

AM I STRESSED???

Firstly, let's define what stress is:

Stress is the mind and body's response to any given environmental condition. It's the fright/flight reaction we have when being or feeling threatened or pressured. It's when our body makes a judgment on what response we need to have, then the brain can perform a reccie through the memory banks and respond where needed. This biological process works firstly in the hypothalamus. This kicks everything into gear, setting off the pituitary gland and the adrenal medulla to release certain hormones and therefore assist us in our peril. Thank you very much brain! All sorted. Or maybe not.

Sadly, our poor brains can find it hard to discern what level of reaction is needed because our stress buckets are so overloaded. It's like a misfire that just keeps repeating over and over, reacting to the stress in the most extreme way. "Release more adrenaline, release more adrenaline". At this point we have become apathetic to the stress, which then makes us ill.

And now that the primitive part of the brain is in control, adding more and more into our already overloaded stress buckets, we can't keep up with emptying the stress out of the bucket, to tidy it all up, so we become more tired and more worn out, and stuck. Sounds so doomy and gloomy, but there is light at the end of this tunnel!

Even though this stress response is a vital part of our makeup, (alerting us to danger, motivating us to get out of a situation, allowing us to discern said situation), it is very much not needed most of the time. We can differentiate to what response is appropriate and then deal with it and move on. But if all this discernment is being drowned out by the noise of a full stress bucket, then what can we do?

Well, if we were to be chased by a sabre-tooth tiger we would fully welcome our hypothalamus to do its job, but if the stressor is not life-threatening, then we can

stand down, engage the intellect, and just sort out the problem without adrenaline coursing through our veins. Nowadays, sabre tooth tigers do not roam the streets. Stress, however, does, and it can come in many forms. Low-level stress and high-level stress – I'm not defining here; we all know the difference.

What help is there? We are advised to reduce or avoid stress because it's bad for us and causes health issues yada yada yada, but there are not always any effective, long-lasting solutions always proffered. Ones that don't need to be taken daily with a glass of water at least – pills and potions have their place, but if we can change the way we respond to stress by using the power of the mind and our physiological abilities, then surely that is a much better solution?

What to do? Well, my advice is to firstly stop, take a pause, and then a nice deep breath. Maybe have a look around us, make a cup of tea and see what we haven't noticed today. I do believe the current model of life does not suit the human brain or body. Living to work, paying the bills, not questioning what the heck is going on, all of these contribute to giving our power away. I also believe in change, simple change, whereby we control our energy output, creating a healthier and more self-empowering input. Or is it the other way round?

Whatever! Just taking some power back, staying in our lane, focusing on us, is a good first step in reducing and ridding ourselves of the poor and unrelenting symptoms that accompany stress.

There is of course a lot more to this, but if we stop getting in the way of ourselves and start by putting up some small, yet strong boundaries, we can then start growing the seeds of a lighter and more positive life. Who says we must work a 40-hour week to make our dreams come true? (Whoever did say that is a liar because no one I know has had their dreams come true by working 5 days a week, being told they need to work harder or that they are not good enough). There are plenty of studies out there demonstrating how we are more productive when working shorter hours or at different times of the day to suit our chronotype. Some of us are night owls and some of us are early birds – they actually work

very well together! Empowering your employees shouldn't be a dynamic or unusual framework of a business. It should be the norm.

If our equilibrium is out of kilter and needs re-balancing so we can reach homeostasis, then maybe just stopping and thinking about this for a short while may help. Having the motivation to change how we live our lives, even with the tiniest of changes, can help us and our loved ones to not be beaten down by the stresses and strains of life, and to live happier lives! Sounds a bit idealistic but we can all dream...