health assured

How can you recognise when situations are starting to get stressful?

When the pressure builds and starts to get too much we often exhibit a wide variety of symptoms – mental, physical and behavioural. This list is by no means comprehensive, but it should enable you to map out your own stress response and help you to understand that of others.

You might find it helpful to use it as a checklist.

Read through the following and tick off those you recognise in yourself when you're stressed:

Physical symptoms include:

- Altered sleep patterns
- Tiredness & lethargy
- Breathlessness
- Dizziness & light-headedness
- Indigestion / heartburn
- Nausea
- Bowel disturbances (diarrhoea, constipation)
- Headaches
- Muscle tension & pain
- Nervous tics

Mental symptoms include:

- Anxiety & apprehension
- Preoccupation with trivial issues
- Inability to prioritise
- Coping difficulties
- Mood swings
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feelings of failure
- Lack of self-worth
- Feelings of isolation

Altered appearance

- Neglecting your appearance
- Looking miserable
- Looking tired
- Looking nervous
- Hunched shoulders
- Tired walk
- Less smiling, joking & laughing
- Looking agitated

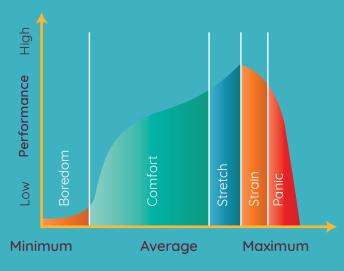
Altered habits

- Disturbed eating
- More:
- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Smoking
- Absenteeisr
- Tardiness
- Accidents
- Taking work home
- Less:
- Holidays
- Quality home time
- Exercise

Altered behaviour

- Irritable and argumentative
- Less sociable
- Less friendly
- Memory problems
- Poor decision making
- Hypercritical and/or inflexible
- Tendency to over-react
- Loss of interest
- Poor performance
- Excessive multi-tasking
- Starting new tasks; never finish old tasks
- A who cares attitude

Where are you on the pressure curve?



Levels of Pressure

Once you are aware of how you respond to high levels of pressure you will be able to recognise the warning signs when you enter the stretch, strain or panic zones, and this will enable you to take corrective action.

If you are at the limits of the stretch zone and about to tip into the strain zone, what can you do to escape to the comfort zone so that you can refresh yourself and regroup before going back into the stretch zone?

It might help you to think back to stressful situations you have experienced in the past and remember what your response was then. " My ideas for escaping into the comfort zone..."