

# STRESS



## NORMAL, EVERYDAY STRESS

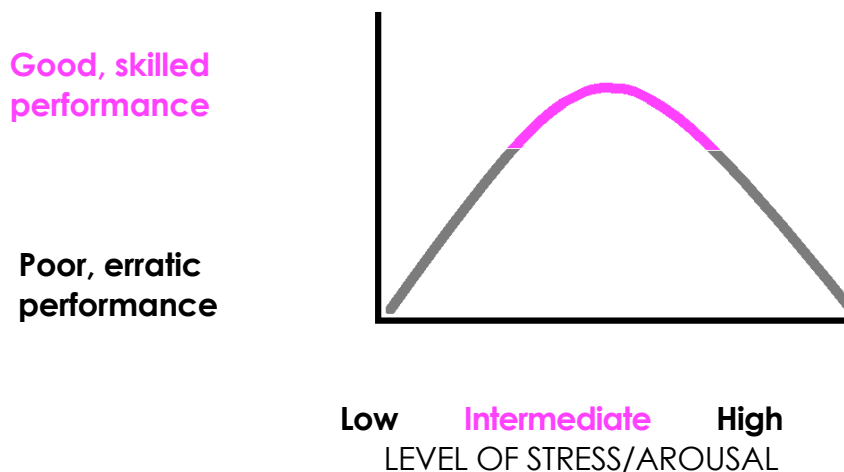
A degree of “arousal” or “tension” in the nervous system is essential for performing to the best of your ability.

A pilot flying a plane, a policeman making an arrest, someone meeting an important deadline, someone checking or repairing equipment, or someone driving a car - they all NEED a degree of arousal or tension.

If you're **too relaxed**.....you'll not be attentive enough. BUT.....

If you're **too tense** you'll make mistakes.

This phenomenon is well known and can be measured in the laboratory. There is a well-established “stress-performance” curve:

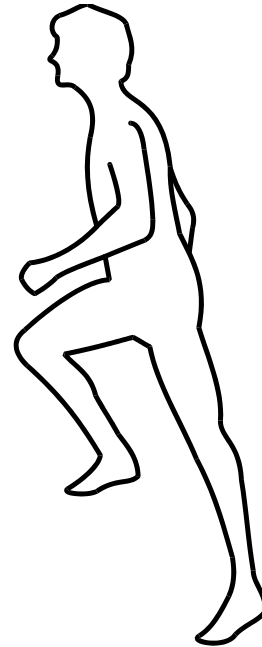


This curve has been found across a wide variety of skilled tasks: when the person doing the task is not “stressed” enough (that is, is too relaxed), performance is poor. With just the right amount of “stress” (or “tension” or “arousal”), performance is at its best. Then, when the person becomes too tense or stressed, performance declines again, typically becoming erratic.

This “tension” or “stress” has both **PHYSICAL** and **PSYCHOLOGICAL** ELEMENTS.

As tension/stress increases from the relaxed state, the changes which occur are as follows:

- PSYCHOLOGICAL** Brain alert
- Concentration focuses
- PHYSICAL** Sweating
- Breathe faster
- Digestion slows
- Adrenalin released



When the amount of tension or stress becomes excessive or is maintained for too long, performance will suffer - becoming erratic. Concentration and alertness will break down, and the individual may also notice physical signs such as sweating excessively.

### **TOO MUCH STRESS**

There are also important **health implications** of being under pressure in this way for too long or simply being under excessive pressure.

When this happens, the effects will start to spill over into other areas of your life. Within limits, this is not necessarily unduly worrying - most people have some bad days and, for example, may end up being irritable or impatient.

However, if work or other pressures frequently have an adverse effect on other aspects of life, you may be at risk of developing anxiety or depressive symptoms.

There are some **early warning signs** that show you are under too much pressure, and these are sometimes called signs of “increased arousal”.

Key 'warning lights' are:



IRRITABILITY  
Being "snappy", on a "short fuse"



POOR CONCENTRATION  
Restless, can't settle

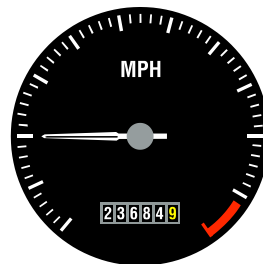


POOR SLEEP  
Difficulty getting off to sleep, or disturbed sleep



REDUCED LIBIDO  
Reduced sexual interest

Within limits, to have some of these symptoms occasionally is not a major problem. However, it's like the warning lights on a car.



If a light flickers occasionally, it's probably not a major problem, and can be checked out when the car is serviced. However, if one or more lights comes on and stays on, you know there's a problem and the car needs attention at once.

If you occasionally have one or two of these symptoms, it's worth thinking about why you're under pressure, and see what can be done to remedy the situation. However, **if you have one or more of these symptoms for a few weeks or longer, you should get advice sooner rather than later.**

These warning symptoms potentially herald the onset of more extensive symptoms. Ignored, they may lead on to such problems as:

- \* ANXIETY SYMPTOMS including general anxiety, episodes of panic, and phobic symptoms.
- \* DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS including regular sleep disturbance, loss of appetite, finding everything an effort, and feelings of depression including weepiness.
- \* RELIANCE ON ALCOHOL - your total intake should not be excessive, you should have alcohol-free days, and you should not depend on alcohol to get to sleep, to face up to going into company, etc.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

If you have one or more of the warning symptoms and they persist you need to do something about it.



You may already have identified where your problems lie from your discussions with a Clinical Psychologist or similar health professional. If so, you may know what action is needed.



You may need to keep a record of times when you are anxious and under stress then follow your Anxiety Management programme to deal with these situations more successfully.



You may need to monitor your alcohol intake in units, noting also when, where and with whom you drink.



You may need to revise any advice you have had on.....  
 Type-A Behaviour  
 Time Management  
 Breathing and Relaxation  
 How to reduce alcohol intake  
 Maintaining outside interests, and so on.



If you are not sure what is at the root of your symptoms and how to deal with it, then contact the psychologist directly or else see a member of your Occupational Health Service or Medical Officer, or your GP.