm will be low and we will be bored sluggish and lethargic.

Make yourself familiar with the signs when your stress levels move above or below the Performance Zone so that you can reign them back in or raise them up accordingly.



THE BRIDGE ANALOGY



The Health & Safety Executive defines stress as ‘the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them’.

This links very closely to one of our definitions of stress; a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that:

**“DEMANDS EXCEED THE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RESOURCES
THE INDIVIDUAL IS ABLE TO MOBILISE.”**

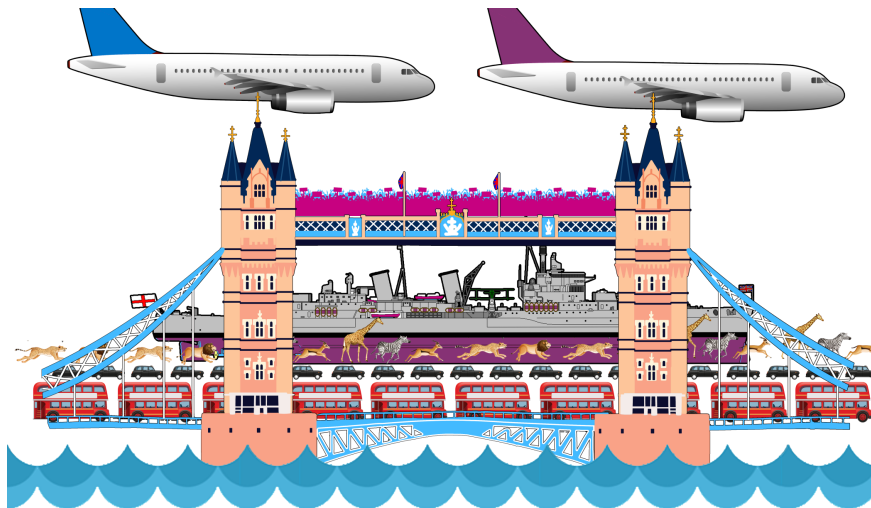
The International Wellbeing Insights uses ‘The Bridge’ analogy to approach the topic of mental health, wellbeing and stress. When a Bridge is carrying too much weight, it will eventually collapse. It is possible to see the warning signs before this happens, ‘The Bridge’ would bow, buckle and creak.

The same principle can be applied to human beings, with excessive demands and challenges placed on our bridges. There may be early warning signs. However stress can creep up on some of us, resulting in an unexpected breakdown.

‘The Bridge’ analogy can also be applied to a team or organisation as a whole by looking for more general signs such as team deadlines not being met or a decrease in team morale.



WHAT'S ON YOUR BRIDGE?



- 1. WE DON'T HAVE A WORK BRIDGE AND PERSONAL BRIDGE, IT ALL GOES TO THE SAME PLACE AND WE TEND TO CARRY IT AROUND WITH US. TAKE A MOMENT TO THINK ABOUT WHAT IS ON YOUR BRIDGE.**

-
- 2. WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS THAT YOU DISPLAY WHEN YOUR BRIDGE IS BOWING AND BUCKLING.**

FLAWED STRATEGIES WHEN DEALING WITH STRESS

When the general public were asked to complete the sentence

“I’m So Stressed, I Need A....”

The most popular answers are:

1. ALCOHOL

2. NICOTINE

3. REFINED SUGAR

4. CAFFEINE



All of these are stimulating and will not directly alleviate stress (with the exception of alcohol which is technically biphasic i.e. in small quantities it is stimulating and in large quantities it is a depressant)

If you take away the consumption of the top 4 cravings from the act, you are left with a constructive experience. The act of smoking itself won't relieve stress, however, taking a couple of minutes away from your work at an appropriate time to have a 'fresh air break' will have a positive effect on your health and efficiency.

STRESS & NUTRITION

Many of us feed ourselves platefuls of food loaded with toxins, chemicals, fats, sugars and other nasties which are of no benefit to our bodies and we expect it to cope.

There has always been a link between stress and nutrition. A balanced diet will boost our resistance against the effects of stress on the body.

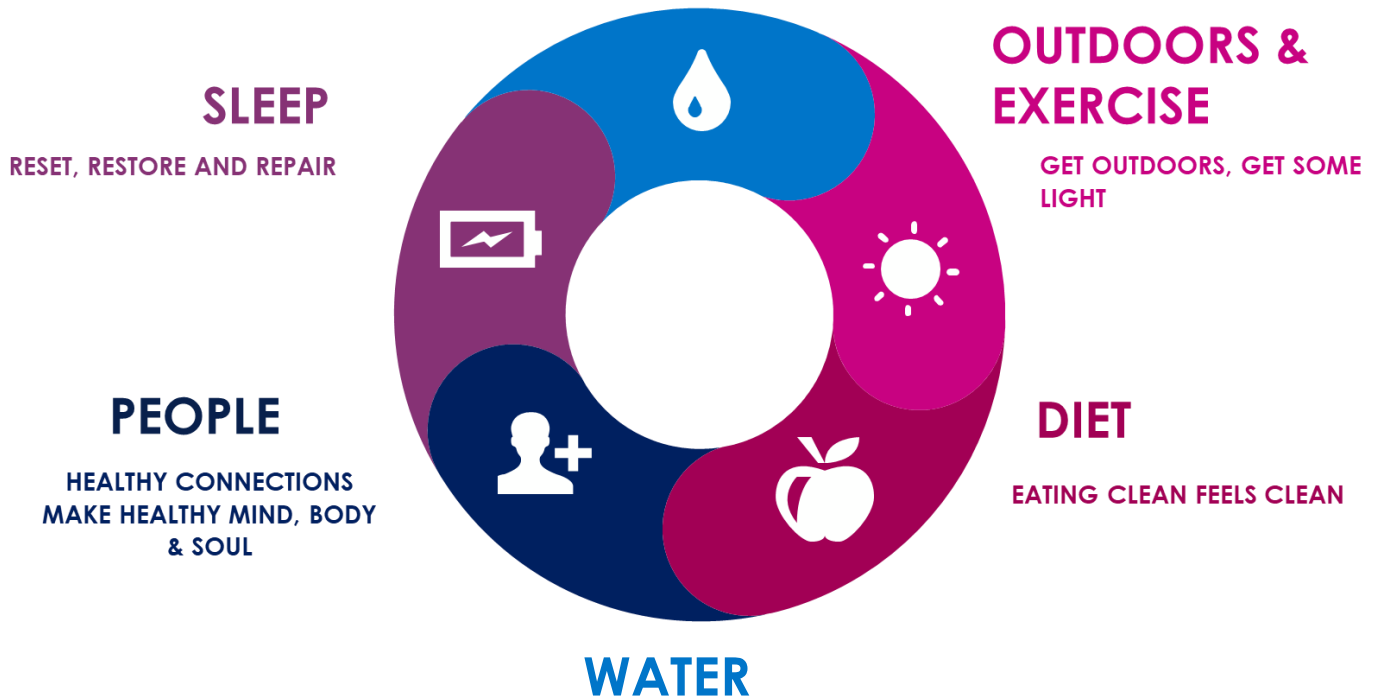
Therefore it is important to constantly top up on vital nutrients.

Someone with a healthy and balanced diet is likely to be far less stressed than someone with a poor diet as their bodies are working more efficiently and they are more resilient to stress.

THE FIVE DAILY ESSENTIALS

WATER

AT LEAST 2 LITRES PER DAY



WATER INTAKE AFFECTS OUR BODY, MOOD AND COGNITIVE FUNCTION. YOU SHOULD BE DRINKING ENOUGH WHERE YOU DON'T EVER FEEL THIRSTY.

OUTDOORS AND EXERCISE

SUNLIGHT IN YOUR EYES AS SOON AS YOU CAN AFTER WAKING UP LEADS TO ELEVATED MOOD, IMMUNE FUNCTION AND FOCUS ALL DAY AND BETTER SLEEP AT NIGHT.

DIET

A DIET THAT IS PACKED WITH NATURAL FRESH PRODUCE HELPS TO LOWER THE RISK OF MANY CHRONIC DISORDERS LIKE CANCER, OBESITY, CARDIOVASCULAR PROBLEMS AND DIABETES. EATING CLEAN FEELS CLEAN.

PEOPLE

WE ARE A HERD SPECIES. SOME OF LIKE TO BE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE HERD, SOME ON THE OUTSKIRTS, WHILST SOME OF US PREFER TO KNOW IT'S THERE IF WE NEED IT!

SLEEP

SLEEP HAS MASSIVE BENEFITS ON OUR PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH. WE RESTORE, REPAIR, AND PROCESS DURING SLEEP.

Source; Andrew Huberman PhD

LIFESTYLE BALANCE EXERCISE

Knowledge is power...only if you apply it or take action

This is about lifestyle balance; as a starting point, think about the different areas of your life and give them a score.

Rate on a scale: Zero being poor, 10 being Excellent

HOW DO YOU RATE YOURSELF OUT OF 10 ON THE FOLLOWING SKILLS/ STATEMENTS?

WATER

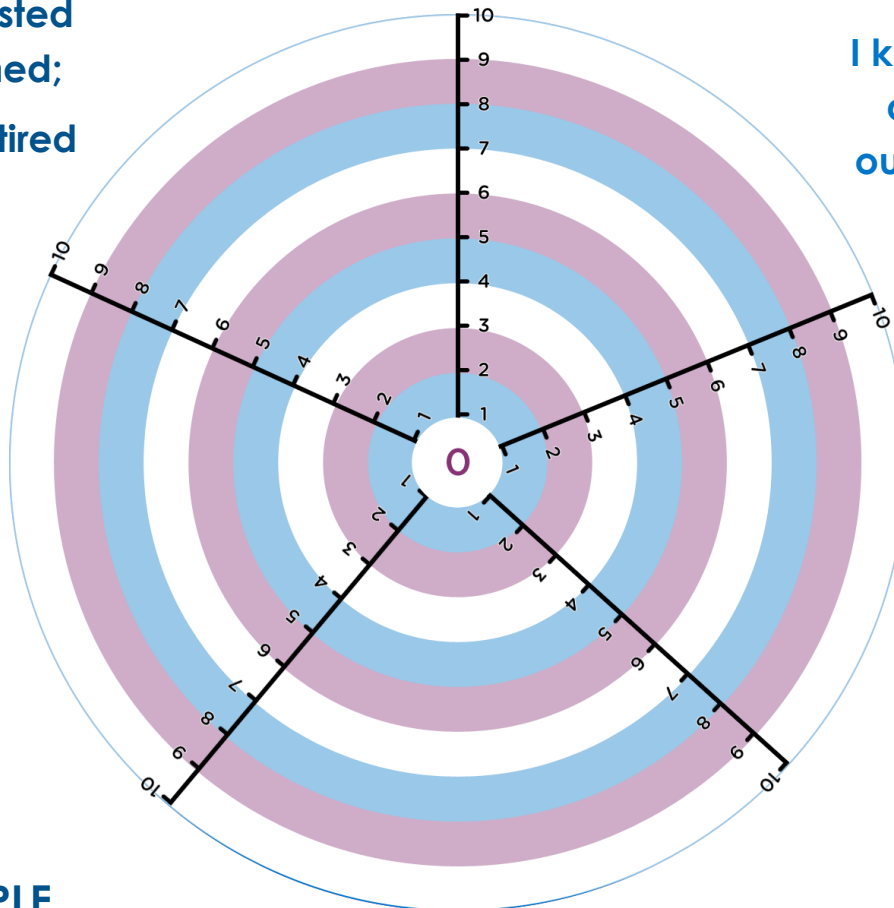
I drink enough to keep my mind and body sharp

SLEEP

I am fully rested and refreshed;
I rarely feel tired

OUTDOORS & EXERCISE

I keep my body active: I am outside for long periods



PEOPLE

I keep connected to a variety of friends and family that I can rely on and who can rely on me

DIET

I keep my body fed well with lots of fresh food

WHAT COULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

WATER

Water is essential for maintaining optimal brain and cognitive function. From a neuroscience perspective, the brain is highly dependent on water to regulate a range of physiological processes, including blood flow, oxygenation, and waste removal. Even mild dehydration can impair cognitive performance, attention, and memory. Adequate hydration is crucial for promoting optimal brain health, preventing cognitive decline, and reducing the risk of age-related brain diseases. Prioritising regular water intake throughout the day is crucial for maintaining overall health and optimal brain functioning.

1. Drink a glass of water every time you brush your teeth, eat a meal, or use the bathroom.
2. Add fruit to your water for flavor. Lemons, limes, oranges, cucumber, watermelon, strawberries, and herbs are delicious options.
3. Eat water-rich fruits and vegetables like melon, cucumbers, lettuce, and celery.
4. Invest in a high-tech bottle that connects to your smartphone and records how much you drink.
5. Set an alarm as a reminder to drink water and track your intake in your calendar.
6. Challenge a friend to a water-drinking contest to make hydration more fun.
7. Drink a glass of water before and after a workout to stay hydrated.
8. Drink a glass of water before going to bed and after waking up to maintain hydration.
9. Replace sugary drinks with water during meals.
10. Drink a glass of water before a meal to help control portion sizes.
11. Use a water filter to improve the taste of tap water.
12. Drink herbal tea or make homemade fruit-infused water for a change.
13. Keep a water bottle at your workplace and refill it regularly.
14. Drink more water in hot weather or when exercising to compensate for the extra fluid loss.
15. Use a marked water bottle to track your daily water intake.
16. Drink water when you're feeling hungry as it can sometimes be confused with thirst.
17. Drink a glass of water after every bathroom break.
18. Drink a glass of water before coffee or tea to prevent dehydration.
19. Use an app to remind you to drink water and track your daily intake.
20. Drink a glass of water if you're feeling tired during the day as dehydration can cause fatigue.

WHAT COULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

OUTDOORS & EXERCISE

Outdoor light and exercise are crucial for maintaining optimal brain and cognitive function. From a neuroscience perspective, exposure to natural light helps regulate the body's internal clock and circadian rhythm, promoting healthy sleep-wake cycles and regulating hormone levels. Exercise is essential for promoting neuroplasticity, increasing blood flow to the brain, and promoting the growth of new neurons and neural connections. Regular outdoor exercise also helps reduce stress and improve mood, which can positively impact brain function. Prioritising regular outdoor exercise and exposure to natural light is crucial for maintaining overall health and optimal brain functioning.

1. **Map your route ahead of time when planning outdoor workouts.**
2. **Bring your cell phone for safety and to track your workout.**
3. **Wear reflective gear if you're exercising outdoors in low light conditions.**
4. **Try different forms of exercise to keep your workouts interesting.**
5. **Incorporate strength training exercises into your routine.**
6. **Take frequent breaks from sitting or standing in the same position.**
7. **Walk or bike instead of driving when possible.**
8. **Practice good posture throughout the day.**
9. **Stretch regularly to improve your flexibility and prevent injury.**
10. **Use resistance bands or weights to add resistance to your workouts.**
11. **Get outside and enjoy nature through hiking, biking, or gardening.**
12. **Take a dance class to improve your coordination, balance, and agility.**
13. **Use a stability ball instead of a chair at your desk.**
14. **Practice deep breathing exercises to reduce stress and increase relaxation.**
15. **Take a walk outside during your lunch break.**
16. **Use a foam roller to massage and stretch your muscles before and after exercise.**
17. **Try aquatic exercise, such as swimming or water aerobics.**
18. **Join a sports league to improve your coordination, teamwork, and competitiveness.**
19. **Practice balance exercises to improve your stability and reduce your risk of falls.**
20. **Use a pedometer or fitness tracker to monitor your daily steps.**

WHAT COULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

DIET

Diet plays a crucial role in our health and wellbeing, with our food choices directly impacting our brain and cognitive function. From a neuroscience perspective, the nutrients we consume are essential for maintaining healthy brain cells and neural connections, supporting memory, attention, and mood. A healthy diet that is rich in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and omega-3 fatty acids has been linked to a reduced risk of cognitive decline and age-related diseases, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. On the other hand, an unhealthy diet that is high in sugar, saturated fats, and processed foods has been associated with impaired cognitive function, depression, and anxiety. Prioritising a healthy diet is crucial for promoting optimal brain health and cognitive function.

1. **Start your day with a healthy breakfast that includes lean protein, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.**
2. **Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.**
3. **Watch portion sizes and use measuring cups to compare your portions to recommended serving sizes.**
4. **Fix healthy snacks that include a combination of foods from different food groups.**
5. **Prepare foods at home to control the ingredients and portion sizes.**
6. **When eating out, choose healthier options that are grilled, baked, broiled, or steamed.**
7. **Include a source of lean protein with each meal and snack.**
8. **Choose whole grains over refined grains.**
9. **Limit added sugars and sodium in your diet.**
10. **Include a variety of foods from all food groups to ensure you get a range of nutrients.**
11. **Drink green tea or herbal tea instead of sugary drinks.**
12. **Include sources of healthy fats in your diet, such as avocados, nuts, seeds, and olive oil.**
13. **Eat fish at least twice a week for a good source of omega-3 fatty acids.**
14. **Include legumes and beans in your diet for a good source of fibre and protein.**
15. **Choose lean meats and poultry, and trim or drain fat from meat to keep your heart healthy.**
16. **Limit processed foods and fast foods, which are often high in sodium, unhealthy fats, and sugars.**
17. **Eat at least five portions of fruits and vegetables each day.**
18. **Choose low-fat or non-fat dairy products to reduce fat intake.**
19. **Drink alcohol in moderation, and try to have at least two alcohol-free days each week.**
20. **Stay hydrated by drinking water instead of sugary drinks.**

WHAT COULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

PEOPLE

Staying connected to people is critical for maintaining optimal brain and cognitive function. From a neuroscience perspective, social interaction and connection are essential for promoting neuroplasticity, reducing cognitive decline, and improving mental health. The brain is highly responsive to social cues, and social interaction has been shown to stimulate the growth of new neurons and neural connections. Conversely, social isolation and loneliness have been linked to increased risk of cognitive decline, depression, and anxiety. Prioritising social interaction and staying connected to people is crucial for maintaining overall health and optimal brain functioning.

1. Stay connected with friends and family through regular phone calls or video chats.
2. Join clubs or groups based on your interests to meet new people.
3. Volunteer in your community to meet people and give back.
4. Be open to making new friends, regardless of age or background.
5. Show appreciation for the people in your life through small acts of kindness.
6. Be a good listener when people talk to you about their feelings or problems.
7. Be respectful of others' opinions, even if they differ from your own.
8. Be supportive of your friends and family during difficult times.
9. Encourage open and honest communication in your relationships.
10. Spend quality time with your loved ones, doing activities you all enjoy.
11. Be patient with others and try to understand their perspectives.
12. Learn to forgive and let go of grudges or past conflicts.
13. Celebrate others' achievements and successes.
14. Be reliable and follow through on your commitments to others.
15. Be positive and try to uplift the people around you.
16. Respect others' boundaries and personal space.
17. Be empathetic and try to understand others' feelings and experiences.
18. Be honest and trustworthy in your relationships.
19. Encourage others to express themselves and their ideas.
20. Be open to feedback and constructive criticism.

WHAT COULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

SLEEP

Sleep is a vital aspect of our health, affecting both our mental and physical wellbeing. From a neuroscience perspective, sleep is critical for a brain functions such as memory, learning, and cognitive performance. During sleep, the brain consolidates and organises newly acquired information, leading to improved learning and retention. Furthermore, sleep is essential for the restoration and repair of neurons and other brain cells, promoting optimal brain health and functioning. Lack of sleep has been linked to a range of negative health outcomes, including increased risk of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and mood disorders.

1. Establish a regular sleep schedule by going to bed and waking up at the same time every day.
2. Create a relaxing bedtime routine to signal to your body that it's time to sleep.
3. Keep your bedroom dark, quiet, and cool for optimal sleep conditions.
4. Limit exposure to screens before bedtime as the light can interfere with your body's sleep-wake cycle.
5. Avoid large meals, caffeine, and alcohol close to bedtime.
6. Regular physical activity can help you fall asleep faster and enjoy deeper sleep.
7. Manage stress through relaxation techniques like meditation, deep breathing, or yoga.
8. Use your bed only for sleep and sex to strengthen the association between bed and sleep.
9. If you can't sleep, go into another room and do something relaxing until you feel tired.
10. If you have persistent sleep problems, consult a healthcare provider.
11. Avoid long daytime naps as they can interfere with nighttime sleep.
12. Make sure your mattress and pillows are comfortable and supportive.
13. If you work night shifts or have jet lag, consider taking a melatonin supplement.
14. Keep pets out of the bed if they disturb your sleep.
15. Avoid drinking lots of fluids before bed to prevent middle-of-the-night bathroom trips.
16. If you snore or have interrupted breathing during sleep, seek medical advice as you may have sleep apnoea.
17. Try a sleep aid app or white noise machine if you have trouble falling asleep.
18. Write in a journal or do a calming activity before bed to help clear your mind.
19. Expose yourself to natural light during the day to help maintain a healthy sleep-wake cycle.
20. Avoid smoking as nicotine is a stimulant and can interfere with sleep.

MY 30 DAY ACTION PLAN

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER...ONLY IF YOU APPLY IT OR TAKE ACTION.

THIS IS ABOUT LIFESTYLE BALANCE;

**HOW DID YOU DO? WHAT ARE YOU DOING WELL? WHAT COULD NEED IMPROVEMENT?
BUILD YOUR PERSONAL RESILIENCE.**

Finding meaningful ways to engage your brain and occupy your time can help alleviate the distress and irritability that poor wellbeing brings.

The coping mechanisms that will work best for you will have a lot to do with your personal situation

FOR EXAMPLE:

“IF I AM NOT FEELING OKAY, I WILL REACH OUT TO SOMEONE IN MY SUPPORT NETWORK”.

“I WILL GET OUT EVERYDAY IN THE FRESH AIR, WHATEVER THE WEATHER”

“I WILL GO TO BED 30 MINUTES EARLIER

ACTION POINT 1: (WATER): I WILL...

ACTION POINT 2 : (OUTDOORS & EXERCISE) I WILL...

ACTION POINT 3 : (DIET) I WILL...

ACTION POINT 4: (PEOPLE): I WILL...

ACTION POINT 5: (SLEEP) I WILL...

BREATHING EXERCISES

(Please do not use this if you are pregnant, have high blood pressure, heart disease or musculo-skeletal issues)

RELAXATION TECHNIQUE

Benefits

More oxygen = calmness and more oxygen in brain increases concentration and focus

INSTRUCTIONS

- Imagine a triangle that starts at your belly button and the corners are at your hips
- Inside that triangle is a ball or a balloon
- Every time you take in a breath, imagine that ball or balloon filling up with air
- Take a nice slow deep **breath in through the nose** and fill the belly up with air
- Hold at the top of the breath for 5 seconds and then slowly **exhale through the mouth**, pulling the navel to the spine. Repeat 5 times

RE-ENERGISING TECHNIQUE

Benefits

This protects against airborne diseases; tones the heart; burns toxins; increases exchange of O₂ and CO₂ in bloodstream, thus stimulating metabolism. Excellent for asthmatics. Balances nervous system.

Instructions

- Stand in a comfortable position
- Inhale and raise arms out sideways, Diaphragm descends, belly pumps out
- Exhale and bend arms in to ribs
- We will be repeating this 30 x
- 10 x slow, 10 x medium and 10 x fast



ABOUT INTERNATIONAL WELLBEING INSIGHTS

Stress is a much used (and abused) term these days. You frequently hear people say “I’m stressed” or “I’m depressed”, yet there is still much confusion about what these terms actually mean and how best to tackle them. This is where we can help. We are the UK’s leading authority on stress management issues, which is why you will regularly hear us talking about this topic in the media.

International Wellbeing Insights is dedicated to leading effective universal change by maximising your resilience, happiness, productivity and success with our passionate approach to reducing stress and promoting wellbeing.

Our extensive knowledge of stress and wellbeing and our cutting edge interventions have made us the primary organisation dealing with work-related stress reduction and wellbeing promotion in the UK since 2003.

For years, we’ve been empowering individuals to take charge of their wellbeing through our workshops, guides and regular updates. We also act as a trusted advisor for many companies such as British Airways, Allianz and Shell, guiding them through the mental wellbeing solution maze.

For more information or to book a workshop or a coaching session see www.stress.org.uk, call +44 203 142 8650 or email info@stress.org.uk



NOTES



International
Wellbeing Insights
People, Culture & Wellbeing

We provide a range of services across the UK and internationally. We are always happy to discuss how we can support you.

We look forward to supporting your wellbeing journey.

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We have supported many organisations, including:

