

Personal Well-being

Workbook

Stress Management Techniques

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About this handout: This handout is a Workbook, which we will work through during the course. You will also receive details of a relaxation techniques download, which you can use after the workshop.

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If you would like to receive a copy of the powerpoint presentation which accompanies this training course (by e-mail), then please send your request to: training@in-equilibrium.co.uk quoting the course title and date.

Introduction

Stress is a concept that means different things to different people. Why is this?

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has defined work-related stress as:

"The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work."

This definition suggests that stress has an objective component; that there is a point for all of us when we will suffer from stress, and that point is reached when pressures or other types of demand become excessive. This clearly indicates then that excessive pressure represents a high risk.

It is also true that stress is not just an external pressure such as meeting a deadline, it's whether or not you believe that you can cope with a situation that you personally perceive as important or threatening.

In our workshops we ask people to give examples of stressful situations at work. We usually get examples such as making presentations, heavy workload, difficult customers etc...

We then demonstrate the individuality of stress by asking if everyone finds these situations stressful. The response is always that some people don't find them stressful, in fact frequently some people say they actually **like** these situations.

We also make the distinction between **event stress** and **chronic stress**.

Event stress is the negative reaction we have to one-off situations and events that reduces our performance and can upset us emotionally. If however the event stress becomes more frequent or we constantly feel that we cannot cope, we can start to suffer from **chronic stress**. Unlike event stress which we usually recover from after a short period of time, chronic stress can stay with us for days or weeks on end. It is the physical and psychological effects of chronic stress that eventually makes us ill.

So how do we know when we are at risk of suffering the unhealthy effects of stress? Let's return to our working definition:

"The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work."

The definition suggests that stress has an objective component; that there is a point for all of us when we will suffer from stress, and that point is reached

when pressures or demands become excessive. This clearly indicates then that excessive pressure represents a high risk.

Note that pressure itself is not necessarily bad. With the right amount of pressure we can feel challenged, stretched, and this is when we perform at our best. Some people refer to this as 'positive' stress. This may be because we often use the words 'pressure' and 'stress' interchangeably. Here, just to be absolutely clear, we use the word 'stress' to mean a negative reaction to too many pressures or demands. A major consultation exercise on stress at work carried out by the HSE found that the vast majority of professionals, employers, and trade unionists thought the use of the term 'positive stress' was confusing and unhelpful. The HSE now only use 'stress' in the negative sense

The HSE approach focuses attention on the antecedents of work related stress in the design and management of work, but recognises that interventions at the individual level have a part to play. Accordingly when looking at stress at the individual level it must be recognised that our experience of stress may depend upon our perceptions about the situation we are in, whether we believe we can cope. Logically then, it follows that, if we can reduce pressure and influence perceptions in the right way the risk will be reduced.

What follows is a selection of tools and techniques designed to help you to reduce your personal risk to stress. However because stress is so dependant on personal perception it will inevitably involve an element of trial and error before you discover what works best for you.

Tool 1: What is well-being?

What does 'well-being' mean to you? Is it one thing or a combination of things? What do you think are the factors that influence your well-being, particularly your mental well-being? What gives you a sense of well-being?

Please take some time to think about these questions, and write down what comes to mind before proceeding.

What is well-being?

Lessons from Positive Psychology

Research from the field of Positive Psychology suggests that the feelings of mental well-being associated with good work-life balance come from a range of factors. For example where:

- You feel in control of your life (**C**ontrol)
- You feel healthy and well (**W**ell-being)
- You get enjoyment from your life (**E**njoyment)
- You have a sense of gratitude and thankfulness (**G**ratitude)
- Work provides something other than money (**V**ocation)
- You know what's important and you prioritise time for those things (**I**important?)
- You feel connected, not isolated (**C**onnection)
- You feel good about yourself (**S**elf-esteem)

This gives us the following mnemonic to help you remember the factors:

Can Work Ever Give Value If Children Suffer?

Personal Well-being and Work-life Balance Inventory and Wheel

Personal Well-being and Work-life Balance Inventory

Please think about and answer the following questions by putting a score between 1 and 5 in the right hand side box. Please be completely honest - this is a self-assessment.

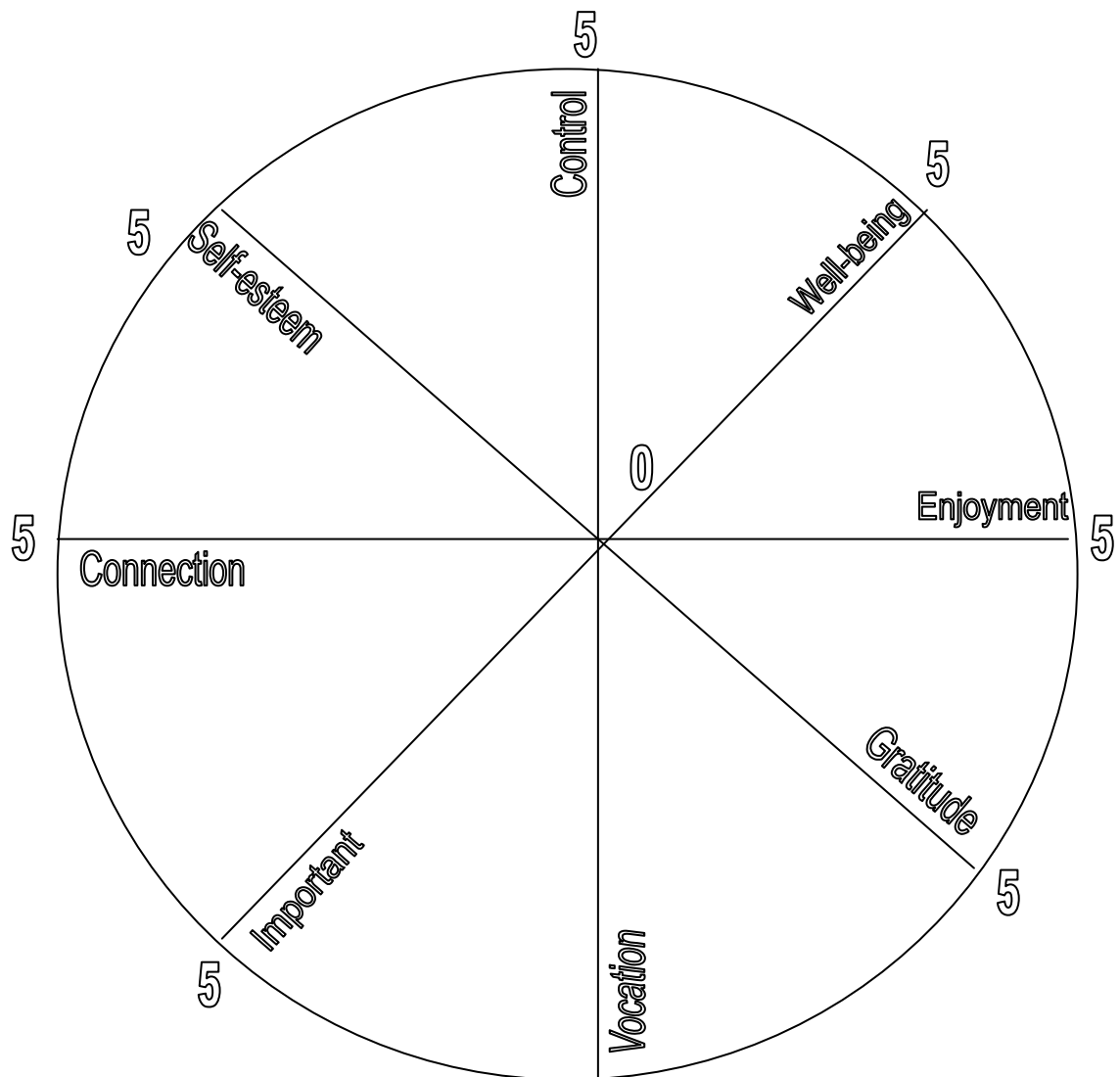
Personal Well-being and Work-life Balance Wheel

On the page after the inventory you will find the Personal Well-being and Work-life balance Wheel. Please put a cross on the line to reflect your score from the inventory and then join up the crosses, so that you can see your results in diagrammatical form.

Personal Well-being Inventory

Mental well-being factor	Score
Control To what extent do you feel in control of your life? Give yourself a mark out of 5; from 1 (not in control at all) to 5 (totally in control of my life).	
Well-being Generally, how 'well' do you feel? Give yourself a mark out of 5; from 1 (unwell, totally exhausted and stressed) to 5 (really well, feel great, bags of energy, a sense of total well-being).	
Enjoyment How much enjoyment do you get from your life? Give yourself a mark out of 5; from 1 (no enjoyment at all) to 5 (total enjoyment – my life is a 'hoot').	
Gratitude How grateful and thankful do you feel about your life? Give yourself a mark out of 5; from 1 (no sense of gratitude or thankfulness, always wish I had something better, never satisfied) to 5 (great sense of gratitude and thankfulness; feel 'blessed', lucky; very happy with my life and what I've got, don't want for anything).	
Vocation To what extent does work provide you with things other than money? Give yourself a mark out of 5; from 1 (really hate work, wish I wasn't there; get nothing out of it other than money; no satisfaction; just causes me grief and stress) to 5 (totally love what I do; gives me a real sense of purpose and vocation; the money is irrelevant; I would choose to do this job).	
Important To what extent have you thought about what's really important to you and allocated time for those things? Give yourself a mark out of 5; from 1 (haven't thought about it; haven't made time to think; haven't set aside time) to 5 (know exactly what's important for me and always prioritise time to important things).	
Connection How <u>connected</u> do you feel? Give yourself a mark out of 5; from 1 (disconnected, isolated, lonely, totally 'on my own') to 5 (totally connected e.g. to self, family, friends colleagues, community, nature, heritage, ideas etc.).	
Self-esteem How good do you feel about yourself? Give yourself a mark out of 5; from 1 (feel really bad about myself, worthless, hate the way I look) to 5 (feel really great about myself, value self highly, happy with the way I look).	

Personal Well-being and Work-Life Balance Wheel



Action Planning to boost mental well-being

How did you get on with the inventory and wheel? Which areas did you score well/badly on? Which areas need attention? Where will improvements make the biggest difference to your life?

What do you need to work on? What are the priority areas for you?

What actions are you prepared to commit to in order to make improvements?
What can you do now and/or in the longer-term?

Who could help? Where could you get support?

The 'PIC' Formula

An important principle of this course is that it is best to focus on the things that will reduce or minimise the risk of stress-related illness. The formula we are using to help us do this is very important, even more important than the tools and techniques themselves, as you can apply the formula in a general sense to your life, including your life at work. After the course, think carefully about all the ways in which you can apply the formula.

The formula is:

PIC → R

- **P stands for Pressure(s).** Your risk will be reduced if you can address or tackle your sources of pressure, the things that can cause your stress.
- **I stands for Individual.** You can reduce your risk if you can change your perspective, or how you see the situation you are in.
- **C stands for Coping.** You can minimise the risk to you by developing good coping skills. Coping skills do not take away sources of pressure, but can help you cope with or manage that pressure better.
- **R stands for Risk.** The aim is to minimise the risk to your health and wellbeing. We can never really eliminate the risk of stress. Some situations and life events are inherently stressful. Especially when, like buses, many things come along at once, a stress reaction isn't surprising. But we can do a number of things that will minimise the risk. We will be focussing on **P** things, **I** things, and **C** things as research shows that these are the most important things in reducing the risk.

We will all have a different PIC formula. Different approaches will work for different people. Don't feel you have to adopt all the tools and techniques in order to manage stress better. Try things out and find out what works for you, and very importantly, what you enjoy.

Some techniques will impact on more than one area. For example, talking things through with someone provides social support which can help you cope, but can also provide a different perspective on your situation, helping you see things in a different way. Some approaches then can have a double or even triple benefit.

‘P’ Approaches

P approaches involve identifying, assessing and tackling the sources of pressure in your life.

The key thing here is to be honest with yourself and to give yourself time to take a good hard, somewhat detached look at your life and things that are causing you stress. Sometimes it can help to talk things through with someone you trust, a good friend, or someone with specialist skills in this area like a Counsellor or Psychotherapist.

P could also stand for Prevention because you are addressing the things that may be causing you stress at source.

The first tool you are about to use also faces a key stress-related issue head-on, that of control. Research shows that our sense of control strongly influences our stress risk. When we feel that we have some influence over events, what Psychologists call an internal locus of control, our risk is reduced. But when we feel that we are being completely influenced by external forces and events, an ‘external locus’, this is much more stressful and increases our risk.

Evidence also shows that the worst recipe for stress is when very high pressures or demands are combined with a very low sense of control, especially when that combination is chronic or continuous over a period of time. When this recipe occurs, we can become progressively more run down. Our immune system then becomes depressed leaving us more at risk from all kinds of illnesses.

Of course, there are always going to be sources of pressure we cannot control, and it is important to clearly identify what we have some control over and what we haven’t, and concentrate our efforts on what we can control. Much stress can come from trying to control things that we can never control. Part of this exercise is about identifying those things, accepting them and moving on, letting them go in other words, so that you can focus your resources where they will be most effective.

P approaches can be the toughest to implement in your life, because it requires some courage to face up to and deal with what’s causing our stress. Having said this, investment in this area can make a big difference to your life as it doesn’t matter so much how good or bad your coping skills are if you can really tackle things at source.

Although, we are briefly trying out tool 1 on the course today, it really requires some quality time away from the training course setting, when you can think about the issues involved.

Tool 2: Taking 'Control' of Your Life

Tool 2 contains a number of elements that can reduce stress risk:

- Reflection
- Analysis
- Acceptance
- Prioritising
- Planning
- Action

Once you have a chance to really use this tool away from this course, give some serious thought to how you could apply these elements more generally in your life.

To use this tool, follow the instructions below:

1. Take a blank piece of paper. Reflect for a few minutes on all of the 'sources of pressure' in your life. Think about your whole life: home, work, relationships, environment and so on. Refer to the 'Sources of Pressure' sheet to help you develop your own list.
2. Now use your 'My control Inventory' sheet. Place each item in your 'sources of pressure' list into one of the two columns. That is, for each item decide quickly whether this is something you have 'some control' over or 'no control' over.
3. Once you have your two lists, challenge the list items on the right. Do you really have no control over these things? Are there some, when you really think about them, where you do have some control? If so, move them into the left column.
4. Now, accept that you cannot control the things remaining on the right. 'Release' them, let them go. Stop trying to influence what you cannot control. Stop knocking your head against a brick wall.
5. Concentrate your efforts on the list on the left. Go through the list and prioritise them. Which of these things are the most important in terms of your stress levels right now?
6. Take the 'Things I can control – Actions to Reduce Stress' table. Select the five most important items in order of importance from the left hand column of your 'Control Inventory' and write them into the left hand column of the 'Things I can control – Actions to Reduce Stress' table.
7. Start with the most important thing and do some action planning. What is the most important thing you could do now that would reduce your stress

associated with that thing? Then think about what you can do in the near future, and then the medium future and so on. This is basic planning. Don't be over-ambitious; concentrate most on what you can actually do in the short, medium and long term.

8. Once you have completed this exercise, how do you feel?
9. It is vitally important that you follow through and put these actions into effect. Again, be realistic. Don't try to do everything at once but focus on the most important things first, even if that is only one thing. Make a commitment to yourself to do that thing or things. If you see that through, you will get a real sense of achievement. If, on the other hand, you are too ambitious, and don't see it through, you will be disappointed and feel as if you have let yourself down. This will only add to your stress.
10. This kind of action planning is a wonderful stress management habit. If you can do this habitually you will have progressively more and better feelings of control over the things that really matter in your life.

Sources of Pressure

We have many sources of pressure in our lives, all of which have the potential to cause stress. Think about and list all of the sources of pressure in your life. Below are listed some categories to help you develop your own list. These categories are designed to get you thinking and generating your own list. There may well be sources of pressure that you have that don't come into any of the categories. Try to be as specific as you can. Once you have completed your list place them into your 'my control inventory' table, dividing them between things you have some control over and things you have no control over.

- ☐ **Change.** What changes are you dealing with in your life?
- ☐ **Major life events** in the recent past, present or near future.
- ☐ **Commuting** to and from work. Does this cause you problems?
- ☐ **Decision making.** Are you facing any difficult decisions at present?
- ☐ **Health.** Have you any concerns about your health or others' health?
- ☐ **Emotions.** Are you angry, frustrated, upset, or worried about anything?
- ☐ **Environments.** Does your home or working environment cause any problems?
- ☐ **Money.** Do you have any money issues outstanding?
- ☐ **Family.** How are things with your family; any particular issues?
- ☐ **Relationships.** How are your most important relationships?
- ☐ **Communication.** Are you having any difficulties in communication with important others?
- ☐ **Organisation and Planning.** Are things in order and well planned or are they disorganised and shambolic? Is your life cluttered?
- ☐ **Phobias.** Do you have any irrational fears?
- ☐ **Social.** How is your 'social' life? Are you getting enough support? Are you seeing enough of the people you enjoy being with?
- ☐ **Work.** How are things at work? What sources of pressure are you facing?
- ☐ **Spiritual.** Do you have any difficulties with regard to spiritual concerns?

My Control Inventory

Things I have (some) control over	Things I have no control over

Things I can control – Actions to Reduce Stress

Most important thing in terms of my stress level	Actions I can take now and in the future to reduce the stress associated with that thing.

Tool 3: Time Management

It may be stating the obvious, but if we can manage our time effectively, this can prevent stress. Our definition of stress pointed out that stress is a reaction to excessive pressure or demands. Time management/prioritisation can help in two ways: by getting the important stuff done, and by dropping the stuff that isn't important.

Stephen Covey suggests that what we need to do is to consider what is **urgent** and what is **important**.

Urgent things are those that we feel we need to do immediately. They appear to require attention 'now'. For example if we are about to leave for an important appointment but the phone rings, we can feel under pressure to answer that phone. Of course, the phone call may be trivial, and is probably much less important than getting to that meeting on time! With urgent things, there's a pressure to react. They tend to be 'in your face' things, 'obvious' things. Sometimes those things seem difficult to put off or ignore.

Important things are those that are meaningful in terms of what you are trying to achieve. They are more based upon results. They can be less obvious, less visible, although important things can also be urgent.

With two basic variables, there are four possibilities

1. Urgent and important
2. Important but not urgent
3. Urgent but not important
4. Neither important nor urgent

From a stress prevention point of view, the key thing is to plan, to be proactive. This requires an investment of time and effort. What causes the stress is where we are always reactive, and feel at the mercy of events. In psychology we talk about 'locus of control'. People with an internal locus see themselves as influencing events, whereas those with an external locus feel that external pressures are influencing them. By working out systematically, proactively what is urgent and what is important, we can build a more internal locus.

Naturally, we will always give a priority to what is both urgent and important. But what many of us are bad at is neglecting the things that are not urgent but are important. If we don't plan and reflect on what's important, the risk of always reacting to events increases, as does the stress risk. You can use the tool on the following tool to help you.

Tool 3: Time management priorities matrix

1. Important and urgent	2. Important and not urgent
3. Urgent but not important	4. Not important and not urgent

Tool 4: Assertiveness

What is assertiveness?

The word assertiveness is used to describe a certain pattern of behaviour or a style of communicating with others. It is a way of behaving which means we are communicating our feelings, thoughts and beliefs in an open, honest manner, without violating the rights of other people. It is an alternative to being aggressive or manipulative, where we abuse other people's rights, or to being passive, where we abuse our own rights. These four different ways of expressing ourselves can be seen as a matrix as follows:

ASSERTIVE Not threatened by conflict Expresses demands and requests clearly and calmly Negotiates with others	AGGRESSIVE Hostile Rage – destructive anger Irritable – suppressed anger Abusive (physically, verbally, emotionally)
PASSIVE Withdraws from conflict Gives in to others' demands Allows others to walk all over them ('doormat') Self-pity/resentment	MANIPULATIVE Makes others feel guilty Uses victim status or illness to get their way Makes comparisons

Comparing the four types of behaving/communicating, it is clear that being assertive is the most effective. Being assertive means we are able to ask for what we want from others; it means we can say no to the requests of others; it means we can express a range and depth of emotion, such as love, liking and anger, without feeling self conscious or becoming aggressive; and it means we can express personal opinions without becoming defensive. Very few people manage to be assertive all the time in all areas of their lives. Some people swing from being passive and not getting what they want to being aggressive because of the resulting build-up of frustration. It is undoubtedly true that we could all benefit from being more assertive in some areas of our lives

Why are we unassertive?

We act in an unassertive manner because we have learned through our experiences to behave that way. This learning process can be traced back to our early childhood. Small babies have no fear of expressing themselves and communicating their needs. They cry and smile openly; there is no inhibition or beating about the bush. But very

quickly children learn to adapt their behaviour to the kind of responses they receive from those around them. Children's behaviour is subtly shaped by the models they are exposed to and by the encouragement, or lack of it, received from parents, family, friends and school.

Some children are encouraged and rewarded for expressing themselves openly and honestly and are quite comfortable expressing a range of emotions. Others may be encouraged to express their thoughts but find it more difficult to express emotions. We have all learned to be the way we are; therefore we can learn to behave differently.

The effects of being unassertive

The long term effect of being unassertive is a growing loss of self esteem. This term refers to our own evaluation of ourselves in respect to how competent, significant and likeable we see ourselves as people. The more we act in an unassertive way, the weaker is our positive sense of identity: the sense of 'This is me, this is how I feel and how I think'. This can result in a lack of sense of purpose, or a feeling that we are not in control of our lives, which in turn leads to negative feelings and symptoms of stress.

If we are failing to express ourselves openly and we are concealing our feelings and thoughts, this can lead to internal tension, also resulting in physical and mental symptoms of stress and potentially leading to aggression. Inherent in unassertive behaviour is poor communication, which leads to the development of unhealthy uncomfortable relationships. Communicating effectively in relationships is the best possible insulator against symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression.

Why be more assertive?

By being more assertive we can improve our sense of identity, our confidence and our self-esteem. A snowball effect is created: the more confident we feel, the more assertive we are and so on. By stating more clearly what our needs are, we increase the chances that these needs will be met.

Being assertive leads to a saving in energy and a reduction in tension. We are no longer preoccupied with avoiding upsetting others, and no longer overly concerned with making gains in an aggressive way. People who are generally assertive are confident people who are simply happy to be themselves.

SIX ASSERTIVENESS SKILLS

1. BEING SPECIFIC

This skill is about being clear yourself about what exactly you want to communicate and then making sure that you communicate it clearly to others.

In order to be specific, it is important to be clear about your own needs and priorities. Then you can decide what it is you want or feel, and are in a good position to say so specifically or directly. You also need to be clear that you have rights – you have the right to ask for what you want or need.

When you are clear about what you want and that you have the right to ask for it, you are in a position to communicate that specifically to others. Avoid unnecessary padding and keep your statement simple and brief.

2. REPETITION (broken record technique)

This skill involves preparing what you are going to say and repeating it exactly as often as necessary, in a calm relaxed manner. It helps you to stick to your statement or request without being distracted. Using this technique, you can relax because you know what you are going to say and you can maintain a steady comment, avoiding irrelevant logic or argumentative bait.

3. THE THREE PART SENTENCE

This skill is a way of making sure communications are two-way. Showing that you have listened to someone is likely to help get them to listen to you. The three parts of the sentence are as follows:

1. show that you have understood what the other person has said (listen and reflect)
2. communicate your side of the story
3. state what you want.

4. HANDLING CRITICISM

There are various ways of handling criticism assertively, without getting defensive or aggressive:

Negative assertion: This skill involves calmly agreeing with someone else's true criticism of your negative qualities and accepting that you have faults e.g. "Your desk is a complete and utter tip. You are very disorganised" " Yes its true I'm not very tidy" The key issue in negative assertion is, of course, self confidence and a belief that you have the ability to change yourself if you so wish and not feeling that you have to be

perfect. By agreeing with and accepting criticism, if it is appropriate, you need not feel totally demolished.

Negative enquiry: This skill involves actively exploring criticism of your behaviour, to ascertain whether the criticism is constructive, or to expose it as manipulative and hurtful. For example, “You’ll find that difficult won’t you, because you are so shy?” You reply, “In what ways do you think I am shy?” If the criticism is constructive, that information can be used constructively and the general channel of communication will be improved.

5. SAYING “NO”

This skill is about saying “no” to unreasonable demands. When someone makes a request, it may be necessary to take a few seconds before responding. Give yourself time to work out whether the request is reasonable or unreasonable. If you are clear that it is unreasonable, be specific and clear about why you are saying no.

Saying “no” or disagreeing with someone may give rise to negative emotions – fear, anger etc. The key is to recognise and accept your emotions, but don’t let them control your behaviour. Focus on the outcome you want to achieve.

6. WORKABLE COMPROMISE

This is a skill for when there is a conflict between your needs or wishes, and those of someone else. Assertiveness is not about winning, so you need to negotiate from an equal position. This means finding a true compromise which takes both parties needs into consideration. Compromising on a solution to a difficult situation need not compromise your self-respect.

Practice Exercises for Assertion

The following is a list of behaviour assignments or homework exercises, which will prove useful in increasing your level of assertiveness and confidence in communicating with others. Choose an assignment that would be moderately difficult and set a deadline to do it.

If you haven't done it by that time, either assume it was too difficult and choose another task, or alternatively, introduce a reward or incentive for doing it by another specified time.

1. Say "Good morning" to somebody whom you do not usually speak to.
2. Stop two people in the street and ask for directions
3. Go into an expensive shop, try on a number of articles of clothing, but buy nothing.
4. Go into a shop and ask if they will give you change for a five pound note.
5. Pay a compliment to a waitress, shop assistant or fellow worker.
6. Buy something from a shop and then deliberately return it, saying, "I've changed my mind".
7. Make a point of telling a friend a joke or funny story.
8. Ask somebody you know " How are you today?" and deliberately take an interest; try to draw them out and find how they are feeling.
9. Make a point of telling somebody how you are feeling and what you have been doing lately.
10. Ask somebody for a favour in a direct and specific way.

'I' Approaches

I (Individual) Approaches involve **changing your perspective** or seeing things in a different way.

If we see a situation as 'threatening' (and that 'threat' is more often psychological than physical in our modern world), we are likely to have a stress reaction. Logically then, if we can change our perspective or see things in a different way, the stress risk is reduced.

You have probably come across people who have completely changed their perspective on life. Sometimes this has been a response to a major 'life-changing' event, for example a serious illness or a near-death experience.

After such an event, the person sees the world in a fundamentally different way, has the insight that the things they previously saw as irritating and stressful were really not that important in the overall scheme of things. It is as if their 'world view' has changed completely. They have decided to concentrate their energies on what's really important rather than what had previously caused them stress.

Can all of us do this though? Absolutely, yes! Do we have to go through a life changing, traumatic experience? Definitely not!

There is a link here with what we have already worked on, the issue of control. We cannot influence certain things, for example what other people say or do, but we can control our response. **We have a choice.** We can choose the way we think about our lives and the things that cause us stress.

This can be a difficult concept to grasp. But when people do grasp it, it is like a light switching on in their head, and they are never quite the same again. This is not idealistic, it doesn't mean we won't ever again find things stressful. It simply means that we have more control over ourselves and the way we think than we did before.

The tools in this section will help you change your perspective. You will find that they may also help you in the **P** and **C** areas as well.

Tool 5: The 'Feelgood Factors' Exercise

As for tool 1, although we'll try this during the course, it will really pay dividends if you devote some quality time to it when you aren't disturbed or distracted.

This exercise involves a period of reflection and the production of a very important list.

Firstly, just take a few seconds to relax.

Now, what you need to do is take some time to think about all the things that make you feel good deep down. These are the things that, when you think about them give you a warm feeling inside, a feeling of joy, happiness, contentment, and/or love.

Please do not write down things because you feel they are things that should give you these feelings. This is not about 'should', but about what 'is'. Be honest with yourself, and don't worry about what other people might think of your list.

The best thing is just to ask yourself the question: "What sort of things really make me feel good?" and see what comes into your mind. It could be particular memories, events, places, people, relationships, activities, pictures, music, or animals/pets – it doesn't matter what the things are as long as they give you this 'feelgood' effect, these positive feelings deep down.

As you think about them write them down in a list. See the following page.

Tool 5: My 'feelgood factors'

(Use this page to write your list)

Just thinking about and producing this list is a good stress management exercise in itself. It makes you focus on the 'feelgood' things rather than the negative stressful things, which will of course reduce your stress. However, there are a number of other ways you can use your list. This list is a jumping off point for the following 3 well-being tools.

Tool 6: Work out what's important

You will probably have found that producing your 'feelgood factors' list has been a very thought provoking exercise. It can prompt you to ask yourself some big questions.

Having reflected on what causes you to feel really good deep down, how would you answer the following:

- What is really important in your life?
- What gives you joy?
- What is really not that important?
- Therefore, what should you give your attention and effort to and place more emphasis on, and what should you ignore and/or place less emphasis on?

These are 'perspective-changing' questions related to work-life balance. When we reflect on and ask them, suddenly some things that seemed important, aggravating, irritating, frustrating, or stressful, now don't seem worth getting stressed about.

Tool 7: Involve yourself in joy-giving activities

Your list may contain activities that give you joy. Many of us for any number of reasons stop doing things which give us joy, for example because 'we're too tired' or 'too busy', or sometimes simply because we just haven't really thought about them for a long time. It may seem obvious but doing things that are 'joy-giving' will reduce your stress risk.

Firstly, you will be happier and less stressed when you are doing these activities.

Secondly, joy-giving activities are distracting. They help you switch off from stressful thoughts. Being able to switch off like this aids your physical and mental recovery.

And thirdly, the more joy-giving activities we get into our lives, the healthier we become. We become more active and get fitter. This builds our self-esteem, reducing the risk of stress, anxiety and depression, not to mention the physical health benefits that come from being more active.

So if your list contains activities:

- Look at each activity.
- Ask yourself if you are really getting enough of that activity.
- Think about how you are going to get more of it into your life.
- Are there things that don't bring you joy, which you could let go of to give yourself more time for the things that do?
- Be concrete. What precisely must you do so that you can regularly indulge in that activity? Think about and plan what you can do now, next week, next month, next year.

These are important questions related to work-life balance. If you spend more time on what's really important (tool 6), and indulge in joy-giving activities (tool 7), your life will naturally take on a much better balance. Life will be more enjoyable and you will be happier and healthier as a consequence.

Tool 8: Thankfulness

Much stress and indeed depression comes from disappointment. We always seem to be striving for things or hoping for things, and if we don't achieve them or get them we are disappointed. It's quite a materialistic world we live in, and the media play a large part too in fuelling these desires. The trouble is, that even if we get the 'new toy' our increase in happiness is temporary. We quickly revert to our typical 'baseline' level of happiness. In positive psychology, this is called "habituation".

There is nothing inherently wrong in having goals, being ambitious and wanting things we haven't got, but stress can occur if our goals are unrealistic or unachievable, or if events conspire against us as they often do. If we are constantly striving, we aren't living in and enjoying the present moment.

The natural disappointment we feel in such circumstances increases the risk of depression, particularly if we are already under a lot of pressure.

Shift your focus

One way of changing your perspective is to shift your focus from what you haven't got to what you have. In the 'feelgood factors' exercise, you identified the things that gave you a good feeling deep down inside. That list is very important because it represents some of the good things in our life. Psychological research has shown that reflecting on and being thankful for the good things in your life (sometimes called gratitude or 'counting your blessings') is good for your mental health and well-being.

Thankfulness is a good positive mental health habit and investing some time to do this every week will pay dividends. You will begin to feel more positive and happier about your life, and it can positively influence your relationships with others. When we ask ourselves what is good about people, it becomes easier to tolerate their imperfections (we've all got them after all).

What are you thankful for?

Tool 9: Challenging Stressful Thoughts

As previously stated, it is not events themselves which necessarily cause stress but the way we perceive and react to them. Most people think that stress is something that happens to them. But how you approach life - your beliefs, your thoughts, and your attitude – can have a major effect on your long-term pressure/stress management.

Do you see a glass of water as half empty or half full?

Is your attitude automatically negative or hostile?

Personality traits which are prone to turning pressure into stress

The Perfectionist

- Do you feel constant pressure to achieve?
- Are you hard on yourself when you make a mistake?
- Do you always feel you haven't done enough?

The Control Freak

- Do you need to control everything and everyone?
- Are you a bad at delegating?
- Do you think lack of control is a sign of weakness?

The People Pleaser

- Do you need to have everyone like you?
- Do you care more for others than yourself?
- Do you hide your negative feelings so as not to displease others?

Lacking in Self-Esteem

- Do you feel that you have poor judgement?
- Do you feel like an impostor?
- Do you feel that you don't do as good a job as others?

Challenge your limiting beliefs

We all have limiting beliefs, which frustrate our progress and frequently result in stress. Many of these beliefs have implied “shalls” and “can’ts” such as

- I’m not as good as other people
- Life is a struggle
- Change is difficult

Limiting beliefs can cause stress when they make us collide head-on into other people. You may have a fight with your partner because they didn’t change the sheets every week: “Everyone changes the sheets every week,” you say. Where does this idea come from? “Everybody knows it. My mother taught me.”

In fact, this is not an immutable law. Believing there is an immutable law that “everyone” knows can cause stress until you acknowledge that it’s really just your preference

Challenge your limiting beliefs by:

- Articulating them
- Labelling them as beliefs and not as truths
- Admitting they are opinions which can be changed
- Admitting that beliefs held by others may be just as valid

Reframing

When experiencing stressful situations you lose the ability to see what you’re doing that can make things worse. Reframing is a technique which changes the way you look at things which can make you feel better about them. Remember that there are always many different ways of looking at any situation. The reality may not change, but there are different ways of perceiving that reality. This being so, you might as well pick the perception that’s going to cause you the least stress.

For example, let’s say you just lost your job. Can you find the upside to this?

- Maybe you hated it, but lacked the courage to leave. Now you have the opportunity to find something better.
- Its scary finding a new job, but we never grow when we’re not challenged. This could make you a stronger person.

Suppose a co-member of your team drives you mad by always acting superior. How could you reframe that behaviour?

- They are probably insecure.
- They may see you as a threat. By trying to put you down, they are hoping to rise above you.
- They may be having personal problems.

Distorted, Negative Thinking

Do you know any negative thinkers? Their thinking style is the opposite of optimism – it destroys confidence, interferes with their performance, and dampens their mental skills.

Examples of negative thinking

- “We’ve got a new contract, that’ll mean working late.”
- “I’ve got a new boss, I’d better watch my step.”
- “All these people are so successful. What am I doing here.”

Types of Negative Thinking

Thinking in black or white terms

You are either the best programmer in the world or the worst. You snapped at your son, so you’ve got to be the worst parent in the world. It’s all or nothing.

It’s not really so.

Instead realise that you can’t be defined by any single act, and one mistake doesn’t usually destroy an entire project.

Over generalising

Similar to black and white thinking, if you over generalise you see every mistake as part of a dark and twisted pattern of inevitable failure. Every time you fail you see it as evidence that you will never get it right.

Instead, evaluate each incident on its own merits, and force yourself to be objective.

Personalising

This is the favourite ploy of those who walk around attracting guilt like a magnet. The boss ignores you and you wonder what you’ve done wrong. Only to find out later she fell out with her husband that morning.

Instead, the right reaction is not to assume the worst without more obvious evidence. If you really have done something wrong you’ll hear about it soon enough.

Challenging Stressful Thoughts

Use the following table to challenge your limiting beliefs and thinking errors:

Step 1: Think of a situation or event in which you felt stressed and note it down.	
Step 2: Note down how you felt and how you behaved in that situation.	
Step 3: As you think about the stressful situation/event and re-experience the feelings you had, note down the thoughts you had.	
Step 4: Look at the thoughts you had and see what underlying beliefs led you to think that way. Challenge your thinking and beliefs. Are they: - logical? - realistic (supported by the evidence)? - helpful	
Step 5: Identify a more helpful belief and way of thinking about that event or situation and note it down.	

Tool 10: Acceptance

There may be some sources of pressure where you really cannot change anything, not even the way you think or feel about them. In these cases, rather than try to control or change the negative thoughts and emotions aroused, watch them pass through your mind and accept them, as follows:

- When you experience a stressful situation, recognise the negative feeling it arouses within you
- Break the negative feeling into individual thoughts and emotions
- Be willing to experience each thought and emotion as it passes through your mind – you don't have to like it, but you do have to be willing to experience it and not struggle with it
- Recognise that they are just thoughts and emotions – they are not you
- Recognise that you have a choice about how you respond – you can remain committed to your goals and priorities and not get sidelined by the negative thoughts and emotions aroused by particular situations.

In order to practice this process, look back at the sources of pressure you identified in Tool 1 that you could not control and choose a few for which none of the tools considered so far seem to help. With these sources of pressure, imagine you are in the situation and work through the stages above. Write below how this exercise makes you feel:

‘C’ Approaches

C Approaches help you cope better with the pressures you experience. Some of them, though they primarily improve your ability to cope, may also have the secondary effect of changing your perspective and tackling sources of pressure.

Tool 11: Social Support

Other people are very important to your ability to cope. Thousands of studies from the field of Social Psychology have repeatedly shown that social support is the #1 buffer against stress. The more pressure there is, the more important that support becomes.

We are social animals. Unfortunately, many people forget this, and the media can glorify individuality and self-reliance to the point that people feel that they **should** be able to cope. Yet we need other people and other people need us.

Generally the risk of isolation and loneliness has increased in recent times. These days, we don't tend to identify with our communities like we did or stay in the same communities, we don't stay with the same careers or companies like we used to, and even within our companies the pace of change has increased dramatically. In addition, we work very long hours, and spend increasing amounts of time commuting. All of these changes have contributed to reducing potential opportunities to build good social relationships, and both give and receive social support.

What can we do to make sure we get the social support we need?

Do an audit of your social life. Key questions you could ask yourself would be:

- What are the most important social relationships in my life?
- Are those relationships as good as they could be?
- What could I do to invest in those relationships?
- Do I need to develop some new relationships/friendships?
- If so, what actions do I need to take?

A key issue is that of **investment**. Investment in relationships is one of the most important things you can do to prevent and reduce stress, and boost your health and wellbeing in the long term. Social psychological research has shown unequivocally that the most powerful influence technique is reciprocity – that is, you have to give to get.

The personal development guru, Stephen Covey talks about the 'emotional bank account', the idea that with relationships you have to make deposits. If you keep making withdrawals, you will become 'overdrawn', and the risk of the relationship breaking down increases. Of course, just like the stock market, we have to bear in mind that investments can go up as well as down as anyone who has teenagers will testify! So we have to take a long-term view, and trust that most of the time our investments will pay off. Yes, some people will occasionally let us down, but in terms of stress risk, the biggest risk for our health and wellbeing comes from not making the investment.

Tool 12: Sleep

If you haven't done it already, become aware of your energy levels and performance on days after a bad night's sleep.

Good quality sleep: this means waking up refreshed with enough mental and physical stamina for the new day. This is essential for performing at your best, which helps you manage increasing workloads and have enough energy for a good work life balance. We all know the difference a really good night's sleep can make.

Do You have a sleep problem? an individual has a degree of sleep problem if they have difficulty getting to sleep, if they wake up during the night and have difficulty getting back to sleep, or wake up in the morning not feeling refreshed. Regularly sleeping though the alarm clock is not a good sign.

Chronic tiredness: a quarter of the working age population are said to be chronically tired, and doctors say more and more have TATT, Tired All The Time. The more consistently we can get good sleep the better. Think how much energy you have felt and how you have performed after a good night's sleep compared to a poor night's sleep.

More than a third of all adults in the UK have sleeping problems. If you think you are one of them then don't just accept it. There are many things you can do to improve the quality of your sleep, some of which are covered below:

- **Dealing with excess adrenaline**

Individuals who have difficulty switching off after work or before going to bed may have excess levels of unused adrenaline in their body. If this is not used up before sleep, it can prevent the brain waves slowing down enough to obtain the most restorative deep sleep. If you cannot switch off, take a brisk walk, or a work out in the gym.

- **Eat early to ensure good quality sleep**

Are you eating and drinking less than 2 hours before you go to bed? It can take food up to 2 hours to fully digest, so if you do eat late you risk indigestion

Drinking before you go to bed can also disturb your sleep, particularly if you drink coffee or tea as they act as a stimulant. However, some people do find that an evening drink such as chamomile tea can help them sleep later on. Alcohol will also affect your sleep quality. It may help you fall asleep but it will also dehydrate you, causing you to wake early with a dry mouth and throat.

- **Empty your mind**

Is your mind too active? Are you thinking about tomorrow's demands and challenges? If you are, try writing down all your plans for the following day before you go to bed to free your mind for sleep. This is a simple but very effective technique. Anxiety always reduces when we increase our perception of control. The act of writing things down also means we don't have to worry about forgetting to do them. It also unclutters your mind and slows it down. It is better to avoid having things around that may trigger thoughts which could keep you awake. For example, keep work-related items out of the bedroom.

- **Acquire relaxation skills**

Everyone knows that you can't 'force' yourself to go to sleep any more than you can 'force' yourself to remember things. A very pleasant way to drift off to sleep is to practice physical and mental relaxation, especially breathing relaxation combined if necessary with muscle relaxation.

This also works very well if you want to get to sleep. If you combine it with a visualisation of a peaceful scene it can be an enjoyable way of drifting off to sleep. Remember, relaxation and visualisation are acquired skills; so the more you practice them the easier they become.

- **Nightly rituals**

Nightly rituals, whatever they are, can also send a strong message to your unconscious that you are ready for sleep. Examples include listening to soothing music, having a bath or reading a novel.

The above is certainly not an exhaustive list, but the main message is that you find, through trial and error, what works for you. And remember, we all need different amounts of sleep, so don't worry if you are not sleeping as much as your partner. They may need more than you do.

Edinburgh has a sleep laboratory headed by Prof. C.J. Idzikowski and he has written a paperback with a CD, called Learn to Sleep Well Kit: A Practical Guide to Getting a Good Night's Rest. It was published in 2002 and is still available on Amazon.

Tool 13: Physical Exercise

There are many benefits to be gained from having some form of regular physical activity not least of which is a noticeable reduction in stress. Don't make the mistake of being put off by the belief that regular exercise has to be a chore you need self-discipline to maintain. To get real benefits you don't have to do that much, particularly if you do very little to start with.

We also find that an individual's motivation to exercise increases when they realise that the main benefits are not physical, but are in fact mental and emotional. When consultants are asked which individual stress management technique produces the best results, most will say that if they had to choose only one, it would be a regular exercise program.

So why is regular exercise so good for stress management? The main reasons are:

- Increases physical and mental energy
- Naturally lifts your mood
- Increases your self-esteem

These three ingredients make us more confident and positive about our ability to cope with demands and to rise to challenges, whereas one of the main causes of stress is a perception or belief that you can't cope.

Why is exercise so good for managing our stress?

- Improved blood flow to the brain brings extra oxygen and sugar which boosts your concentration and alertness.
- The faster blood flow through the brain carries away more toxic materials and waste products which slow you down
- Endorphin production increases improving mood and feelings of well-being

Remember, these benefits stay with you at all times, not just when you are exercising.

If you are not ready to join a fitness club here are a number of activities you can build into your daily routine:

- Revive an old aerobic activity you used to enjoy such as badminton, swimming or anything else you did before you became so busy

- Become a 'stair person' instead of using lifts all the time. You could start by going down the stairs and progress to going up
- Make yourself walk more by deliberately parking further away from your work or the shops. This usually reduces the stress of finding a parking space as well
- Instead of sitting down for a coffee break encourage a colleague to go for a walk with you
- Learn some basic stretching exercises and do them every morning as soon as you get up
- Join a dance club or get into the habit of doing your 'Madonna' routine in the living room
- Buy a bike or retrieve your old one from the garage

If you want a more regular approach think about exercising 3 times a week for 15 – 20 minutes. And forget the 'no pain, no gain' adage, unless you're into that kind of thing it simply isn't necessary.

Always remember that if you can't carry on a conversation with the person next to you when you are exercising, you are exercising too hard!

Tool 14: Diet & Nutrition

See <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/Healthyeating.aspx> for more ideas and suggestions.

Many people these days are very aware of what they eat and drink and the effect it has on their health and stress levels. This tool includes some simple facts about what we eat and drink and the effect this has on our energy levels and general wellbeing.

Everyone needs the 4 basic nutrients:

Water, Carbohydrates, Protein and Fats as well as vitamins, minerals and other micro-nutrients. By choosing the healthiest forms of each of these nutrients, and eating them in the proper balance, you enable your body to function at its optimum level.

Further information on the 4 basic nutrients and the choices you can make for a healthy diet can be found on our website here:

<http://www.in-equilibrium.co.uk/a-balanced-diet>

A Balanced diet

All meals should contain a healthy mix of protein, good fats and carbohydrates. All meals should contain a healthy mix of:

Fruit and Vegetables

Nutritional benefits: Vitamins, minerals and fibre

How much per day? At least 5 portions

There have been many experiments where fruit and vegetables are made available to people both in the workplace and in schools and colleges. The results always show that people will eat fruit and vegetables if they are available, the trouble is mostly they are not. Most vending machines are full of sweets, crisps and caffeine-loaded drinks. The experiments consistently show improvement in performance and attitude where fruit and vegetables are consumed more regularly.

Starchy Foods

Bread, rice, potatoes and pasta, choose wholegrain varieties where you can, eat potatoes with skin on for more fibre and vitamins

Nutritional benefits: Energy, fibre, vitamins and minerals

How much per day? A third of everything we eat

Meat, fish, eggs and beans

(Try to eat lean cuts of meat)

Nutritional benefits: Protein and vitamins and minerals

How much per day? Two to three portions (one portion is an egg or a serving of meat/fish the size of a pack of cards)

Milk and Dairy Foods

Nutritional benefits: Protein and calcium

How much per day? 2 to 3 portions (one portion is a small pot of yoghurt or glass of milk)

Food containing Fat and Sugar

Nutritional benefits: Energy

How much per day? One portion

Try to choose healthy fats (e.g. olive oil, avocados, nuts, seeds) and natural sugars (e.g. fruit).

In the UK most people eat and drink more calories than they need which is why many of us are overweight. We eat too much fat, sugar and salt and not enough fruit, vegetables and fibre. It is important to have some fat in the diet but it is not necessary to eat foods which are high in fat and sugar in the diet.

Try to base meals around starchy carbohydrates such as potatoes, bread or pasta. Include a different range of fruit and vegetables in your diet and try to have at least 2 portions with every meal. Include a moderate serving of food containing protein is also important. Then choose adequate calcium sources aiming for three portions of low-fat dairy or dairy alternatives daily.

No single food will provide all the nutrients we need. A good diet should include a wide range of foods from each of the different food groups.

Reasons not to skip breakfast

Studies have found that there are many benefits of eating breakfast:

- Helps people resist sugary snacks before lunch
- Skipping breakfast makes it harder to meet your nutritional needs as it is a good opportunity to have whole-grains, breads, cereals, fruits etc
- Gives you more energy and improves concentration
- Gives you more strength and endurance to engage in physical activity
- Lowers cholesterol levels

Avoid the 'sugar blues'

The 'sugar blues' is the term given to the roller-coaster effect we can experience if we regularly eat sweets; chocolate biscuits and sweetened hot and cold drinks; and refined starchy carbohydrates like bread and pasta. The consumption of high sugar content foods like these immediately spikes our blood-sugar levels and gives us a burst of energy. However the energy is short-lived as our bodies quickly sense that our blood sugar level is too high and automatically reduce it which makes us feel tired and lethargic. Too often our response is to boost our energy again by tucking into more chocolate and sweet drinks, and so the cycle continues....

Limit Sugar and Salt

It can be hard to keep track of the amount of sugar we consume each day. Large amounts of added sugar can be added in foods such as bread, canned soup and vegetables pasta sauces, frozen dinners, ready meals, soy sauce and ketchup

Avoid sugary drinks - try sparkling water

Eat naturally sweet food - fruit, peppers, etc. to satisfy a sweet tooth

Salt

Eating too much salt can cause high blood pressure and lead to other health problems. Try to limit salt to one teaspoon a day.

How much salt for adults?

Adults should eat no more than 6g of salt a day – that's around one full teaspoon. Children should eat less. One easy way to eat less salt is to stop adding salt to your food during cooking and at the dinner table. If you regularly add salt to food when cooking, try cutting it out or adding less. With time you will rediscover the real tastes of your favourite foods. When you sit down to eat, taste your food before adding salt.

Examples of high salt foods

Anchovies, bacon, cheese, gravy granules, ham, olives, pickles, prawns, salami, salted and dry roasted nuts, salt fish, smoked meat and fish, soy sauce, stock cubes, yeast extract

Tips to reduce salt intake

- Avoid processed pre-packaged foods
- Be careful eating out
- Opt for fresh/frozen vegetables
- Cut back on salty snacks
- Choose low salt or reduced sodium products
- Try slowly reducing the salt in your diet.

Caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant so it can temporarily make us feel more alert or less drowsy. Caffeine affects some people more than others, and the effect can depend on how much caffeine you normally consume. It's fine to drink tea and coffee as part of a balanced diet. But it's important that tea, coffee or other drinks containing caffeine are not your only source of fluid.

Pregnant women should limit their intake of tea or coffee due to their caffeine content. Neither tea nor coffee are suitable drinks for toddlers and young children. Caffeinated drinks can also make the body produce more urine. Some people are more susceptible to this than others, but it also depends on how much caffeine you have and how often you have it.

Key points to remember

- Eat lots of fruit and vegetables (at least 5 a day)
- Always have a healthy breakfast with some protein
- Base your meals on starchy foods
- Plan your protein consumption to precede performance periods
- Carbohydrates help you to relax
- Have fresh fruit and vegetables available, you will eat it
- If you eat fish try to have 2 portions of oily fish per week
- Cut down on saturated fat and sugar
- Eat less salt
- Don't let yourself get thirsty
- Avoid caffeine, especially after lunchtime
- Get active and be a healthy weight

Try small steps first

Give yourself time. Add an extra portion of fruit or a salad once a day, or switch from butter to olive oil when cooking. As your small changes become habit, you can continue to add more healthy choices to your diet.

Perfection isn't necessary and can put you off your long term goal

Every change you make to improve your diet matters. Don't put pressure on yourself to be perfect or eliminate foods you enjoy - the long term goal is to feel good, have more energy and reduce the risk of cancer and disease.

Give the above a go for 2 –3 weeks and notice the positive effects on your energy, health and stress levels.

Tool 15: Drinking enough water

Water makes up approximately 75% of the human body and it is thought that brain tissue consists of up to 85% water. Even the smallest reduction in our body's water concentration can have far reaching effects. Dehydration reduces energy and clarity of thought. Much of the stress we experience can be dealt with better if we regularly drink 3 –4 pints of good quality water every day.

Ten reasons for drinking water:

1. Water is an essential nutrient that is involved in every function of the body.
2. Drinking enough water enables your body to burn fat and calories more effectively. It also rids the body of toxins and waste, improves your metabolism and increases energy levels.
3. Water deprivation kills faster than a lack of any other nutrient. You should be drinking 6-8 glasses of good quality water daily.
4. Water must be continuously replaced because an average of 250ml is lost on a daily basis through breathing.
5. By the time thirst is experienced, your body is already in slight dehydration. Avoid this by drinking water regularly throughout the day. It is better to drink moderate amounts throughout the day rather than drinking a day's supply in one go!
6. Common symptoms of dehydration include; headaches, poor concentration, tiredness, increased risk of developing kidney infections, constipation.
7. If they can, professional sportsmen and women drink water regularly when competing. They know that even slight dehydration reduces clarity of thought and performance.
8. As the beauty experts know, water is nature's best moisturiser. By drinking sufficient water, you can moisturise your skin from the inside. Remember, to achieve the healthy glow that comes from being properly hydrated, drink up, because no moisturising cream can do the job alone.
9. Keep a jug of water beside your bed when you go to sleep, so that you actually have a glass if you wake up feeling thirsty, rather than just dreaming about it!
10. Remember coffee, juice and fizzy drinks do not count as a substitute for water. In fact they contribute to the build up of toxins and add to dehydration! Dehydration occurs because coffee, tea and alcoholic drinks are diuretics (they make you pee!) so your body loses water.

Tool 16: Breathing Exercises

Diaphragmatic or deep breathing is probably the most widely used stress management technique. Give it a try the next time you feel under pressure or are stuck in a tense situation. Maybe you have an irate customer on the phone who is being unreasonable and aggressive. You can feel yourself beginning to get angry and losing control. Try the following while listening: take several slow, deep breaths into the pit of your stomach, follow this with some normal breathing, then take several more deep breaths. Most people are surprised at how well this simple exercise calms them down and clarifies their thinking.

The following breathing exercises are covered in the Relaxation Techniques audio download which accompanies this course.

Diaphragmatic breathing

This is about learning to breathe slowly and deeply from the stomach rather than from the upper chest. A simple way to see this happen is to lie on your back with a book on your stomach. The book will move up and down if you are breathing from the stomach.

Paced breathing

We recommend that you perform ten paced breathing cycles 3 times a day. A breathing cycle is a breath in, holding your breath for a short period and then breathing out emptying the lungs.

As a discipline for increasing energy mentally and physically, increasing the oxygen saturation of the blood, increasing circulation of lymph and the removal of pollutants, it is a good idea to do paced breathing of ten cycles (1 cycle = in and out) 3 times a day.

There are 3 levels of breathing cycle you can use, each uses the ratio 1:4:2 in relation to the breath in: holding your breath: breathing out. You should start off by practicing 10 cycles 3 times a day at level 1 and progressing towards doing 10 cycles 3 times a day at level 3.

Level 1: Breathe in over 2 seconds, hold for 8 seconds, breathe out over 4 seconds.

Level 2: Breathe in over 3 seconds, hold for 12 seconds, breathe out over 6 seconds

Level 3: Breathe in over 4 seconds, hold for 16 seconds, breathe out over 8 seconds.

Walking and Breathing

Paced breathing can also be carried out when walking, using each left and right step as your count instead of using a second in time. For example, using the ratio of 1:4:2 you would breathe in while taking one step, hold the breath while taking four steps, and breathe out while taking two steps.

A more simple walking and breathing technique is to breathe in over eight steps and out over twelve steps or less. Many people find this technique to be very relaxing.

IMPORTANT: You should only do what you feel comfortable with, at no time should you strain yourself doing these exercises!

The Relaxation Techniques Audio Download

The following relaxation techniques, recorded by Dr David Mason Brown of In Equilibrium, are available on this website:

<http://www.in-equilibrium.co.uk/relaxation-techniques/>

Password DMB-15

Please e-mail us if you have any difficulty accessing the relaxation techniques: training@in-equilibrium.co.uk

Breathing - slowing & deepening the breathing to slow down brain waves (like a car going from high revs to idling).

Breathing & Relaxing the Muscles - muscles, especially neck, shoulders, back and limbs develop muscle tension as the day goes by.

Breathing for Energy (Paced Breathing) - this exercise uses the diaphragm to circulate the lymph fluid to remove the waste products produced by cells.

Breathing & Walking - allows you to relax when walking to and from car, an appointment, a shop, etc. and also increases awareness of the Present Moment and slows down the perception of time.

The Inner Voice – accessing your beliefs and inner strength.

The Tropical Island – a 20 minute deep relaxation exercise to help you to switch off after work.

The Forest with the Balloon - a relaxation and offloading technique.

Please note that all the above techniques to be successful have to be practised and practised until they become automatic.

Postscript

There are countless tools and techniques for managing stress and enhancing well-being. In this course we have barely scratched the surface. Don't think you have to do the same thing as someone else. You don't. Do your own thing. Be your own person. Most important of all, do what you enjoy. If you don't enjoy what you do, it is hardly likely to reduce your stress levels!

www.in-equilibrium.co.uk