



International
Wellbeing Insights
People, Culture & Wellbeing



Stress Management Society
from distress to de-stress

Excelling Under Pressure: Burn Bright Not Out

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Ministry
of Defence



Strategic
Command



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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

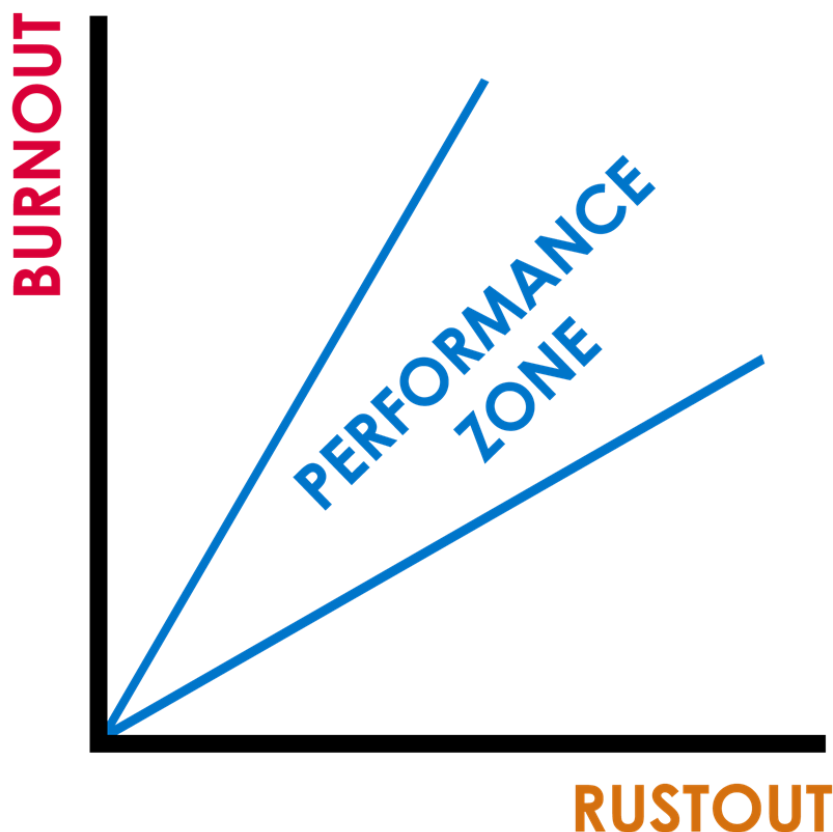
Manageable levels of stress are not a problem, a stress-free environment is not the ultimate goal - we need pressure in our lives in order to perform. The issue is long stages of inactivity causing distress from stagnation or prolonged exposure to high levels without a rest or reset period.

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.



STRESS EVALUATION EXERCISE

It may be helpful for you to think about how stress affects your life and to share this with a partner. www.stress.org.uk/see

1. What does stress mean to you?

2. What is the cause?

3. How does it affect you:

A. Physically?

B. Mentally? (How you think)

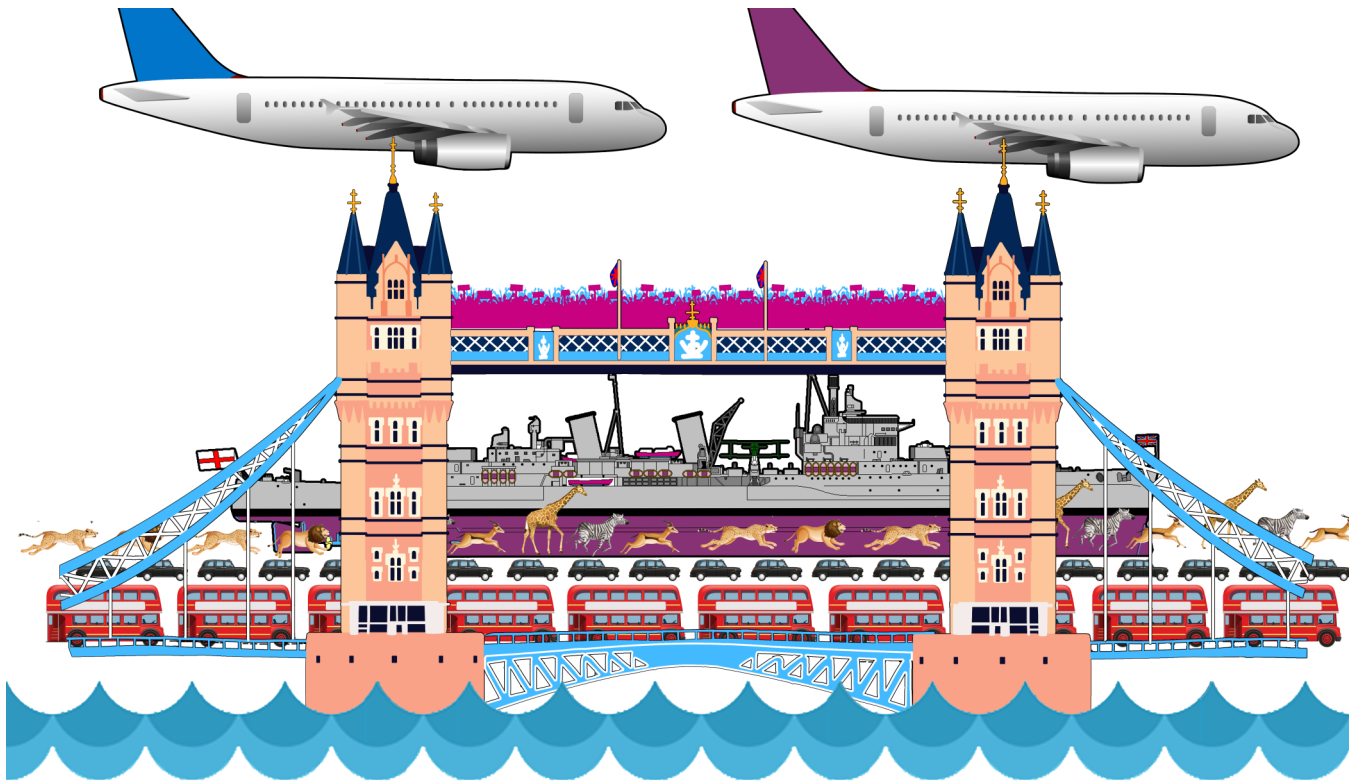
C. Emotionally? (How you feel)

4. How often does it affect you?

5. How have you been dealing with it until now?

6. How could you deal with it instead? What could you do differently?

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.”**

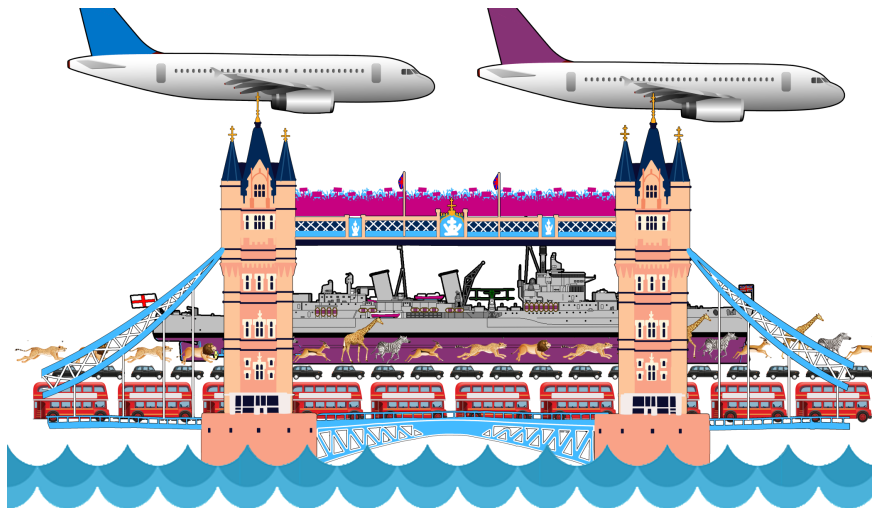
The International Wellbeing Insights uses ‘The Bridge’ analogy to approach the topic of mental health, wellbeing and stress. When a Bridge is carrying too much weight, it will eventually collapse. It is possible to see the warning signs before this happens, ‘The Bridge’ would bow, buckle and creak.

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.**

RECOGNISING STRESS

Early identification of stress and stress-related problems

One of the difficulties with stress is that people experience stress in different ways. This contributes to stress manifesting in non-uniform presentations, so it would be wrong to overgeneralise when giving advice on how to identify stress in others. However, what we can say is that because stress can have negative effects, it will usually manifest itself in unusual behaviour for that person.

It isn't always possible to prevent stress, so a key action in order to minimise risk is to identify stress-related problems as early as possible, so that action can be taken before serious stress-related illness occurs (thus preventing a costly outcome for all concerned).

There will be changes in the stressed person. These changes may be emotional, physical or behavioural, or a combination of all three. So, the key thing is to look out for negative changes of any kind. Bear in mind that the negative changes are also likely to have knock-on effects

e.g. reduced performance at work, damaged interpersonal relationships

Of course, we all experience 'bad days', so we are really talking about situations where people display these negative changes for a period of time (e.g. 5 days in a row).

Certain factors at work may indicate a potential problem

- More accident prone
- Forgetting things
- Showing a negative change in mood or fluctuations in mood
- Avoiding certain situations or people
- Using more very negative or cynical language
- Becoming withdrawn
- Showing a prolonged loss of sense of humour
- Becoming increasingly irritable or short-tempered
- Arguments and disputes between people
- A tendency to suffer from headaches, nausea, aches and pains, tiredness and poor sleeping patterns
- Indecisiveness and poor judgement
- Self-harming
- A problem with drinking or drug taking
- Looking haggard or exhausted all the time
- Unable to think creatively

CAUSES OF STRESS AT WORK

These are some traditional causes of stress at work

Feeling out of control of your destiny

Unreasonable demands in
the job

Overwork

A feeling of being under-appreciated

Difficulty with resolving
problems

Bullying or
harassment

Difficulty with communication

Uncertainty about job security

Office politics



THE TOP PRINCIPLE

Write down 3 situations/worries that you often think about or are currently challenged with:

1.

2.

3.

Worrying about the future can cost us a lot of time and energy. It is a time robber just like unexpected or unscheduled interruptions. Time robbers are a massive problem when trying to manage your time effectively. Dealing with time robbers is ultimately a problem solving exercise. This consists of a logical 'step by step' analysis of what the problem actually is. It is also necessary to define the level of control.

A useful device for ascertaining this level is the TOP principle: *is the problem...*

Totally within my control

Outside of my control

Partially within my control

If the problem is totally outside of your control, then there is absolutely no point in attempting to solve it, we have to re-focus our energies on to things that we can an effect over

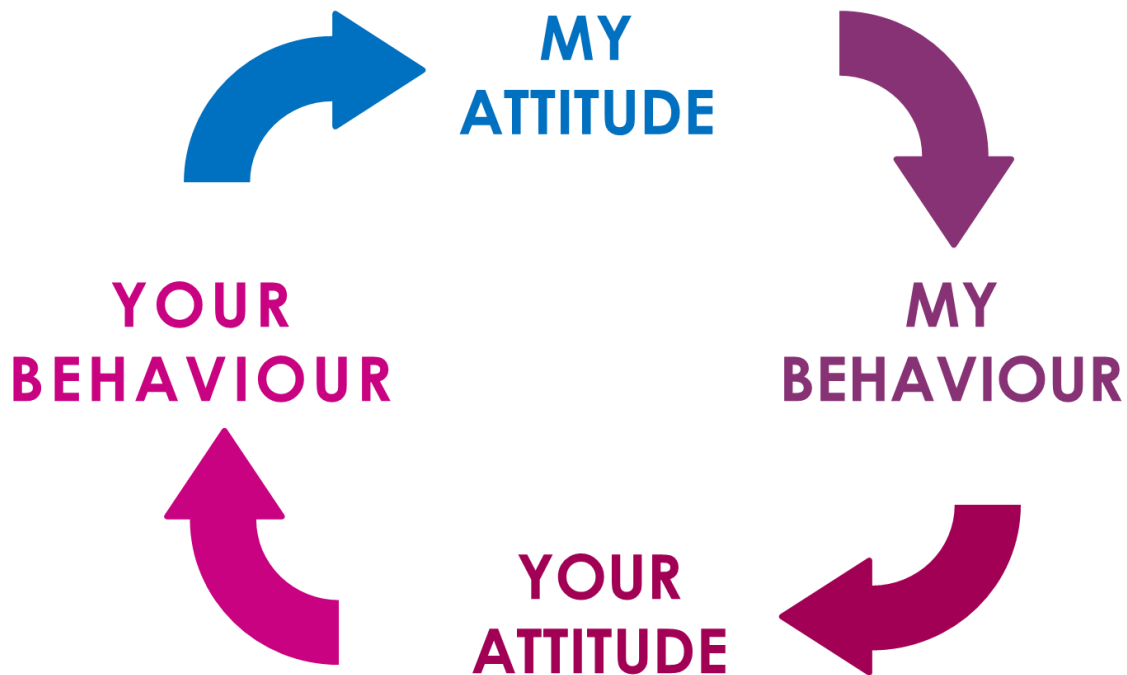
How would you classify each of your 3 worries? Circle the respective letter.

1. T O P

2. T O P

3. T O P

BETARI'S BOX



Our stress levels may increase due to the behaviour of the people around us but also by the way we react to them. The following module draws on the Betari's Box concept to raise awareness of how people's behaviours and attitudes are directly linked to each other, and how we can reduce interpersonal conflict and stress.

ATTITUDE AFFECTS BEHAVIOUR

Our attitude becomes visual through our external behaviour. This may be apparent in the signals we send to others, such as smiles, tone of voice and use of particular words. It has an effect on how we act towards other people. The reverse is also true. The attitude of others has an effect on their own behaviour.

BEHAVIOUR AFFECTS OTHERS' ATTITUDES

If a person is aggressive towards you, you will interpret this in a certain way, which will in turn affect your own attitude. And again, the reverse is true. Your behaviour affects the attitudes of those around you as they interpret, rightly or wrongly, what you do. This creates a circle. The way you act affects someone else's attitude. Their attitude affects their behaviour, which has an effect on your own attitude that affects your behaviour, and the cycle continues.

BETARI'S BOX

TIPS TO BREAK A CYCLE OF NEGATIVITY

Sometimes you can find yourself stuck in a cycle of being irritable, which makes you defensive and more irritable. Once you recognise this, see if you can press the "reset button" and be pleasant to others.

Remember that whether your attitude is good or bad, it affects everyone you come into contact with.

You can only control your own actions, so if a colleague is stuck in a negative cycle, then remember that you have a choice in how you respond. Just because that person is negative to you doesn't mean that you have to respond in a negative way.

Practice empathy. Empathy can also get you out of a negative cycle once you're in it.

If someone around you is persistently aggressive and rude, explore the reasons for their negative behaviour. If they are familiar with the Betari's box, you could use this as a starting point for the discussion.

Stop what you're doing as soon as you realise you're in a negative mood. Take a few minutes to assess why you're feeling so negative. Negativity often begins with an insignificant event such as getting stuck in traffic and can escalate from there. Break out of the cycle by focusing on something positive.

TIME MANAGEMENT & PRIORITISATION

Time management is a stress management technique. If you fail to master your time, you get overwhelmed, you get stressed and your energy levels, productivity and efficiency diminish.

Good time management is essential if you are to handle a heavy workload without excessive stress. By using time management skills effectively, you can reduce work stress by being more in control of your time, and by being more productive. This ensures that you have time to relax outside work. This skill can also be used outside of work e.g. scheduling doctors appointments or sporting activities.

PRIORITISATION GRID

How many priorities do you have? Five? Ten? Too many to even count? The definition of a priority is the most urgent and important thing to be done, everything else comes after...in order of urgency and importance!

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	<p>1</p> <p>DO</p> <p>The most urgent and important task. <u>Must</u> be done now, other things have to stop or can't progress until this is actioned.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>DIARISE</p> <p>As important as Box 1, but without the time pressure or risk factors. We can predict them and they can be scheduled.</p>
NOT IMPORTANT	<p>3</p> <p>DELEGATE</p> <p>Appears to be urgent but is actually not important. Ask yourself: <u>Why</u> am I doing this now? Why am I doing this <u>now</u>? Why am <u>I</u> doing this now?</p>	<p>4</p> <p>DELETE</p> <p>The distractions, the time robbers, the trivia. Things you don't need to be involved with, especially when under time pressure, that stop you from being effective.</p>

TIME MANAGEMENT & PRIORITISATION

PRIORITISATION GRID

Use the prioritisation grid to sort your tasks in order of importance and urgency. Ideally, you should be spending most of your time working on things in box 2! Ask yourself: **WHY AM I DOING THIS NOW?**

Write down, in no particular order, 3 situations/worries that you often think about or are currently challenged with, use the grid to prioritise them.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	1	2
NOT IMPORTANT	3	4

PRODUCTIVITY CYCLE

When we start on a new task it takes a little introduction time to get into a zone of focus, we can then maintain that for a period of time, and eventually we get tired and lose attention. This is true if we are dedicated to just one task, however most of us start working on an activity and then get distracted by emails, phone calls and demands.

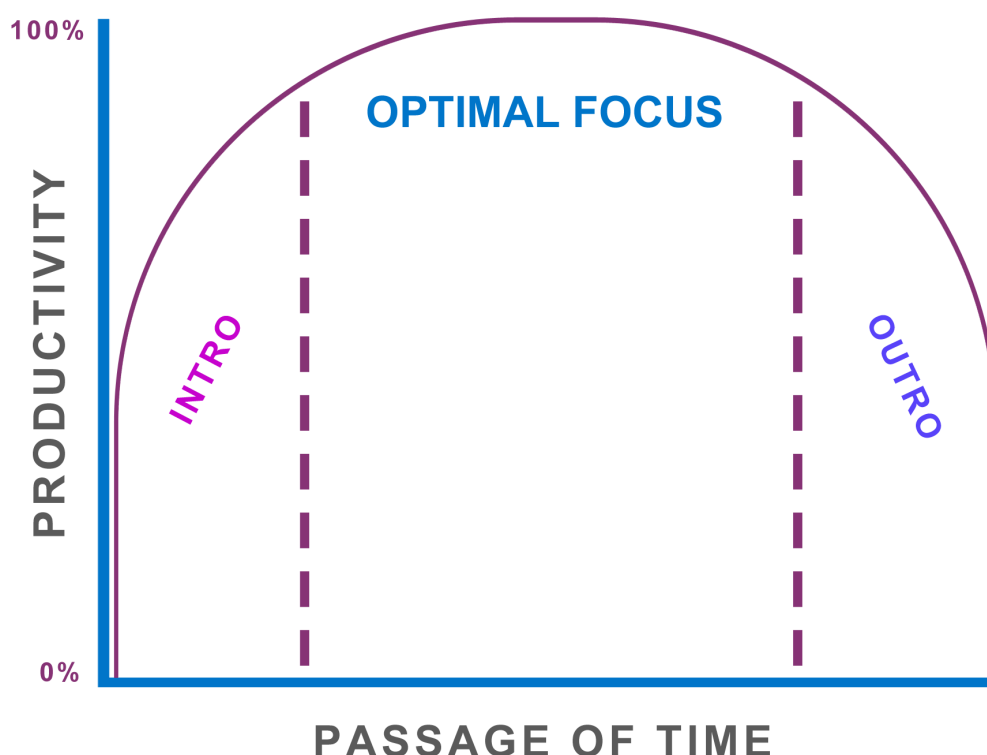
Bob Proctor, a productivity expert from the USA, believes this decreases your efficiency by over 400%! Being distracted and jumping from task to task prevents us from giving any activity our full attention resulting in more time and energy spent to produce the same or a lower the quality of work.

There are many schools of thought on the length of the productivity cycle: The Pomodoro Technique® suggests 25 minutes, Tony Schwartz says 90 and then break. Dr. Rossi recommends interspersing your work with 20 minute breaks over the course of the day instead of a traditional lunch break time in the middle of the day.

Whatever the technique, the important part is to break and reset.

Challenge yourself to work up to a 60min productivity cycle without distractions and see how much more focussed and rested you are!

Remember: you're not a robot, it's not cheating, they're resets!



MINIMISING DISTRACTIONS

WHAT ARE YOUR TIME AND ENERGY ROBBERS?		
DISTRACTOR	HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH IT NOW?	WHAT COULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

EXAMPLES TO GET YOU STARTED:

EMAILS

TURN OFF POP UPS, CLOSE YOUR EMAILS WHEN YOU NEED TO FOCUS AND AGREE THIS WITH MANAGERS AND TEAM MEMBERS. SET A TIME TO REVIEW THEM, THIS WILL FREE YOU TO TACKLE OTHER IMPORTANT DUTIES.

COMMUNICATE ON YOUR EMAIL SIGNATURE YOUR WORKING HOURS AND AVAILABILITY

PHONE CALLS

USE VOICEMAIL OR PLACE YOURSELF ON DO NOT DISTURB ON TEAMS/JABBER/OUTLOOK AND SET ASIDE TIMES TO RETURN MISSED CALLS. YOU CAN SEE WHO HAS CALLED OR MESSAGED YOU ONCE YOU HAVE FINISHED

MEETINGS

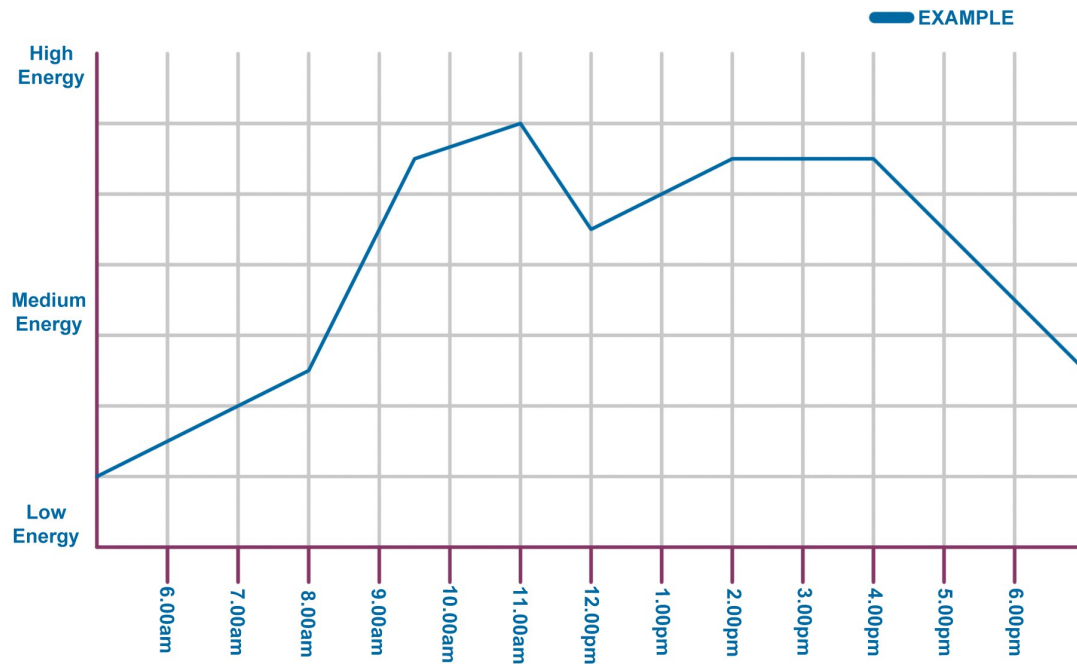
USE REAL-TIME MEETING LENGTHS NOT DEFAULT SETTINGS AND A TIMED AGENDA, ESPECIALLY FOR LONGER MEETINGS OR WHERE THE CHAIR PERSON IS LESS EFFECTIVE

INTERRUPTIONS

USE A 'DO NOT DISTURB' VISUAL FOR IMPORTANT/URGENT TASKS. IF YOU NEED TO BE FOCUSED, SET YOUR STATUS TO ACTUALLY MEAN WHAT YOU ARE DOING... AND REALLY MEAN IT!

ENERGY MANAGEMENT

It is more efficient to arrange your workload to match your energy levels. E.g. if you know that you have an energy boost in the mornings, use that time for high energy or creative tasks, then use your lower energy times for general admin tasks such as checking emails.



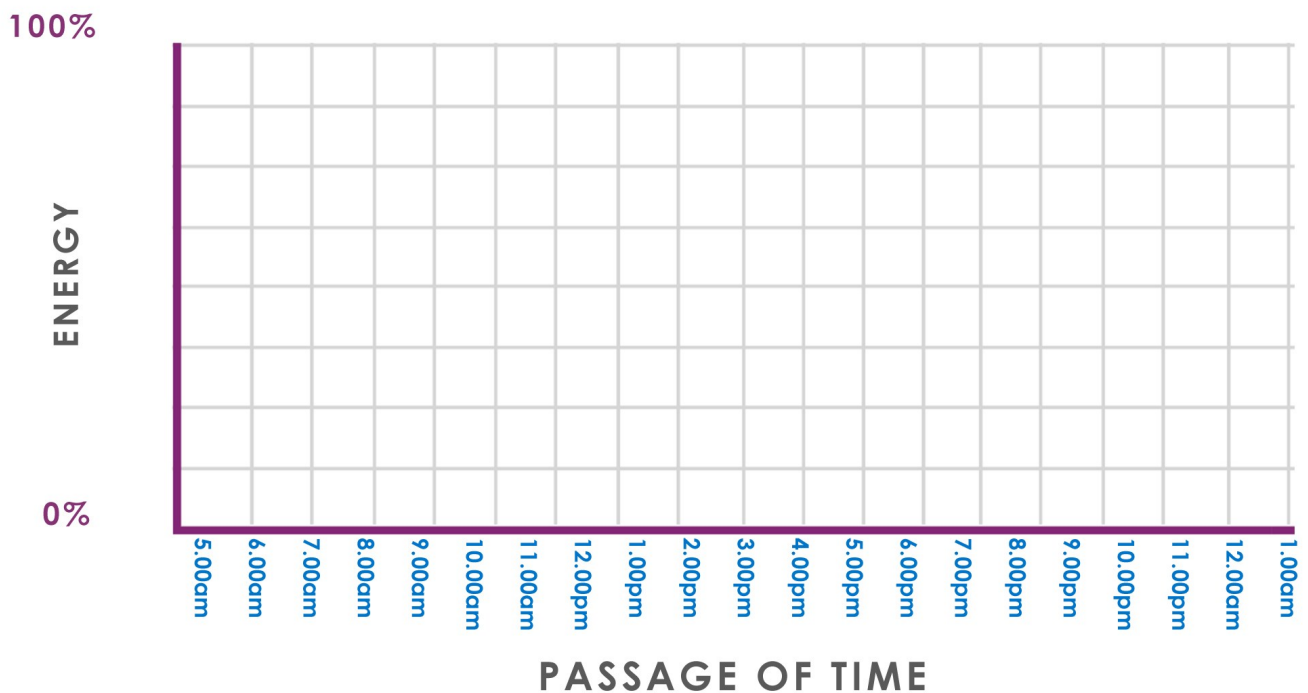
- WHEN ARE YOU MOST PRODUCTIVE?
- WHEN IS YOUR TEAM MOST PRODUCTIVE?
- ARE YOU A MORNING OR AN AFTERNOON PERSON?
- WHAT IS THE FIRST THING YOU IN THE MORNING?
- HOW DO YOU FEEL IN THE AFTERNOON?
- ARE YOU SAVING UP OR DELAYING TASKS TO WHEN YOU HAVE THE LEAST AMOUNT OF CONCENTRATION AND HEADSPACE?
- IS THIS THE BEST USE OF YOUR TIME, FOCUS AND ENERGY?



ENERGY MANAGEMENT

Use the chart plot your own energy cycle: does this match when you schedule your work?

Could you use the chart to plot for a different time period: a week, a month, a quarter or even a year?



YOUR TEAM

- COULD YOU ASK YOUR TEAM TO PLOT THEIR ENERGY CYCLES?
- WHY NOT SUPERIMPOSE THEM OVER EACH OTHER?
- WHEN IS YOUR TEAM MOST PRODUCTIVE?
- ARE THEY MOSTLY MORNING OR AFTERNOON PEOPLE?
- ARE THERE PEAK TIMES?
- HOW DO THEY FEEL IN THE AFTERNOON?
- COULD WE EXTRAPOLATE TO LONGER TIME PERIODS?
- ARE WE SELF-SABOTAGING BY SCHEDULING HIGH ENERGY WORK IN LOW ENERGY TIMES?
- IS THIS THE BEST USE OF THEIR TIME, FOCUS AND ENERGY?

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

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

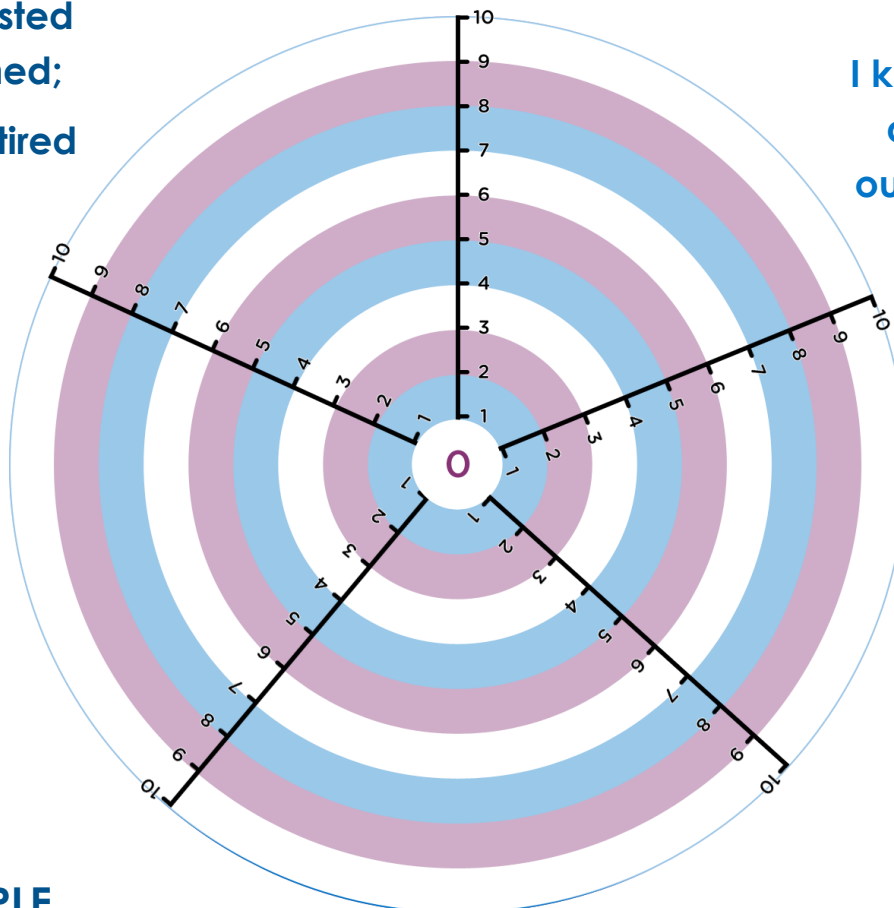
sharp

OUTDOORS & EXERCISE

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

SLEEP

I am fully rested
and refreshed;
I rarely feel tired



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



FOOD, WATER AND MOVEMENT

OUR BODIES ARE BIOLOGICAL MACHINES THAT THRIVE ON BEING TREATED WELL WITH CONSISTENCY. WE OFTEN TREAT A PET BETTER THAN WE TREAT OURSELVES. WE WOULDN'T DEHYDRATE, STARVE OR ISOLATE A CAT OR A DOG, YET WE CAN OFTEN FIND OURSELVES THIRSTY, EATING POOR QUALITY FOOD AND LIVING A MUNDANE AND SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE.

ASSESS THE QUALITY OF YOUR FOOD, WATER AND MOVEMENT	Y	N
DO YOU HAVE A HEALTHY BALANCED DIET?	Y	N
DO YOU EAT BREAKFAST?	Y	N
DO YOU STOP TO EAT THREE REGULAR MEALS A DAY?	Y	N
DO YOU AT LEAST EAT FIVE PORTIONS OF FRUIT & VEGETABLES PER DAY?	Y	N
DO YOU EAT RED MEAT LESS THAN TWICE PER WEEK?	Y	N
DO YOU EAT TAKEAWAY FOOD LESS THAN ONCE PER WEEK?	Y	N
DO YOU EAT FRESHLY-PREPARED MEALS MORE THAN READY MEALS?	Y	N
DO YOU STOP TO EAT LUNCH AWAY FROM WORK OR INTERRUPTIONS?	Y	N
DO YOU <u>NEVER</u> FEEL THIRSTY?	Y	N
DO YOU DRINK MORE THAN 2 LITRES OF WATER A DAY?	Y	N
DO YOU HAVE A WATER BOTTLE THAT YOU HAVE WITH YOU?	Y	N
DO YOU DRINK LESS THAN THREE CUPS OF CAFFEINATED LIQUID PER DAY?	Y	N
DO YOU DRINK LESS THAN 1 UNIT OF ALCOHOL PER DAY?	Y	N
IS YOUR URINE A VERY PALE OR CLEAR COLOUR?	Y	N
DO YOU GET OUTSIDE FOR AT LEAST 45 MINUTES A DAY?	Y	N
DO YOU GET YOUR 10,000 STEPS PER DAY?	Y	N
DO YOU EXERCISE TO THE POINT OF PERSPIRATION AT LEAST THREE TIMES PER WEEK?	Y	N
DO YOU DO SOMETHING FOR FUN, JUST FOR YOU, AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK?	Y	N
DO YOU CHECK-IN WITH PEOPLE WHO MAKE YOU FEEL GOOD AT LEAST 3 TIMES A WEEK?	Y	N
TOTAL		

SLEEP

SLEEP IS THE ROCKSTAR OF WELLNESS YET IS MASSIVELY UNDERRATED. WE OFTEN DEPRIORITISE SLEEP DUE PROFESSIONAL AND/OR PERSONAL PRESSURES WHICH THEN HAS A DOMINO EFFECT ON OUR PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING.

THIS SURVEY WILL ASK YOU A SERIES OF QUESTIONS TO UNPACK SOME OF THE BEHAVIOURS THAT CAN OFTEN LEAD TO POOR SLEEP PATTERNS.

ASSESS YOUR SLEEP HYGIENE	AGREE	DISAGREE
I KEEP A CONSISTENT BEDTIME AT LEAST FOUR TIMES A WEEK	Y	N
I RELAX BEFORE MY BEDTIME	Y	N
I SPEND THE LAST 45-60 MINUTES OF MY DAY FREE FROM WATCHING TV, BEING ON THE PHONE OR USING A SCREEN	Y	N
THE BEDROOM IS CLEAR OF TV'S, PC'S AND MOBILES	Y	N
THE BEDROOM IS DARK	Y	N
I HAVE A PROCESS I FOLLOW TO WIND-DOWN BEFORE BED	Y	N
I CAN RECOGNISE WHEN I AM BOTHERED BY SOMETHING; I AM ABLE TO PROCESS THE DAY AND END THE THOUGHT-LOOPS	Y	N
I HAVE A QUIET AND CALM MIND WHILE TRYING TO FALL ASLEEP	Y	N
I FIND IT EASY TO GET TO SLEEP AND STAY ASLEEP	Y	N
I CAN FALL BACK TO SLEEP EASILY IF I WAKE UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT	Y	N
I GET AN AVERAGE OF 7-8 HOURS OF SLEEP AT LEAST FOUR TIMES A WEEK	Y	N
I DREAM OFTEN	Y	N
THERE ARE DAYS WHEN I CAN WAKE UP NATURALLY WITHOUT AN ALARM AND IT WON'T CAUSE PANIC OR DISRUPT MY DAY	Y	N
I HAVE A CONSISTENT WAKE-UP TIME (WITHIN 60 MINUTES), EVEN ON THE WEEKENDS	Y	N
MY SLEEP IS RESTFUL; I WAKE UP FEELING REFRESHED AT LEAST FOUR TIMES A WEEK	Y	N
TOTAL		

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. Carry a reusable water bottle with you throughout the day, and sip on it regularly. [source](#)
2. Set a goal for how much water you want to drink each day, and track your progress with a water tracking app or journal. [source](#)
3. Infuse your water with flavour by adding slices of fruit, vegetables, or herbs. [source](#)
4. Drink a glass of water first thing in the morning to kick-start your hydration for the day. [source](#)
5. Sip on water before, during, and after exercise to stay hydrated. [source](#)
6. Drink water instead of sugary drinks, such as soda or sports drinks, to reduce your calorie intake. [source](#)
7. Choose water instead of alcoholic beverages when you're out at a social event. [source](#)
8. Keep a glass or bottle of water on your desk or in your workspace to remind you to drink throughout the day. [source](#)
9. Drink a glass of water before each meal to help you feel fuller and eat less. [source](#)
10. Choose sparkling water or club soda as a hydrating and low-calorie alternative to soda. [source](#)
11. Drink water with a slice of lemon or lime to add flavor and increase your vitamin C intake. [source](#)
12. Take a water bottle with you when you travel, and fill it up at water fountains or restaurants. [source](#)
13. Drink water when you feel hungry between meals, as thirst can often be mistaken for hunger. [source](#)

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. Set a goal for how much physical activity you want to achieve each day, and track your progress with a fitness tracker or journal. [source](#)
2. Incorporate more movement into your daily routine, such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator or parking farther away from your destination. [source](#)
3. Try a new form of exercise, such as yoga, Pilates, or dancing. This can help keep your workouts interesting and challenge your body in new ways. [source](#)
4. Incorporate strength training exercises into your routine to improve your muscle tone and balance. [source](#)
5. Take frequent breaks from sitting or standing in the same position for long periods of time, and move around to stretch and increase blood flow. [source](#)
6. Walk or bike instead of driving when possible. This is a great way to increase your daily activity level and reduce your carbon footprint. [source](#)
7. Practice good posture throughout the day to improve your alignment and reduce strain on your muscles and joints. [source](#)
8. Stretch regularly to improve your flexibility and prevent injury. [source](#)
9. Take a fitness class, such as aerobics, Zumba, or kickboxing, to keep your workouts fun and challenging. [source](#)
10. Use resistance bands or weights to add resistance to your workouts and improve your strength. [source](#)
11. Get outside and enjoy nature, whether it's hiking, biking, or gardening. This is a great way to stay active and appreciate the beauty of the outdoors. [source](#)
12. Take a dance class, such as ballroom or salsa, to improve your coordination, balance, and agility. [source](#)
13. Use a stability ball instead of a chair at your desk to improve your posture and engage your core muscles. [source](#)

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. Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables every day. Aim for at least 5 servings per day. [source](#)
2. Choose whole grain foods over refined grains. Whole grains are high in fibre, vitamins, and minerals. [source](#)
3. Limit your intake of processed foods. Processed foods are often high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats. [source](#)
4. Choose lean sources of protein, such as chicken, fish, beans, and legumes. [source](#)
5. Incorporate healthy fats into your diet, such as olive oil, avocado, nuts, and seeds. [source](#)
6. Include sources of omega-3 fatty acids in your diet, such as fatty fish and flaxseed. [source](#)
7. Use herbs and spices to add flavour to your meals instead of salt. [source](#)
8. Choose whole, fresh foods over processed foods whenever possible. [source](#)
9. Plan your meals in advance to ensure that you have healthy options available. [source](#)
10. Eat slowly and mindfully, paying attention to your hunger and fullness cues. [source](#)
11. Try to eat meals at regular intervals throughout the day to maintain stable blood sugar levels. [source](#)
12. Limit your intake of high-calorie, low-nutrient foods, such as candy and potato chips. [source](#)
13. Consider using a food scale or measuring cups to help with portion control. [source](#)
14. Snack on healthy options, such as fresh fruit, vegetables with hummus, or nuts. [source](#)
15. Limit your intake of high-sugar foods, such as desserts and sweetened cereals. [source](#)

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. **Join a local group that shares your interests to meet new people and bond over shared passions. [source](#)**
2. **Volunteer for a cause you care about, it feels good to give back. [source](#)**
3. **Attend local events, such as festivals, concerts, and fairs. [source](#)**
4. **Take a class or workshop in something that interests you [source](#)**
5. **Reach out to old friends that you've lost touch with. You might be surprised at how quickly you can rekindle your relationship. [source](#)**
6. **Host a themed dinner party or potluck with friends or neighbours. This is a fun way to socialise and bond over good food. [source](#)**
7. **Use social media to stay in touch with friends and family who live far away. While it's no substitute for in-person interactions, it can help you maintain connections with those who are important to you. [source](#)**
8. **Attend a networking or professional organisation event to meet new people in your field. Expand your professional network and potentially advance your career. [source](#)**
9. **Join a sports league or fitness group to meet people who enjoy the same physical activities as you. [source](#)**
10. **Take a class or course, such as cooking or language lessons, to meet new people and learn new skills. [source](#)**
11. **Participate in online forums or related to your interests. This can help you connect with like-minded people and engage in stimulating conversations. [source](#)**
12. **Host a game night or movie night with friends or family. This is a fun and low-pressure way to socialise and spend time together. [source](#)**
13. **Attend a book club or literary event to connect with other book lovers. This is a great way to discuss your favourite books and authors while meeting new people. [source](#)**
14. **Participate in a hobby group or club, such as a photography club or knitting group. This is a great way to meet people who share your interests and bond over a common hobby. [source](#)**

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. **Stick to a consistent sleep schedule, going to bed and waking up at the same time each day. This helps regulate your body's internal clock and improve the quality of your sleep. [source](#)**
2. **Create a relaxing bedtime routine to signal to your body that it's time to sleep. This might include reading, taking a warm bath, or listening to calming music. [source](#)**
3. **Avoid caffeine and alcohol close to bedtime, as they can interfere with your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. [source](#)**
4. **Exercise regularly, but avoid strenuous activity close to bedtime, as it can increase alertness and make it harder to fall asleep. [source](#)**
5. **Create a comfortable sleep environment, with a supportive mattress, comfortable pillows, and cool, dark, and quiet surroundings. [source](#)**
6. **Avoid using screens an hour before bedtime. [source](#)**
7. **Practice relaxation techniques to promote a wind-down before bedtime. [source](#)**
8. **Avoid large meals close to bedtime [source](#)**
9. **Use blackout curtains or an eye mask to block out light and promote darkness, which helps regulate your body's natural sleep-wake cycle. [source](#)**
10. **Keep your bedroom cool, between 15-19C or 60-67F, to promote sleep. [source](#)**
11. **Avoid napping more than 20 minutes during the day, it can interfere with your ability to fall asleep at night. [source](#)**
12. **Avoid watching TV or using electronic devices in bed, as it can interfere with your ability to fall asleep and negatively affect sleep quality. [source](#)**
13. **Use white noise to mask external sounds and promote a better sleep environment. [source](#)**
14. **Avoid consuming large amounts of fluids close to bedtime, as it can cause frequent awakenings to use the bathroom. [source](#)**

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

SUPPORT RESOURCES

HUB OF HOPE

Mental health database bringing your local and national mental health services together in one place at www.hubofhope.co.uk

SAMARITANS

The Samaritans 24-hour service.

Call: 116 123

Email: jo@samaritans.org

C.A.L.M: CAMPAIGN AGAINST LIVING MISERABLY

Free and confidential helpline and webchat – 5.00pm-midnight, 7 days a week

Call: 0800 58 58 58

Webchat: www.thecalmzone.net/help/get-help/

Take personal responsibility to get
the individual support you need

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...



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 an organisation 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 SMBC, Garrett, Dragados, DHL, and the NHS—guiding them through the wellbeing solution maze.

For more information or to book a workshop or a coaching session see www.wellbeing.work or call 0203 142 8650 or email info@stress.org.uk

If you want to promote wellbeing in your company using branded stress management products, go to www.stress.org.uk.





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:

