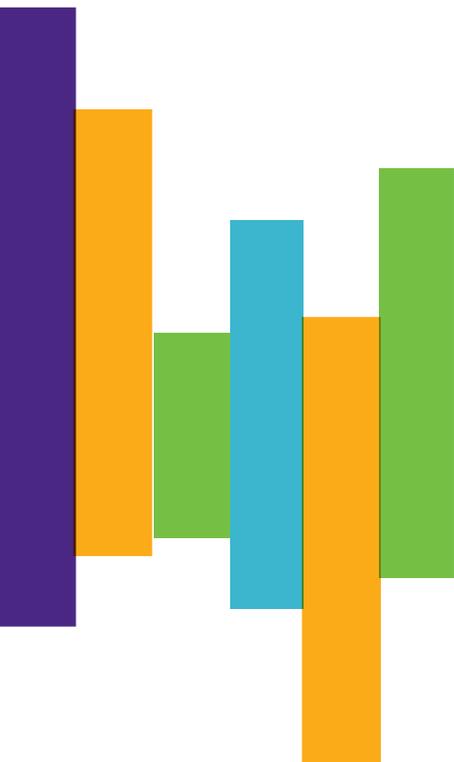


CAPITA



Emotional Resilience



Resilience



Stress is a fact of modern life. For many people, it is so commonplace that it has become a way of life.

Stress isn't always bad. In small doses, it can help you perform under pressure and motivate you to do your best. But when you're constantly running in emergency mode, your mind and body pay the price.

There are so many sources of stress: caring for children, elderly parents or disabled dependants, holding down a job and making time for a social life.

Added to these everyday stresses are extraordinary events such as deaths, serious illnesses, natural disasters and social upheavals that often occur randomly and without warning. It is easy to become frustrated by the great number of pressures that consume you on any given day, and over time, the effects of all of these stressors can combine to wear you out.

Emotional Resilience

There is no escaping stress, but there are ways you can learn to handle stress better when it is present, and to 'bounce back' faster from its impact. The collection of skills, characteristics, habits and outlooks that make it possible to remain flexible and fresh in the face of stress is often referred to as "emotional resilience".

Learning to become more emotionally resilient can dramatically improve your attitude and your health in the face of inevitable stress.

To be emotionally resilient means to be able to spring back emotionally after suffering a difficult and stressful time in life. Stressed people experience a flood of powerful, negative emotions which may include anger, anxiety, and depression. Some people remain trapped in these negative emotions long after the stressful events that have caused them have passed. Emotionally resilient people, on the other hand, are quickly able to bounce back to their normal emotional state.

Recognising the signs of stress

When you perceive a threat, your nervous system responds by releasing a flood of stress hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones rouse the body for emergency action.

Your heart pounds faster, muscles tighten, blood pressure rises, breath quickens, and your senses become sharper. These physical changes increase your strength and stamina, speed up your reaction time, and enhance your focus – preparing you to either fight or flee from the danger at hand.

Stress can overwhelm your defences, despite your best efforts at coping. Long-term exposure to stress can lead to serious health problems. Chronic stress disrupts nearly every system in your body. It can raise blood pressure, suppress the immune system, increase the risk of heart attack and stroke, contribute to infertility, and speed up the aging process. Long-term stress can even leave you more vulnerable to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

Know the signs:

Physical symptoms

- Chest pains
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Cramps or muscle spasms
- Dizziness
- Fainting spells
- Nail biting
- Nervous twitches
- Pins and needles
- Feeling restless
- A tendency to sweat
- Sexual difficulties such as erectile dysfunction or a loss of sexual desire
- Breathlessness
- Muscular aches, and
- Difficulty sleeping (physical).

Mental symptoms

- Anger
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Changes in behaviour
- Food cravings
- Lack of appetite
- Frequent crying
- Difficulty sleeping (mental)
- Feeling tired, and
- Difficulty concentrating.

If you have been experiencing some of these symptoms for a long period of time you are at risk of developing high blood pressure which can lead to heart attacks and stroke.



Recognising burnout

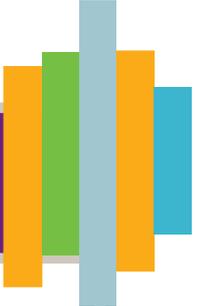
Excessive and constant stress can leave you feeling helpless and completely worn out, leading to a state of emotional, mental and physical exhaustion called 'burnout'.

Burnout can reduce your productivity leaving you feeling lethargic, helpless, cynical and resentful.

The negative effects of burnout can have repercussions on your home and social life as well as cause long term changes to your body which may make you more susceptible to illnesses like colds and flu, so it's important to recognise burnout and deal with it straight away.

Burnout isn't the same as stress. Stress is often the result of 'too much' of something. Too many pressures which demand too much of you physically and mentally.

Burnout on the other hand is about 'not enough' of something. Not enough energy or motivation; feeling empty and past caring about the consequences of your actions.



Work-related causes of burnout	Lifestyle causes of burnout
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling like you have little or no control over your work• Lack of recognition or rewards for good work• Unclear or overly demanding job expectations• Work which is unchallenging or uninteresting to you• Working in a chaotic and highly pressured environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working too much, without enough time for relaxing and socialising• Being expected to be too many things to too many people• Taking on too many responsibilities, without enough help from others• Not getting enough sleep• Lack of close, supportive relationships

Burnout: warning signs and symptoms

Burnout is a gradual process which occurs over a period of time, it doesn't just happen overnight.

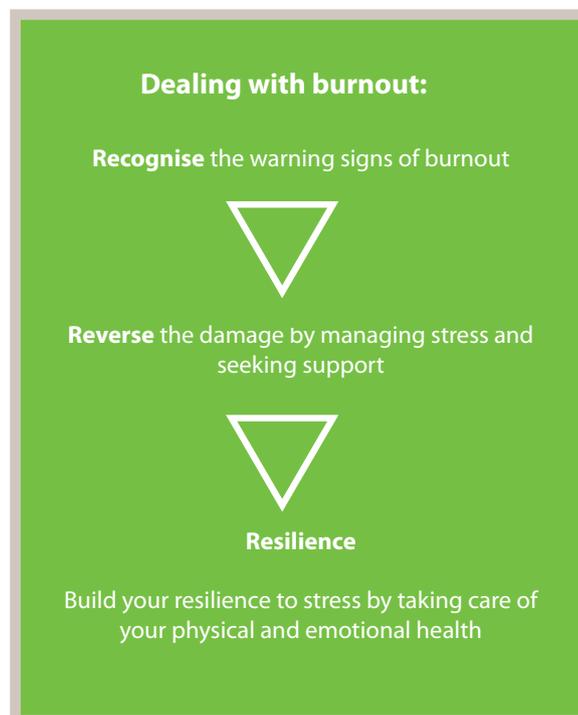
The signs and symptoms are subtle at first, but get progressively worse.

Physically, you may feel tired and drained, you may experience more headaches or back/muscle pain. You may also notice a change in appetite or your sleeping habits.

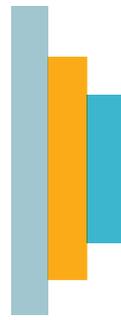
Emotionally, you may feel a sense of failure or self-doubt. You may feel de-motivated, helpless, defeated, negative and dissatisfied.

All of these symptoms may lead to you withdrawing from your responsibilities, avoiding social situations and beginning to use food or alcohol to cope. You may find it hard to get out of bed in the morning, and begin to neglect work through absence or arriving late and leaving early.

If you are experiencing symptoms of stress or burnout, it is important that you contact your GP and/or occupational health/HR to seek support or for assessment.



The road to resilience



The resilient attitude

Survival experts and psychologists tell us that someone's ability to survive and/or even thrive in difficult and challenging environments is often related to a way of thinking that fosters resilience. If we are able to learn what helps make a person resilient, we may be able to help ourselves and our organisation to cope effectively even with unforeseen situations.

What is it about emotionally resilient people that makes them more effective at managing stress than non-resilient people?

The key difference between the groups appears to be that emotionally resilient people have a specific set of attitudes concerning themselves and their role within the world that motivates and enables them to cope more efficiently and effectively than their non-resilient peers.

These special beliefs characteristic of resilient people help them to keep proper perspective, and to persist with coping efforts long after less resilient types become demoralised and give up.

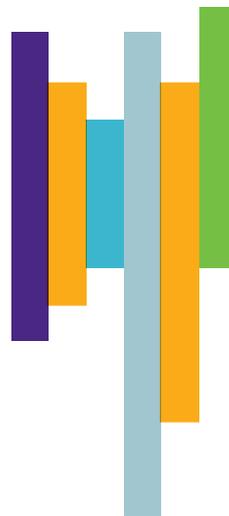
In order to become a more resilient person, it is necessary to work on cultivating these beliefs and attitudes for your own life.

The attitudes that underlie emotional resilience are powerful because they enable people who subscribe to them to cope with great efficiency and effectiveness. It's not really that emotionally resilient people know more or have better coping skills than do non-resilient people. It's more that they are better at applying the coping skills they know than non-resilient people.

Specifically, emotionally resilient people tend to:

- Have realistic and attainable expectations and goals
- Show good judgment and problem-solving skills
- Be persistent and determined
- Be responsible and thoughtful rather than impulsive
- Be effective communicators with good people skills
- Learn from past experience so as to not repeat mistakes
- Be empathetic toward other people (caring how others around them are feeling)
- Have a social conscience (caring about the welfare of others)
- Feel good about themselves as a person
- Feel like they are in control of their lives
- Be optimistic rather than pessimistic

Key factors supporting resilience



Social/family/work support

- What are my formal and informal support systems?
- Do I have managerial support/supervision and am I making the best use of it?
- How do I balance my work/social/family relationships and do I spend time with people who help nurture and support me? Can I ask for their support?

Awareness of stress/impact of change

- Am I able to recognise when I am feeling stressed, or when change is having a detrimental impact on my self and those around me?
- What strategies do I use to deal with this, and am I able to implement these in a timely manner?
- Do I take time out if I feel irritable or angry?
- Do I recognise what might trigger these responses?

Delegation

- Can I let go of projects I do not need to spend my time on and have confidence in others in completing these tasks?
- Am I able to prioritise my own workload and be able to set realistic expectations and boundaries for myself.

Self care

- What do I do that nurtures or fulfils me?
- What hobbies, sports, pastimes do I engage with that give me a sense of my potential outside of work.
- Am I aware of the importance of a healthy diet, exercise, and a regular sleeping pattern?

The 'rolling with' mentality

- To what extent can I accept change and be flexible, rather than resisting or fighting it?
- Can I see the potential positive results from challenging or changing situations?
- How flexible am I?

Self belief

- Am I able to recognise my own ability to cope with challenge?
- Have I learnt from previous challenges, and can I apply my learning?
- Am I able to counter negative thoughts with confident determination?

Forward planning

- What changes am I able to foresee and plan for?
- Can I develop a plan to help me and my colleagues manage change?
- Can I break down larger issues into more manageable processes, and how do I plan and review these steps?

Building resilience

Get support

Knowing the signs and symptoms of stress and burnout and taking early action to deal with them could save you from long-term problems.

Talk to friends, work colleagues, family, managers, or a medical professional.

Accept change

Accepting that change is inevitable and that certain circumstances cannot be changed is the first step towards keeping things in perspective.

Try to consider the situation in a broader context and look at the long term positives.

Focus on relationships

Good relationships with close family members, friends and colleagues are important.

Talking with, and accepting support from those who care about you strengthens resilience.

Move towards your goals

Develop some realistic goals and do something small and regularly to help you move towards them. If for example your goal is to make new friends, celebrate the joining up of a new club as a step in the right direction of achieving that goal, instead of seeing the task as simply unachievable.

Develop your confidence

Nurture your own self-belief by reviewing all your past successes. Think about past experiences where you have dealt with a tough situation and overcame obstacles.

Make decisions and take action

Don't ignore problems or situations. Take decisive actions to deal with your problems and the demands of daily life rather than detaching yourself completely from your problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.

Gain control

Prioritise what you need to accomplish during the day and tick off each item as you finish them. Time-management is important in keeping tabs on stress levels. Ensure you prioritise your time for exercise and sleep.

Keep a stress diary – become aware of stress inducing occurrences by writing down events that were stressful to you. This can help you to adopt effective coping strategies to manage the causes of stress in your life.

Be optimistic

When you are faced with a difficult situation, try and look further than the immediate problem, by focusing positively on how things could improve.

Identify pessimistic thoughts and ask how reasonable they are. Focus on positive possibilities and counter your negative thoughts with realistic judgments and possibilities.

Slow down, or take a break

Take time away from your everyday routine to recharge your batteries and gain perspective.

Listen to your favourite music, read a novel, take a long bath, practise meditation, yoga or Tai Chi. Cut down on demanding commitments or activities to give yourself time to rest and reflect.

Take care of yourself

Pay attention to your own needs and feelings.

Engage in activities that you enjoy and which relax you.

Exercise regularly, eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of water.

Positive thinking



Stress is stressful precisely because it is a source of negative emotions: depression, anxiety, anger. While you are experiencing negative emotions it can easily seem that there is no way to resist them.

However, it is possible to consciously influence and change your negative moods to more positive moods. Simply deciding to exercise when you are feeling stressed can temporarily lift your mood for instance.

Sharing positive emotions

Positive emotions benefit your social health as well as your physical health.

Sharing positive emotions with others helps to bond people together, creating and maintaining strong, healthy, and caring relationships, which in turn provide social support, which promotes further emotional resilience and positive feelings.

Physical health benefits

More and more research suggests that the positive emotions (happiness, contentment, joy, etc.) are associated with a healthy immune system. On the other hand, the negative emotions are associated with weaker immune function, greater production of stress hormones, and greater incidence of illnesses.

Positive emotions are not just window-dressing; they are intimately tied up with your immune function efficiency and your physical health. If you can learn to cope better with stress so as to avoid becoming depressed and to lessen the time you spend feeling negative, you can have a positive impact on your emotional and physical health.

