

Understanding Stress

Definition

The stress response occurs when our perceived abilities fall short of the perceived demands. It is a complex of mental and physiological reactions preparing us for action.

Primary and Secondary Stress

The automatic primary stress response occurs faster than thought and before any emotional response to the situation. Emergency chemicals are activated by the autonomic nervous system when there is an immediate threat to life. This is all perfectly normal and no stress management is necessary here.

In Secondary Stress there is time to analyse the situation and to experience the mental and emotional responses. There are three stages:

1. 'I want to' – Fuelled by adrenaline this is the enjoyable buzz we get from healthy challenge. As long as it is not kept up for too long this is not harmful.
2. 'I have to' – When the perceived demands continue for longer than adrenaline can provide us with more energy, the body uses its own logic to engage other chemicals: the cortico steroids to keep the extra energy up. The emotional tone becomes negative and our energy reserves start to be consumed. The presence of steroids in our system compromises our immune system which leads to a wide variety of illnesses.
3. 'I can't escape from' – This is as a result of long term involvement in stage 2. Energy reserves are drained and any number of dangerous mental and physical conditions can result. It is essential to stop and have time out when this stage is entered upon.

Managing Stress

A good stress management course or a programme of coaching will include an honest appraisal of where we are at the moment and then the chance to analyse the various sources of stress in our lives. On the basis of this analysis we will be able to identify coping strategies as well as stress avoidance.