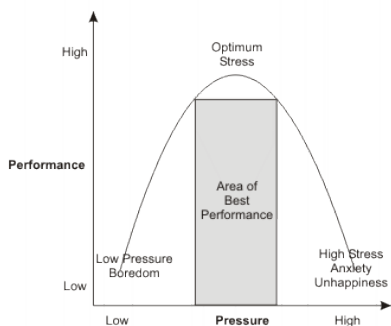


Stress management

For a significant proportion of the clients seen in our practice, managing excessive levels of stress is a necessary and integral part of treatment. Ironically, the busiest and most stressed clients are often the ones least likely to have suitable strategies in place "I am too busy to do stress management" is a common protest!

It is a common misconception that all stress is bad. A small amount of stress aids performance and provides motivation to achieve. However when the stress levels are too high, they have a negative impact on our performance (as illustrated in the diagram below). Stress is often associated with negative experiences such as

relationship breakdown, job loss, financial difficulties and similar life events. However positive events such as getting married, getting a promotion, buying a house or having a baby can also be extremely stressful.



The Inverted-U relationship between pressure and performance

Fight or flight response

The fight or flight response is the body's physical reaction to a sudden threat to our safety or life. In these situations hormones are secreted to prepare the body to fight harder or flee faster. These changes include increased heart rate and blood pressure,

changes in blood flow to increase oxygen supply to muscle and decrease blood loss from in other areas in the event of injury. People who experience anxiety will recognise these as common physical symptoms which they may experience.

Long term stress can affect the cardiovascular system and the immune system, which increased rates of heart disease and cancer, as well greater vulnerability to viral illness.

Stress management strategies

Smoking, drinking substance use, avoidance and procrastination are commonly used by people experiencing stress however these strategies are not truly effective in the long terms and can be harmful to physical health.

Stress management is more than reading a book, watching TV, or having a few drinks. It involves a good work life balance, healthy diet, reducing intake of caffeine and refined sugars, decreased use of drugs and alcohol, regular exercise, active relaxation practices, (such as meditation, visualization, breathing techniques muscle relaxation exercise) as well as thought control and managing unhelpful cognitions.

Other important factors in managing stress are good sleep hygiene (a suitable sleeping environment to ensure adequate sleep, a range of enjoyable interests and activities, good social supports and laughter. Other issues that can impact on stress levels included assertiveness, time management, effective communication, reframing to a positive outlook, lowering unrealistic standards, and acceptance of things that cannot be altered. For more information on stress management techniques and resources, please contact us at integralpsychology@westnet.com.au.