
‘Talking Cures’

Stress at Work & Work Life Balance

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Talking Cures

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Aims of this presentation

Modern context of stress

Definition & understanding of stress

Impact of stress

Stress at work

Stress management skills



Stress

The 21st century plague

Overtones of: overload, burnout, not coping

Destroys minds, bodies and lives

Negative physical, psychological and social impact

What is Stress?

A normal, necessary and adaptive response to help us deal with the challenges of life and the environment.

An aid to survival

A way of managing change



***“If it is so good, then
what is the problem?”***

The Stress Story...

This is mainly because of where we started out from, and what stress was meant to do...

Man: hunter-gatherer, needing to survive in the primal plain, a harsh environment requiring a prompt response to overcome threats to life.

The stress response enabled us to:

Hunt for food

Find shelter

Keep warm

Escape predators



Fight or Flight



What are the Sources of Stress in Modern Life?

Physical and Psychological threats

Physical safety

Self-esteem

Security

Role and position in society

Relationships

Urbanisation; lack of space

**Increase in expectations
and aspirations**

**Different types of social
relationships**

Accelerated pace of change

**Increase in complexity &
information**

**More demands: emotional,
social & work related**



General Causes of Stress

Choice: too much

Perfectionism

Accelerated change

Globalisation

Media

Money

Materialism

Life-stressors : negative and positive

Poor lifestyle

Poor work-life balance



Have we learnt new ways of reacting to stress ?

NO!

The fight-flight response is activated because our hard-wiring and our bodies have not kept up with the ways in which we have changed our environments.



The good old fight-flight response is alive and activated

Have we learnt new ways of reacting to stress ?

BUT...

There is no fight and no flight i.e. no direct physical response possible or indicated in the face of the social demands and threats we are facing

AND

The stress response remains activated for prolonged periods of time



The costs of the stress response

Over-alertness – edgy, jumpy feelings

Over-arousal – confusion, exhaustion, anxiety and depression

Over stimulated immune system – depressed immune function, increased infections, susceptibility to auto-immune diseases

Muscular tension – muscular pains, backache, headaches, anxiety, fear

Stress related conditions

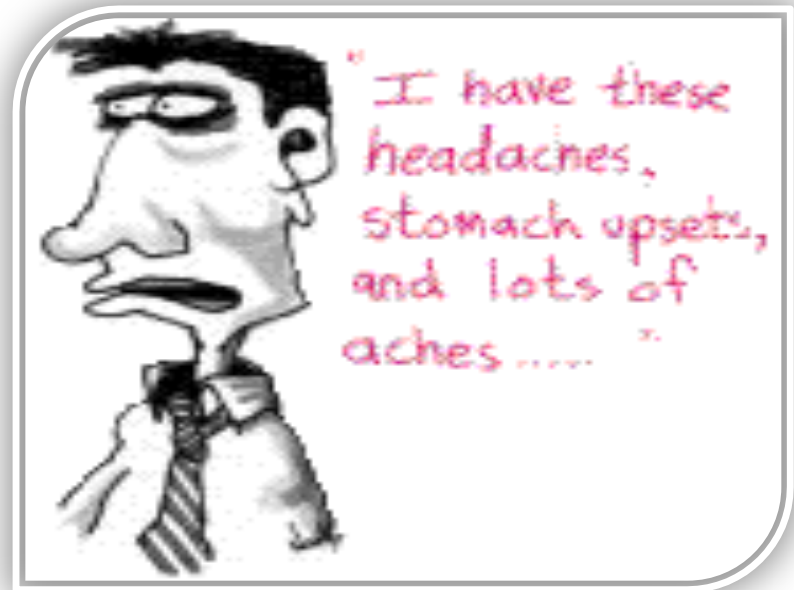
Cardiovascular system

Digestive system

Muscles, joints & skin

Infertility, sexual disorders

Other chronic conditions e.g. diabetes, asthma, rheumatoid arthritis



The negative impact of chronic stress

Stress response **malfunctions**

Stress **hormones** not effectively regulated:
constant surges or no shut-down

Hormones **suppress immune system**

Shrinkage of brain-cells: negative impact on thinking process

Damage to hippocampus= **depression**

Increase in connections in amygdala= **anxiety**

Increase in cortisol levels= abdominal **obesity**, type-2 **diabetes**,
poor control of blood-sugar levels, general inflammatory
response

Premature ageing

Psychological symptoms of stress

- **Poor concentration**
- **Forgetfulness**
- **Worrying and panic**
- **Loss of confidence, discouragement**
- **Irritability and intolerance**
- **Impatience and anger**
- **Feeling trapped**
- **Loss of interest**
- **Procrastination**
- **Low mood**
- **Anxiety**
- **Indecision**



The costs of the stress response

Overeating

Loss of appetite

Increased cigarette smoking

Increased caffeine intake

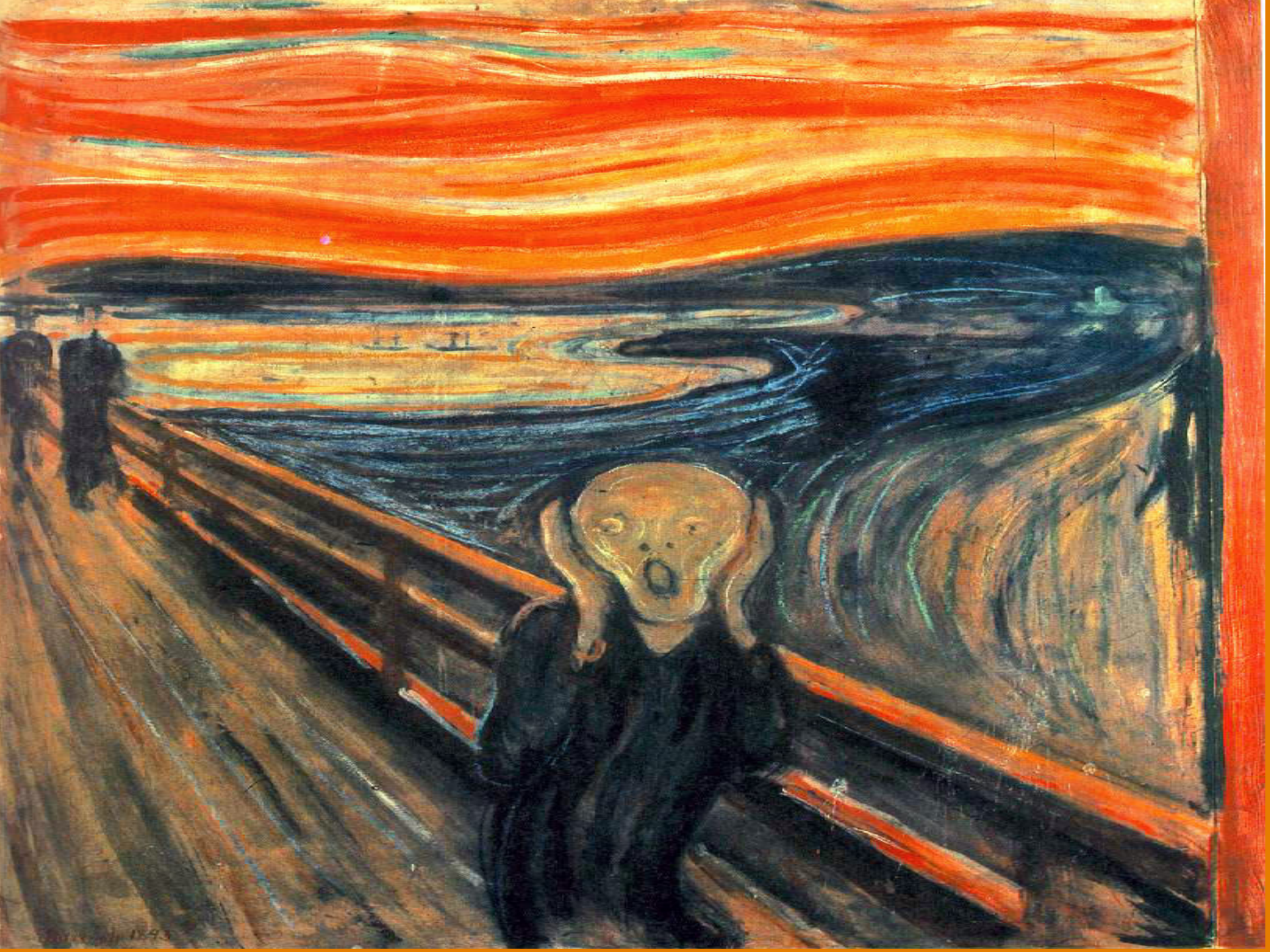
Increased alcohol consumption

Drug abuse



Stress: others' perceptions

- **Ignoring** other people
- Not pulling weight **outside** of work
- **Not listening** to others
- Time and attention **limited to work**
- **Disregarding** colleagues' needs
- Producing **poor quality** work



Stress related conditions

Psychiatric problems

Generalised anxiety disorder, panic-disorder, phobias and obsessive compulsive disorders

Depressive illnesses, can lead to psychotic conditions & suicide

Addictions

Eating disorders

The negative impact of chronic stress

Depression: the new epidemic...

2.9 million people in the U.K suffer from depression

This has been linked to the high levels of stress inherent in **modern life**

Anxiety: also increasing...

1 in 10 people in u. k. have anxiety

This can escalate and result in panic-attacks, phobias, social anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorders

This tends to result in a **vicious cycle** resulting in ever-higher levels of stress

Effects of stress on the bigger picture

Major losses in terms of **health, productivity and performance**

Affects all organisations in industry, commerce and the professions

Absenteeism

Loss of trained personnel who leave, retire early or die

Effects of stress on the bigger picture

Costs of hidden distress:

Poor mental performance

More accidents

Interpersonal conflicts

Poor concentration

Poor judgement

Poor management

Poor leadership

Loss of innovation

No creativity

Impaired decision making

Is this always the case?

No!

We are **all** stressed... A degree of stress is **normal**

There is good stress: **Eustress**, and bad stress: **Distress**

Some people **cope** with higher levels of stress than others

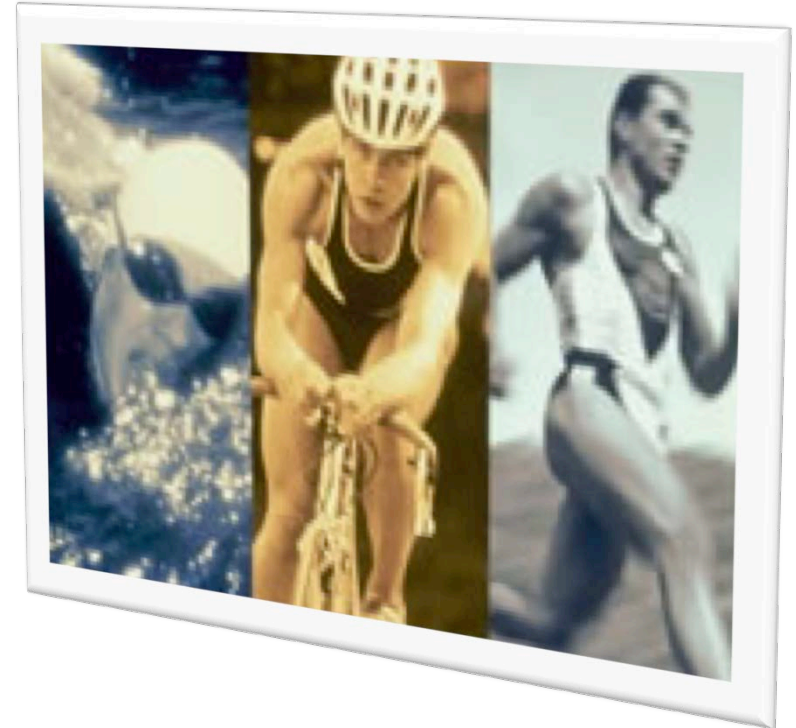
This is due to **interpersonal differences** and **different life experiences, upbringing, personality** which modulate a person's approach to life **challenges and demands**

Factors affecting impact of the stressor

Stress: inevitable part of life

Everything and anything source of stress

Stress is internally modulated



Work : why do we do it?

To Fulfil Ourselves

To Earn a Living

To Help

To Achieve Power and Control

To Meet Parental Expectations

Because we have to

What is work-related stress?

It is the **negative impact** on, or reaction to, an individuals' perception that **excessive load** is being placed on them

Health & safety law

Employers have a duty of care towards their workers

Employers have a general duty to safeguard the health of their employees

Employers need to ensure that their employees do not suffer from stress-related illness

Causes of stress at work

Poor environment

Organisational culture

Poor communication style

Targets; too many, too high

Management style

Bullying and harassment

Causes of stress at work

Information overload : too much information

Internet, e-mails, memos, trade and professional journals, spam

Deluge of **poor quality information** which needs to be sifted with resulting **loss of time**

This can result in the **information fatigue syndrome**

Causes of stress at work

Time poor

Overworking

Overload

**(25% employees would
love to leave their jobs)**



Causes of stress at work

Instant **availability**

Internet, **e-mails**, mobile phones, texting

Always 'on', **no down-time**, no 'switching off', **no control**

Presenteeism: first in, last out!

Causes of stress at work

Daily Hassles

Accumulation of small, irritating, daily, stressful events.

Daily Hassles can be more damaging than the major life events

Stress caused by Daily Hassles accumulates because they seem so trivial and manageable.

Work-Stress

What sort of person(s) get stressed?

Hard-working, driven, determined

Like to be in control, goal directed

Perfectionistic

Work-Stress: how do we cope?

We do more & more

We avoid (paperwork, people, ourselves)

We get addicted to things (work)...

...Does it work?

NO!



Work Stress: how does it make us feel?

Helpless, Angry ,Sad, Frustrated

Powerless, Out of control

Disappointed, Disillusioned

Empty

Sense of Loss

Work-Stress: what do we do then?

We try harder

We do more and more work

We marginalise everything else

Work-Stress: what happens when this fails?

We burn out

We give up

We carry on going through the motions

We lose the balance

Common thinking distortions in stress

All-or-nothing thinking

Awfulising - catastrophising

Personalising

Negative focus

Jumping to conclusions

Living by fixed rules



But remember...

**Some stress is inevitable and even good for us.
We all have different capacities to tolerate
stress and we can thrive on the right levels of
stress and demands**

Signs of Eustress

Stimulated

Interested

Interesting

Helpful

Understanding

Open and sociable

Calm

Confident

Creative

Effective

Efficient

Clear thinking

Focussed

Good decisions

Productive

**So stress management makes
a great deal of sense from the
point of view of individuals,
managers, employers and
society**

Balance

***“Equilibrium, Harmony
among the parts of
anything, equality or just
proportion”***

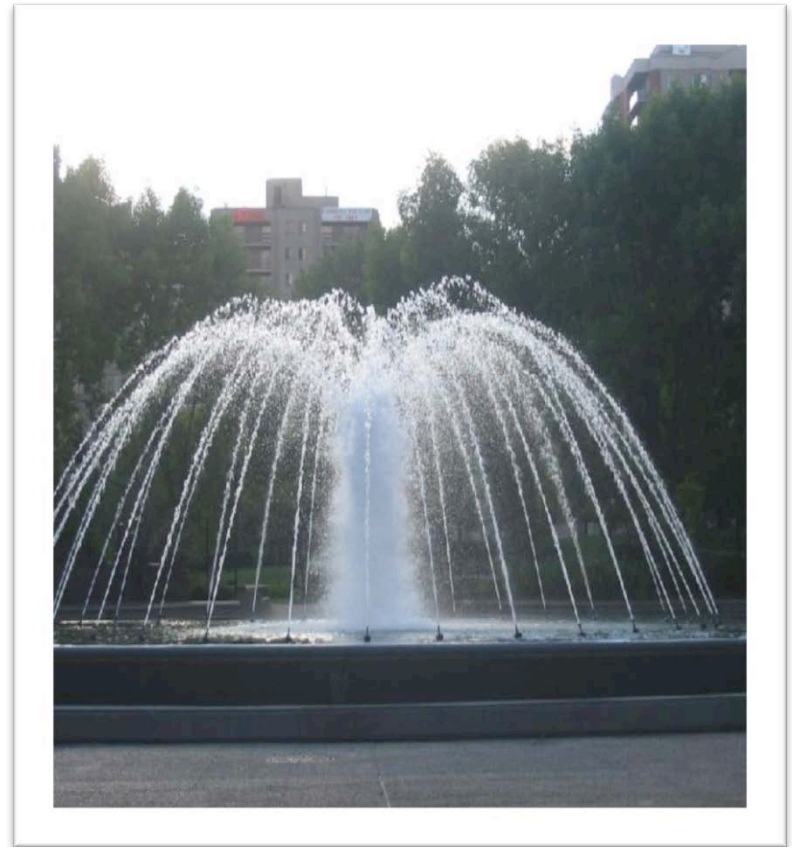
(Chambers Dictionary)



Balancing Demands

“In order that people may be happy in their work, these three things are needed: they must be fit for it: they must not do too much of it: and they must have a sense of success in it”. (John Ruskin, 1851)

Sigmund Freud stressed the importance of both work and love (relationships) in establishing human happiness.



Rebalancing ourselves

External strategies

Internal strategies

Remember!

These are inter-linked and their success depend on insight, self-awareness and motivation to change

Managing stress: practical strategies for the individual

Switch off: T.V, mobile, internet

Limit newspapers, magazines

Turn off your car-radio for news

Limit choices

Edit your address book and your phone-book

Create boundaries

Clear desk

Clear computer

Use your bin

Close your door

Prioritise

Clarify what a job entails before taking it

Managing stress: practical strategies for the individual

Be proactive

Plan your time

Go with your body-clock

Breaks including stretch breaks

Personalise work-space

Limit clutter

Keep it clean and tidy

Not too much noise

Fresh air breaks

Good posture

Avoid uncertainty

Stop commuting madness

PwC



Managing stress: practical strategies for the individual

Stop the information over-load

Do not try to know everything all the time

Do not try to be an expert at everything

Talk to the right people

Be clear about what information you need to access

Limit electronic communications coming in and going out

Throw away unread publications, old notes, papers, statistics

You do not need to be present all the time.

Set realistic goals

Work smart

Ask for help, perhaps from the start

What about when it gets complicated?

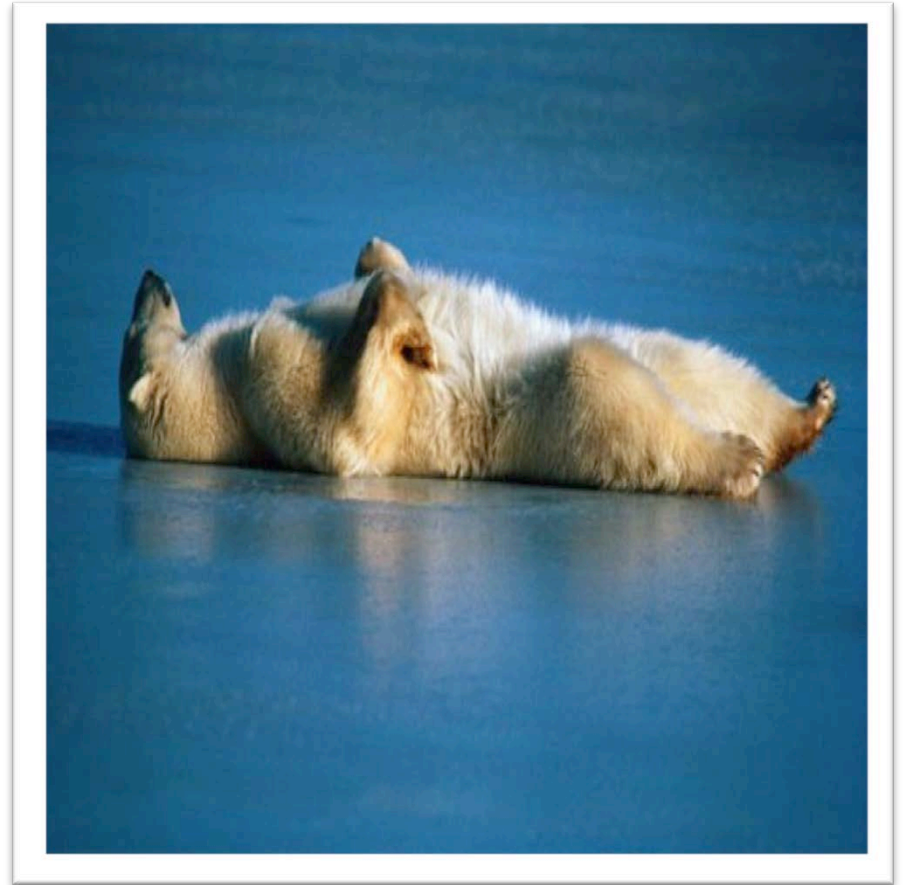
Different conflicting roles

Time pressures

Too many demands

Too many people to please

**No time to breathe, let alone
to think**



Surviving the modern jungle and developing internal management skills

Combating inner helplessness

Assert your autonomy to yourself

Forget; they' re doing this to me

Confront the fact that you are making choices including the choice to be here

Do a cost/benefit analysis; Then choose again

Be compassionate to yourself

Recognise that there is a lot going on for you

Step back, stop reacting

Then ask some key questions;

What, how, when, who?

Surviving the modern jungle and developing internal management skills

Managing Emotions: Step 1

Develop self-awareness

Acknowledge that particular feelings may be triggered

These feelings may not feel 'appropriate'

They may feel difficult, overwhelming even dangerous & threatening

Surviving the modern jungle and developing internal management skills

Managing Emotions: Step 2

Know yourself, know your triggers, know your reactions; physical, emotional, psychological

Remember: knowledge is power

Surviving the modern jungle and developing internal management skills

Managing Emotions: Step 3

Learn to recognise your feelings

Learn to accept your feelings

Stop fighting them & criticising yourself for having them

Accept that it is O.K to have them

But remember you do not have to act on them

Surviving the modern jungle and developing internal management skills; *managing emotions*

Then manage them; how?

Step back from emotion

You can let it go

Nothing lasts forever: This will pass

Ask yourself some questions e.g. what if this were not my problem?

From every situation: ask yourself; what have I learnt from this?

Is it worth reacting? If so, when and how?

Managing stress at work: challenging communications

Step back before responding

Stand your ground

Say 'no'

Do not smile

Say 'and'

Build bridges and stick to your point!

Agree... then disagree, politely!

Handling difficult people bullies, chatter boxes, needy

Clarify communication

May need to involve other parties

A job change is a last resort

More than 50% of total workforce has been bullied at some point in their careers

Managing stress at work: what can employers do?

Pay attention to work environment

Challenge presenteeism

Set realistic targets

Limit uncertainty

Set positive examples in terms of communication

Intolerance of bullying & harassment

Organisational culture: respect, honesty, compassion

Organisational procedures: fair, clear, accessible

Clarity: say what you mean

Respect autonomy

Dr G's important steps to limit stress

Live in the now: this is all that you have

Living is about making **mistakes & learning**

You can **only change yourself**, not others

Baby steps are all it takes to change

Stop criticising yourself: be your own friend

Remember: **you can choose**

You are not alone

Dr G's top tips to deal with stress

Be kind to yourself

Take care of yourself

Allow yourself to **have pleasure**

Give to yourself

Stop being so **angry**

Say **thank you**

Say **no**

Get rid of **energy drains**

Let **someone else** do it

Dr G's real things to do to destress

Breathe, Exercise, Eat well, Drink water

Watch alcohol, caffeine and smoking

Enjoy the small things

Allow yourself the good things you have

Listen to music you love

Watch a funny film

Read a good book

Talk to a friend

Buy flowers for someone

Grow things

Give yourself a pat on the back

Turn away from the negatives

Think about good things



Mental health

What is mental health

How would you define it

Would you know it if you saw it

Think of someone in your life who you see as being mentally healthy

Describe them to yourself

Give us one quality you see as being at the core of mental health

Mental health

Resilience; ability to deal with adversity

Capacity to deal c stress

Ability to deal with difficult emotions

Capacity to be happy

WHO definition; state of well being. realises own abilities, can cope c normal stresses of life, can work productively & fruitfully, can contrib to his/her community