



Stress response worksheet
Provided by Dr. Marie Gerhard-Herman

Unpleasant Things

Happen

Millions of years ago our ancestors would escape unpleasant things on the savannah and survive because of their flight, fight or freeze response.

The response has been called the stress response.

We are hard wired for fight, flight or freeze in the face of unpleasant things.

Each time there is a fight, flight or freeze response, chemicals in the body change. Stimulants (adrenalin, cortisol) immediately go up and sex steroids go down. After the response is over, things go back to baseline.

If unpleasant things are present all the time; these chemicals don't decrease to baseline.

The stimulants can cause havoc in the body if they stay up, contributing to the smoldering fire of inflammation and many diseases.

And of course, sometimes you **do** have to fight, fly or freeze to survive.

What can you do ?

We cannot make all unpleasant things go away, but **we can change the reflex response to them in a way that decreases damage to our bodies.**



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STRESS WILL AFFECT YOUR HEALING

There is stress for everybody.

The goal is to change your response to stress, so that stress results in less ill effect.

1. The goal should be to be BETTER and not focused on perfect. Start slow.

2. Recognize stress.

Stress is the body's response to *anything*. There is so much stress every day that people stop recognizing it. (Attached are signs of stress). Adrenaline goes up, sex steroids go down with each stress response.

Stress response has been described as fight (freeze) or flight response: Your body redirects resources by shutting down digestion and selective vasoconstriction of arteries. You can see rapid breathing, high heart rate, dry mouth and shakiness.

3. Change your breathing at the instant you feel stress. Belly breath is a simple way to improve stress response. It is a new way of breathing for many. You breathe in deeply and your abdomen expands like a balloon, then you blow it all out. **Practice** with your hand on your belly. "BreathingApp" is free for smart phones.

E.g. In for 4 seconds, hold, out for 6 seconds.

Doing 4 of these at least 4 times a day is a good way to start.

4. Positivity is more beneficial than negativity.

Automatic negative thoughts are ingrained in many people, and are not helpful. The first task is to RECOGNIZE negative thoughts. (Attached) The second task is to develop a positive response.

5. It is what you do every day that counts. Exercise is a key component.

Exercise is essential to wellbeing and begins with walking 20 minutes a day. Arm cycling or other options can be used. Drink plenty of water and eat vegetable(s) daily.

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Source: Benson Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine

Pick two to start. Recognize them and immediately do two deep breaths.

Examples of STRESS WARNING SIGNALS
<p>PHYSICAL</p> <p>Cold fingers Blotchy skin Headaches Indigestion Stomach aches Sweaty palms Tiredness Back pain Tight neck/ shoulders Racing heart Restlessness</p>
<p>COGNITIVE</p> <p>Trouble thinking clearly Forgetfulness Lack of creativity Memory loss Loss of sense of humor Inability to make decisions Racing thoughts Negative thinking Ruminations Fixating on something</p>
<p>EMOTIONAL</p> <p>Overwhelming sense of pressure Nervousness Anxiety Boredom- no meaning in things Edginess Intolerant Feeling powerless to change things Easily upset Anger Loneliness Sad Emptiness</p>
<p>BEHAVIORAL</p> <p>Decreased exercise Overuse of alcohol Teeth grinding Skipping meals Crying Hair twisting Overeating Jumpiness Loss of sleep Difficulty getting things done</p>



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RELATIONAL

Resentment Judgement Clamming up Burrowing Avoiding
Lack of intimacy Distrust Less contact with friends Using people

Read this once a day for one week.

Try to identify these frequent stress signals in yourself.

After one week, try to respond to the signal with 2 deep, slow breaths.



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Identifying **Negative Automatic Thoughts**

Thoughts are shaped by underlying expectations and beliefs. They can be positive or negative, helpful or unhelpful. ***Automatic thoughts arise when we feel threatened, often without us even being aware of them.***

Negative automatic thoughts are linked with negative moods and feeling, this makes it difficult to distinguish between thoughts as rational (useful) thoughts and irrational (ineffective coping and unhelpful behaviors).

Example: You lose your job. Negative automatic thoughts "I will never find another job" "I'm a loser" "My life is ruined"

These negative thoughts are distorted and will likely lead to unhelpful behaviors like staying at home or not talking to anyone about the situation, which creates even more negative emotions.

Thought Distortions

All or nothing: Black and white thinking that perceives events at an extreme.

Language reflecting this may include **always** and **never**.

E.g. You are in the slowest line at the supermarket and say "I always pick the slowest line."

Mental filter: Focus on one negative detail and not the whole. This can darken perception of reality like a drop of ink into a beaker of water.

E.g. You are having a happy reunion until someone recalls an insignificant mistake that you once made, and that ruins the evening for you.

Mind reading: Thinking that another person thinks negative of you without sufficient evidence or considering other possibilities.

E.g. A colleague disagrees with you at a meeting and you think, "He thinks I do not know what I am talking about"

Fortune telling: Predicting a negative future without enough information. This habit of thinking contributes to anxiety and against a favorable outcome.

Magnification/ minimization: Magnifying the significance of trait beyond its significance in the whole.

Should statements: Having a rigid idea of how you and others should behave and an exaggerated idea of how bad it is if these expectations are not met.



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Personalization: Accepting more than your fair share of responsibility for a problem.

Comparison: Maladaptive when it leads to feelings of superiority and inferiority.



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Restructure distorted thoughts.
Problem solve what you can influence.
Accept what you cannot influence.

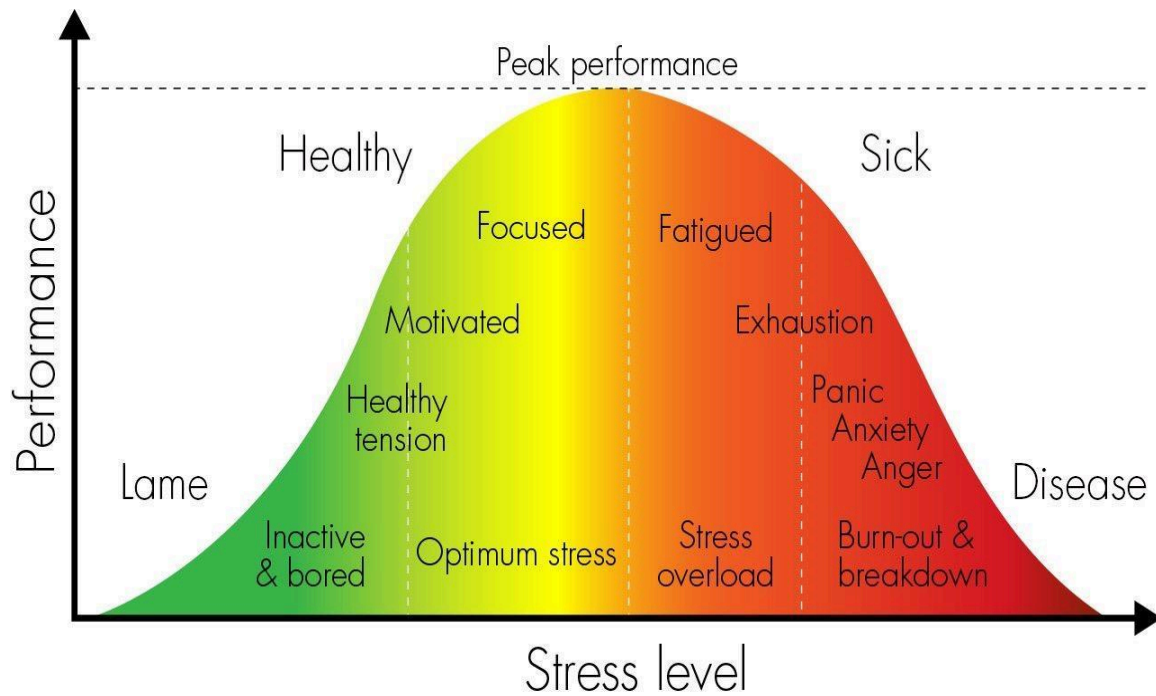
Examples of adaptive emotions/ perspectives:



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Acceptance	Joy
Accountability	Justice
Awareness	Kinship
Appreciation	Leadership
Awe	Love
Balance	Mastery
Beauty	Noble
Charity	Openness
Commitment	Patience
Clarity	Peace
Courage	Perseverance
Compassion	Positivity
Curiosity	Presence
Creativity	Power
Confidence	Purity
Determination	Purpose
Devotion	Responsibility
Discipline	Reverence
Dignity	Sacrifice
Ease	Serenity
Enthusiasm	Service
Faith	Spontaneity
Fearlessness	Stability
Fidelity	Stillness
Flexibility	Strength
Forgiveness	Surrender
Friendship	Tolerance
Freedom fulfillment	Transformation
Generosity	Trust
Grace	Truth
Gratitude	Vigilance
Growth	Vulnerability
Harmony	Will
Honor humility	Willingness
Individuality	Vitality
Inspiration	Worthiness
Integrity	Wisdom
Intuition	

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