



Awareness & Self Care in Managing Stress

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MY WELLNESS TRANSITION
EMPOWERING YOU ON YOUR WELLNESS JOURNEY

What is Stress?

- Stress is difficult to define because it is subjective and is experienced differently by each of us
- We all know people who have been through enormous physical and emotional stress and yet cope very well
- And we also know people who are very susceptible and struggle to cope with even “imagined” stressful events



Different Types of Stress



- Our body responds to physical, mental, and emotional stress in the exact same fashion
- It cannot delineate between the different types of stress
- The good news is that if we manage stress more effectively in one area, it will reduce the overall burden of stress on our body
- Therefore, every small step we take in managing stress has a whole-body benefit

What does our body perceive as Physical Stress?



- Eating processed foods high in refined sugars, trans fats and additives
- Consuming too much alcohol, stimulants, cigarettes or over the counter medications
- Sleep deprivation & working long hours with no break or holiday
- Exposure to environmental toxins/pollution/noise/blue light
- Excessive or too little exercise

What does our body perceive as Mental Stress?



- Continually having to meet deadlines at home or at work
- Studying and having to work full/part time and juggling childcare or caring responsibilities
- Learning new skills, new methods at work or loss of skills (as technology keeps changing)
- Unemployment/redundancy
- Poverty and struggling financially to pay debts, mortgage and bills

What does our body perceive as Emotional Stress?



- Breakdown of relationships (family, partners, friends or work colleagues)
- Bereavement & loss of a person, animal or life ambition
- Abuse (physical, sexual, mental)
- Suppression of your personality or sexual orientation
- Feeling helpless in the face of adversity (climate change, natural disasters, wars and COVID)

Fight-Flight-Freeze

- When we experience stress, our Adrenal Glands which sit on top of our kidneys, produce our stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol
- These hormones govern our ability to respond to stress (fight, flight or freeze)
- If our bodies are in an elevated stress response for too long, then we can start to experience symptoms in every system of the body

Symptoms of Stress



Panic attacks
& feeling
overwhelmed

Irritable
bowel
syndrome

Low mood

Tired all the
Time

Inability to
sleep

High blood
pressure

Female
hormone
imbalances

Dermatitis &
eczema

Lowered
Immunity

Awareness & Free Will

- One of the most important points to remember when approaching the whole area of how to manage stress is that: Stress is Unavoidable. It's part of life
- Humans are very fortunate to have free will and awareness (we can observe ourselves from outside ourselves)
- The single most important thing to develop for managing stress is increasing our awareness
- Until we become aware that we are stressed, we will be powerless do anything about it
- Are you aware of what you need to do to keep your body, mind & spirit happy and healthy?

Awareness & Self Care



The following short self-care questionnaire might help you identify areas that you do give attention to, and other areas that might need more of your time and attention



There are no right or wrong answers. It's just a tool to help you see what you are doing to care for yourself

How often do you?



Eat a whole foods-based diet rich in colourful fruits and vegetables?

Drink enough water to feel hydrated?

Exercise for more than 30 minutes per day?

Sleep enough hours to wake feeling refreshed?

Take time to breathe deeply throughout the day?

Engage in stress-reducing activities (excluding TV or screen time)?

Spend time in nature?

Make time to participate in things you enjoy?

Treat yourself with kindness?

Get enough social time with people who make you happy?

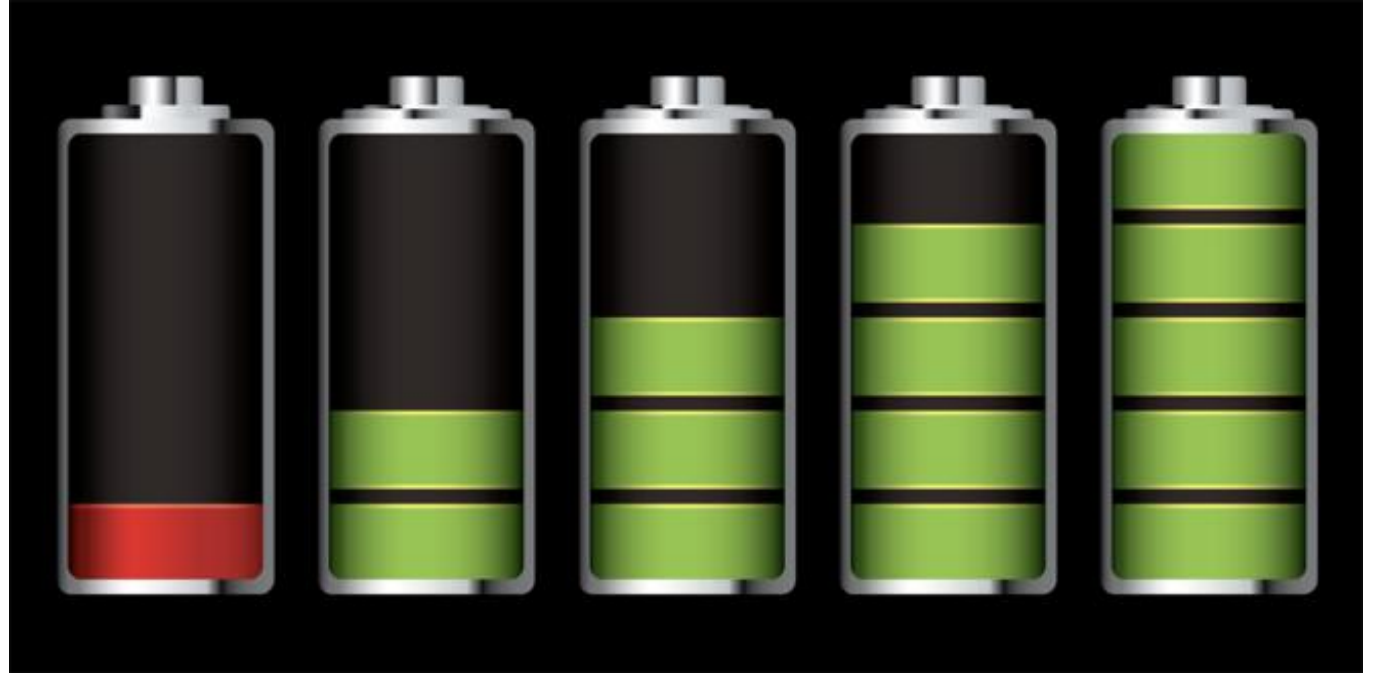
Change what you have control over



- You can choose the food you eat everyday
- You can choose how much water you drink every day
- How much movement you do in a day
- How you breathe
- Time spent in Nature
- What you do with your free time
- Giving yourself permission to relax and disengage
- Choose who you spend your time with (energy robbers or supportive people)

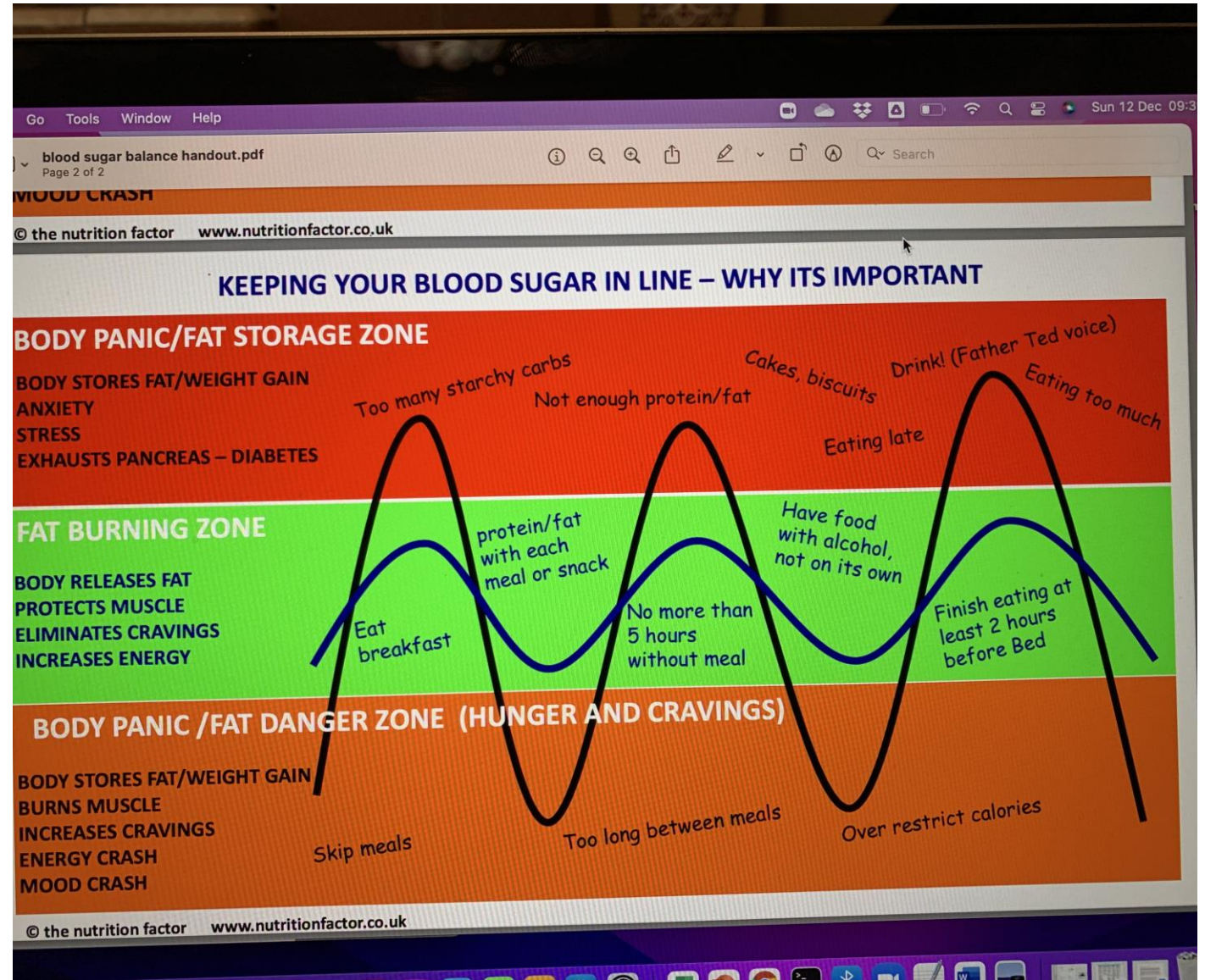
Recovery from Stress

- Recovery from Stress and balancing our stress hormones needs a mind, body, and emotional/spiritual approach. The first place we start is with our nutrition
- Our bodies need energy to deal with our everyday physical, mental and emotional tasks



The Awareness of Food Blood Sugar Balancing

- Chronic stress leads to irregular blood sugar levels
- Instead of a nice gentle rise and fall after each meal, the blood sugar spikes very high and then drops
- This can cause fatigue, irritability, anxiety and a lack of concentration



The Awareness of Food

- A Protein food must be eaten at every meal. This slows down the release of sugar into the blood stream, prevents irregular blood sugar patterns and sustains your energy
- Thinks Nuts & Nut butters, seeds, beans, hummus, lentils, eggs, chicken, fish. meat, cheese or yogurt
- Ensure you are eating regularly with no long gaps between meals
- Irregular blood sugar levels increase your cravings for sugary foods and stimulants in the form of caffeine or nicotine to keep you going. This is like “flogging a dead horse”
- Caffeine stimulates adrenaline release which can trigger feelings of panic, anxiety and jitteriness
- It prevents you sleeping & relaxing

Food to help your body deal with stress

Reduce

Reduce caffeine intake to no more than 1 coffee per day or 2-3 black/green teas per day to help with reducing adrenaline. If possible, reduce it to an absolute minimum and replace with relaxing herbal teas

Reduce or eliminate

Reduce or eliminate all refined carbohydrates e.g., biscuits, cakes, pizzas, white bread, fizzy drinks, white rice, pasta, burger buns etc. Replace with low G.I. fibre-rich whole foods

Increase

Increase all vegetables & salad leaves. Aim for 4-6 portions per day. No more than 2-3 portions of fruit per day

The most important vitamins & minerals for Stress

Magnesium

Whole grain rice, barley
millet, wheat & rye Seeds
& Nuts Green vegetables
Salmon & Halibut Apricots
& Figs

Zinc

Oysters, lean meat &
chicken, pumpkin seeds
beans & lentils

Vitamin C

Kiwi fruit & Papaya
Currants Peppers Citrus
Fruit Berries Green
vegetables

B complex

Wholegrains nuts & seeds
red meat Daily products

Vitamin D

Fortified milk eggs butter
salmon
Skin exposed to sunlight

What are you doing in your free time?



- Are you using it for walking in nature, exercising, being creative, learning, laughing, meeting friends or relaxing?
- Or are you bored and watching mindless TV or sucked into the rabbit hole of social media scrolling?
- When you were younger with less responsibilities, did you have hobbies or interests?
- Take the time to re-connect with these passions.

Finding flow & balance in your free time

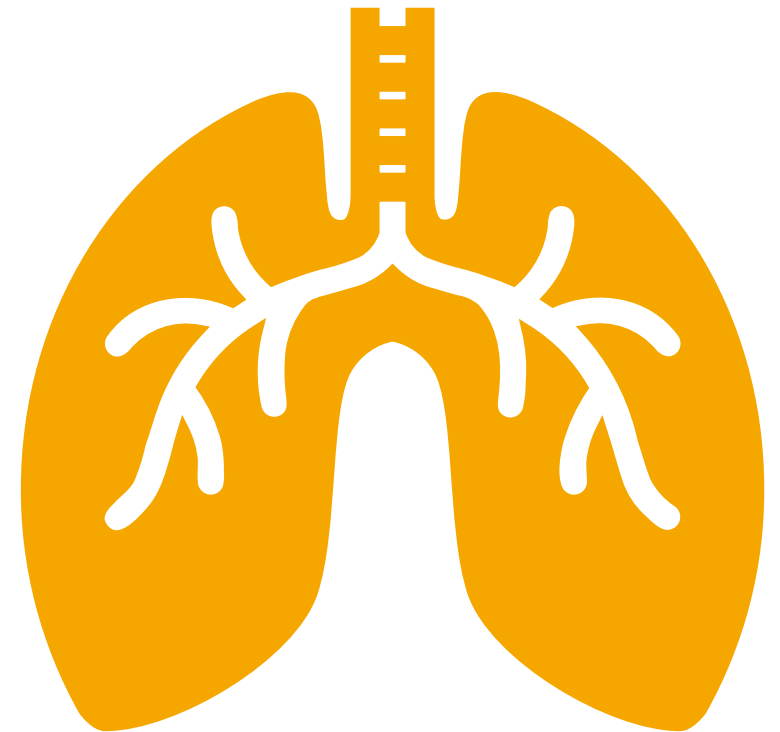


Daily Suggestions	Weekly Suggestions
Go for a Walk in Nature (forest, lake & canal)	Spend time with supportive friends or family
Listen to music you love or dance	Look at something you consider beautiful (i.e., art, nature, sculpture, fabrics)
Make & eat a healthy, colourful meal or bake beautiful bread	Try yoga or tai chi, gently flowing exercises
Breathe deeply and centre yourself using breathing techniques	Adopt an active hobby like aqua aerobics, bicycling, or gardening
Stretch your body & drink water	Write a letter to someone you care about
Scan your body and be aware of how you feel	Get a massage or a long soak in the bath
Be creative (i.e., adult colouring books, watercolours, sketch, crochet, knit, write, sing, act)	Sleep until you wake naturally
Give yourself a hand or foot massage	Visualize a place you find relaxing, like a beach, a mountain. Write down all positive things in your life for which you are grateful
	Find a funny film or book and laugh



The Awareness of Breathing

- When we hold our breath due to stress or shallow breathing, we can trigger adrenaline to be released and we move into fight/flight/freeze mode
- Once you start to become more aware of how you breathe and where you hold stress and tension in your body, you can start to change



The Awareness of Breathing



We can regulate the different ways we use our breath by focusing on timing



For example, we can take a long, slow deep inhalation into the lungs over 4 seconds, hold the breath there for 4 seconds and then take 4 seconds to empty the lungs gradually and completely before starting the next inhalation



This shorthand for this rhythm is 4:4:4:0. This really does help the body relax and move us away from fight/flight/freeze mode

The Awareness of Breathing

