



Understanding Stress

📄 THRIVE SHEET

OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVE

What is stress really? Is it possible that not all stress is bad?

This 'Thrive' sheet is designed to help you

- Identify the early warning signs of bad stress.

The stress response is designed to protect us. From an evolutionary perspective it kept us alive in the face of physical danger, priming us to make the appropriate physical response to a threat; freeze, flee or fight.

We are living in the safest world ever in terms of physical danger but the evolution of our physical response to stimulus hasn't kept pace with the changes. We therefore choose from a wide range of perceived threats, whether they are mildly real or completely imagined to get stressed about.

Threats to our beliefs, threats to our personal values and threats to how we see ourselves. Threats in terms of how we believe others see us. Do they respect us? Do they like us? It seems ridiculous, but not getting enough likes on a social media posting can kick off a similar physiological response to being in physical danger.



EXERCISE 1

RECOGNISING THE SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

One of the things that makes moments of stress difficult to identify is the fact that when we are experiencing the stress we are not self-aware enough to recognise it.

We tend to tell ourselves we are okay and insist to others that we are not stressed.

So, this exercise is designed to help you stop and get some perspective:

Take some time to identify the many signs of stress that either you or those around you may be experiencing.

It's easier if you think of different types of symptom – below they are classified into three responses. Using the 3 columns below, list as many of the signs as you can think of under each category:

Emotional What might you or somebody else be feeling emotionally if you were suffering from stress?	Physical What might be the physical manifestations of suffering from stress either in the moment or more chronic long term?	Behavioural What might you or somebody else be doing if you were stressed



EXERCISE 2

RECOGNISING YOUR PERSONAL EARLY INDICATORS OF STRESS

Looking through the list above, what are the things you notice clearly enough to serve as early warning signs of stress?

For some people it will be noticing how they are feeling emotionally, for others it will be a physical sign and for others it will be a tell-tale behaviour which indicates that they are heading towards an unhealthy level of stress.

Sometimes those who are nearest and dearest to us notice the signs before we do. You might want to ask a family member, a close friend or a colleague what they notice in you.

Also, reflecting on what you notice in others can help us be more self-aware. Take a moment to think about one person from your private life and one colleague you work with and reflect on what are their early warning signs.

PERSON FROM PRIVATE LIFE

Name

Signs of stress

COLLEAGUE FROM WORK

Name

Signs of stress

Now turning your attention to yourself.

What are the 3 signs that you are heading towards an unhealthy level of stress.

1)

2)

3)



Stress is a great leveller, whether you are the CEO or at entry level. We all experience it at some point in our career.

The most important first step is to recognise stress when it is becoming a problem. By being more open individually and collectively we can help each other to thrive more.

Be well and thrive!

LEARN MORE

If you'd like to learn more about stress and neuroscience the following resource will be really helpful for you.

Nigel Marsh TED Talk

[Click here](#)

Books

Brilliant Stress Management

Mike Clayton

Chimp Paradox

Prof. Steve Peters