

Stress: College Counselling Blog #5

As April is 'Stress Awareness' month, it seems like a fitting time to take a moment to think about stress...



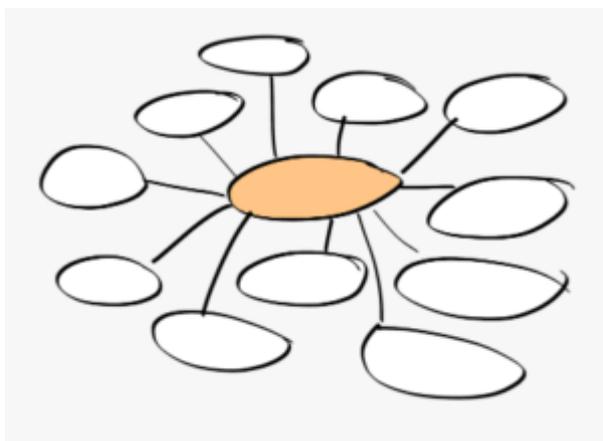
What causes 'stress' in our lives?

What do we notice when we're feeling 'stressed'?

How does 'stress' affect us?

How can we manage 'stress'?

You may find it useful to just pause for a moment when reading this and take time to notice any responses that come up for you when reading these questions, or even give yourself the opportunity to explore these questions and make a note of any thoughts you may have. Mind-mapping is often a useful way to do this.



We all know what it's like to generally feel stressed but do we actually take time to notice those feelings or sensations in detail? It's not easy to pin down what stress actually means; for me, stress is related to feelings of anxiety and pressure. It may be a response to something that is going on around us such as a particular situation or event (eg. Exams) or even a reaction to a sense of being placed under pressure or having certain demands put on us (eg. coursework deadlines).

One proposed definition of stress is:

"In a medical or biological context stress is a physical, mental, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension. Stresses can be external (from the environment, psychological, or social situations) or internal (illness, or from a medical procedure)." (Charles Patrick Davis, MD, PhD (2011) Definition of Stress, medicinenet.com)

Firstly, I think it's important to point out that 'stress' isn't necessarily a 'bad' thing. Our ability to notice 'stress' is a survival instinct that has enabled humankind to survive on a basic (primitive) level. Stress is primarily a physical response within our bodies; so when we're feeling stressed, our bodies sense there is a threat and switches to something called 'fight or flight' mode. This involves releasing a mix of hormones or chemicals such as adrenaline and cortisol to prepare the body to take physical action. This in turn then causes a number of reactions, from blood being diverted to muscles to shutting down unnecessary bodily functions such as digestion.

Through the release of hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, we gain a rush of energy, which basically prepares us to physically fight or run away ('fight or flight'). That heart pounding, fast breathing sensation is the adrenaline; as well as a boost of energy, it enables us to focus our attention so we can quickly respond to the situation. This 'fight or flight' mode can help us survive dangerous situations, such as reacting swiftly to a person running in front of our car by slamming on the brakes.

However, the challenge is when our bodies go into a state of stress in inappropriate situations, when it becomes overwhelming for us and generally impacts our ability to engage in our daily life and those around us. These are some side effects/ symptoms that we may experience when feeling stressed:

On your body	On your mood	On your behaviour
Headache	Anxiety	Overeating or undereating
Muscle tension or pain	Restlessness	Angry outbursts
Chest pain	Lack of motivation or focus	Drug or alcohol misuse
Fatigue	Feeling overwhelmed	Tobacco use
Change in sex drive	Irritability or anger	Social withdrawal
Stomach upset	Sadness or depression	Exercising less often
Sleep problems		

Whatever your personal definition of stress is, we can all learn to manage the way we respond to stress!

If this is something that you feel you would like support with, please get in touch with the College Counselling Service on counsellorreferral@nptcgroup.ac.uk

We are also running a well-being workshop on Thursdays during this half-term; 3:30pm-4pm via Teams...please join us!