

Managing Stress

In The Moment & Beyond



Small Changes = Big Impact #bethechange

This resource helps to recognise the challenges of elevated and ongoing stress. It provides tactics for individuals, workplaces and managers.



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STRESS



What will you do to shift the needle?

Workplace stress is reaching record levels, affecting employees worldwide. April is Stress Awareness Month, giving organisations a chance to raise awareness, reduce stigma and actively support employee wellbeing before issues escalate

This year's theme is: **Small Changes = Big Impact #bethechange**

What Is Stress?

Stress is a valid reaction within our mind and body in response to a stressor or threat.

The reaction primes our body to fight, flight or freeze (FFF) involving increasing breathing, more oxygenated blood to our muscles and the release of adrenaline and cortisol.

Stress is often used as a 'catch all' term when we are trying to describe that we don't feel great, we don't feel in control and we are experiencing uncomfortable sensations, thoughts and behaviours that we may not want to take a closer look at.



Around 1 in 4 workers report feeling unable to cope with stress at work

79%

of UK adults feel stressed at least one day a month.



Signs of burnout, including exhaustion and disengagement, are increasing, now impacting more than half of the workforce

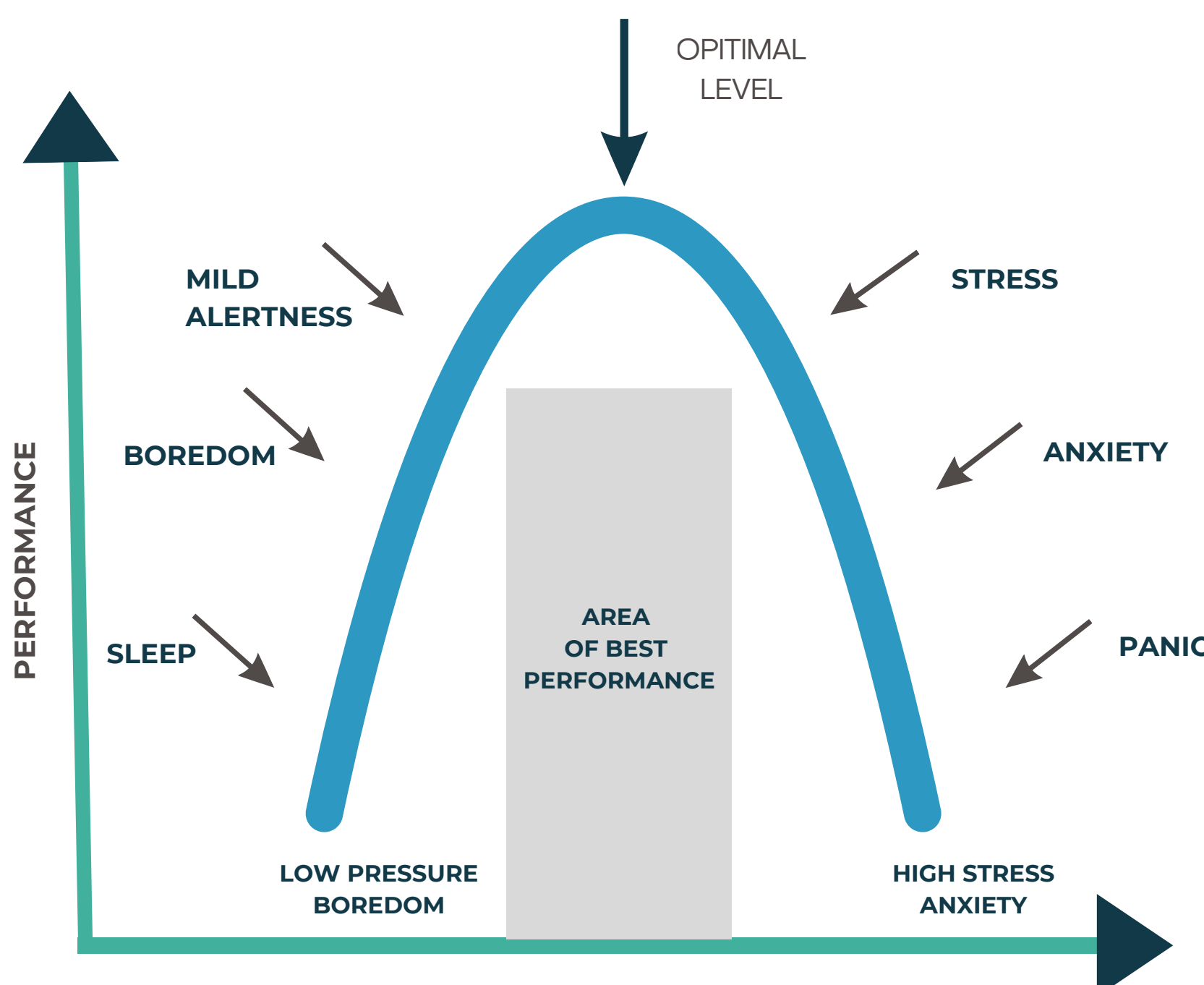
So...Is Stress Bad?

Stress, as described above, is a valid response and protects us from situations that may cause harm. It enables us to have intense periods of focus to take the action we need to, such as stepping quickly back onto the pavement as a car comes towards us at speed.

An amount of stress, or pressure, can therefore help us perform at our best, such as a job interview or during sport, when we are able to access the enhanced focus and performance ability. The challenge comes when the level of pressure is too much or too prolonged, meaning we move into a place of potential high stress and anxiety. We can also experience a decrease in performance without an amount of pressure, putting us in a place of boredom.

Everyone is different, so it's key to understand what type and amount of pressure you and your teams might perform best under, to ensure you don't move to a place of higher or prolonged stress and decreased performance.

Pressure Performance Curve



Aspects to consider:

- We need a certain amount of arousal/pressure to perform at our best
- Too little and our brain 'switches off'
- Too much and our brain feels overloaded

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STRESS



Recognising The Challenge

It's important to recognise when you are in periods of intense or prolonged stress, as unchecked it can lead to serious longer wellbeing challenges.

In our fast paced world, we are subject to multiple stressors at a time, meaning we:

- a) Don't recognise our threat system is turned on
- b) It is left turned on for long periods of time.

Having your threat system turned on and releasing more adrenaline and cortisol than your body needs. This aspects, in tandem with other aspects such as reduced blood flow to areas of the body and shallow breathing, can lead unpleasant thoughts, feelings and behaviours such as anxiety, burnout and also chronic illness.

WHERE DO YOU FEEL IT?

Use the diagram to mark where you experience stress, when:

- a) when you are in periods of intense and / or prolonged periods of time.
- b) how stress shows up for you, including feelings that you may not associate with it such as aches, pains, disrupted sleep, sweating, shaky, light headedness, feeling hot or cold, a dry mouth, feeling hungry and heart palpitations.

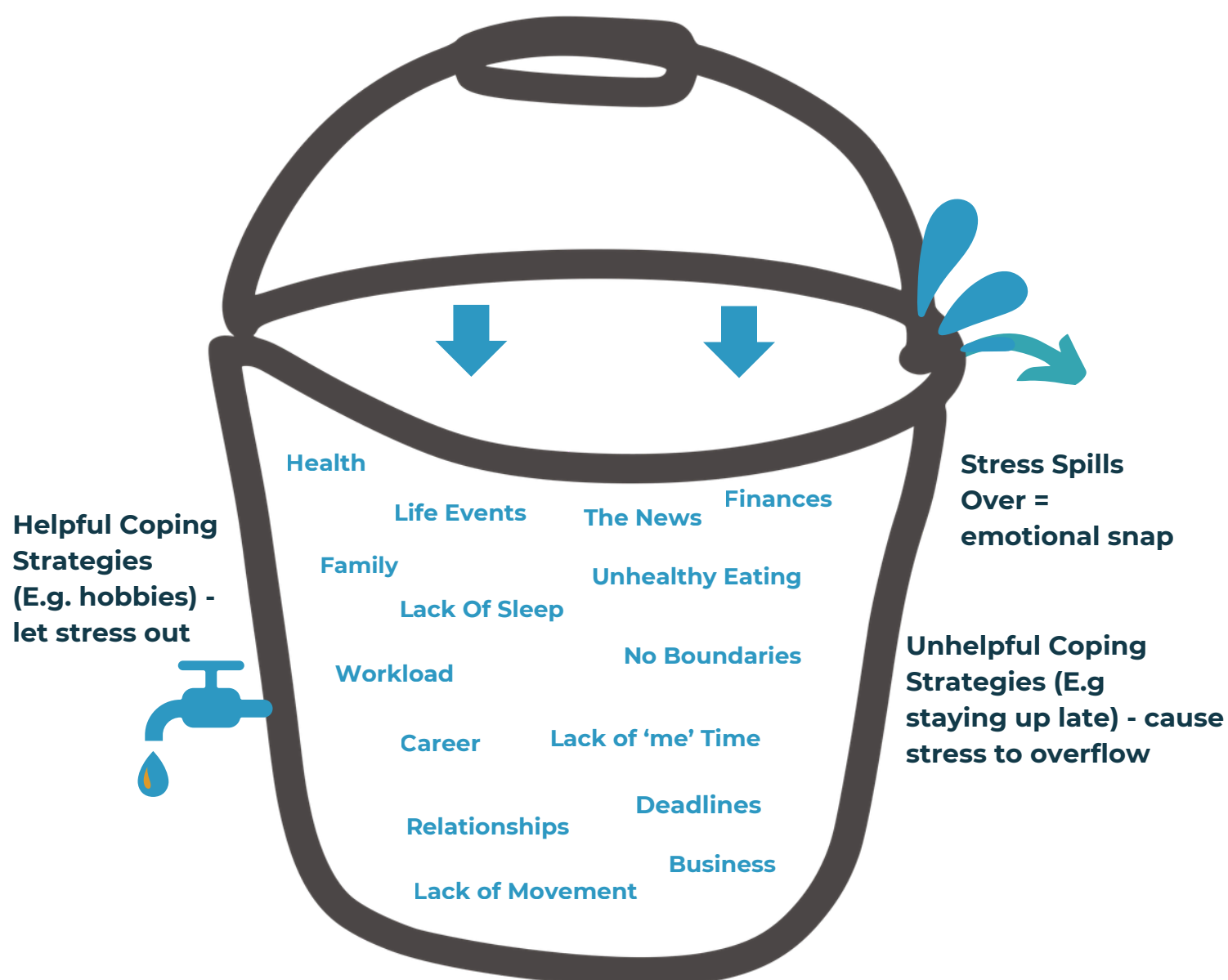
Recognising these signs, sensations and behaviours is key to understanding your stress signature - because we are all different. It helps us to keep a watching brief on our stress and take actions sooner, to manage our levels more effectively.



THE STRESS BUCKET

What Stress Is Sloshing Around In Your Bucket?

Everyone's threshold for dealing with stress is different and everyone's bucket might be a slightly different size. However, one thing is true for everyone, if we are in prolonged periods of elevated stress our wellbeing will suffer.



Being able to identify the following aspects of:

- a) what's going in to our stress bucket
- b) how quickly we fill our stress bucket
- c) how we feel and behave when our bucket overflows
- d) what activities help us to 'empty' our buckets to avoid overflow

is useful to help us recognise how vulnerable we are to different stresses and how we can better manage our stress levels.



You'll find a copy of the Stress Bucket exercises at the end of this pack for you and your team to use.

WAYS TO SUPPORT STRESS In The Workplace



Talk About It

"I've noticed you don't seem yourself lately, is everything okay?"

Simple check in's, individually and as a team, can prevent emerging issues becoming prolonged problems. Remember that, Managers and Mental Health advocates don't need to offer medical advice; their role is to listen, signpost and support (not diagnose). Talking also helps to normalise that stress affects everyone.



Managing Workload

Encourage your team to take their annual leave across the year, ensure they are appropriately trained for their role, and give opportunities for two-way feedback. In 1:1 meetings, actively enquire about working relationships, whether workloads feel manageable and offer flexibility if someone's workload is turning into 'overload'.



Communication

People often become stressed when they feel they are kept in the dark. During periods of change or disruption in particular, rumours can spread and anxiety grows. Keep teams up to speed with what's happening and how it affects them - try to decode high-level organisational changes into what they really mean for your team.



Leadership Skills

Model the healthy behaviours you want to see, such as taking breaks, setting boundaries and actively managing your own stress. This signals to the team that it's acceptable and expected they do the same. You can't pour from an empty cup. If your own demands are unmanageable, escalate that upwards rather than absorbing it silently.

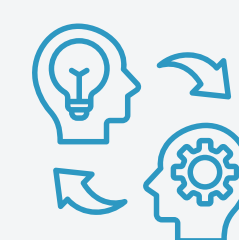
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Signpost Support & Intervention

Many organisations offer Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs). You may also want to consider peer networks, mentoring or coaching. Mental health training helps to ensure managers in particular feel confident and equipped to signpost to this support, rather than feeling anxious about saying the wrong thing or having the answer.

Whatever support you offer, ensure it is easy to access for everyone.



FOUNDATIONS TO MANAGE STRESS FROM



Take time to recharge

Spend time doing activities that help you feel calm and also energised, as an act self-care, such as reading, gardening or seeing friends.



Connect with others

Reach out to those who make you feel supported and bring energy. Establishing boundaries in challenging relationships helps you manage energy .



Get enough sleep

Quantity and quality of sleep matter. Ensure you go to bed at a suitable time for you and create an environment that supports good sleep.



Breathe...

Bringing focus can help you breath deeper and slower. Try taking three deep and slower breaths to lower your heart rate and feel more in control.



Spend time outdoors

Take time outside to notice nature or green space if possible. Become more present, dial down your stress response and give your mind a break.

STRESS BUCKET EXERCISE

WHAT STRESSES ARE FLOWING INTO YOUR BUCKET?



WRITE THEM IN THE BUCKET

MOVE TO THE NEXT STEP!

Time to think about how to help **empty** the bucket!

1.What can I change or manage differently?

2.What can't I change and need to accept?

3.What needs my urgent attention?

4.Who can help me?

5.What are some of my unhelpful ways that I use to cope

6.What are some of the useful ways that I use to cope?

WHAT ONE THING I WILL DO DIFFERENTLY THIS WEEK?