

UNDERSTANDING STRESS

INFORMATION ABOUT SYMPTOMS OF STRESS AND COUNTERING ITS EFFECTS

Stress is a reaction to external pressure, which leads to a predictable psychological, physiological and behavioural response. Stress has a Goldilocks effect - too little and you become bored, too much and you become distressed, but just the right amount can be motivating. The challenge is managing the stress response so it remains at an optimal level.

THE STRESS RESPONSE

The body gets ready for "fight or flight" in response to a perceived threat. This results in a number of physiological responses including:

- › increased heart rate
- › increased blood to muscles
- › increased alertness, and
- › narrowed vision and hearing

Sometimes the brain can misinterpret stress symptoms as a threat in itself and may end up triggering a further stress response. This is often referred to as a stress feedback loop.

REDUCING THE STRESS RESPONSE

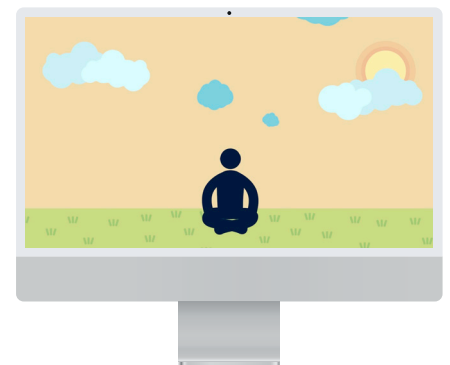
It is possible to break the feedback loop by changing the shallow, rapid breathing and racing thoughts associated with fight or flight.

Breathing exercises focused on slow, deep breathing encourages full oxygen exchange and can calm the stress response.

Informal mindfulness involves focusing all of the senses in the present moment. This is usually helped by focusing on specific senses (e.g. sight, touch), or focused attention on breathing. By doing this distracting thoughts can dissipate at least momentarily, allowing the stress response to turn off and the relaxation response to begin.

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