

Introduction to Stress Management

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH



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INTRODUCTION

Hello, I'm Paula Ackers.

My journey into stress management began over 20 years ago, after I experienced burnout firsthand. At the time, I didn't fully grasp just how deeply stress could affect every part of my wellbeing—physically, emotionally, and mentally.

I used to believe that success meant working hard, powering through, and always striving for more. There's some truth to that, but what I've learned is that true success also requires setting healthy boundaries and making intentional choices about how we spend our time—and why.

Whether you're just beginning to explore stress management or looking to deepen your approach, I hope this eBook offers you a fresh perspective. Remember: it's never too early—or too late—to start.



Master of Social Work
Bachelor of Psychological Science
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CHAPTER 1

What is Stress?

Stress is an inevitable part of life – we need stress to function. Functioning at our optimal level is referred to as homeostasis. However, if homeostasis is challenged by too much stress, we will experience a stress response (also known as the “fight, flight, or freeze” response). This is a natural physical and mental response to a real or perceived danger. This stress response triggers the release of hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, which causes physical changes like increased heart rate, quicker breathing, muscle tension and heightened senses, in preparation for the body to either stay and “fight” the situation, “flee” from the situation, or become immobilised and “freeze”.

“Stress acts as an accelerator: it will push you either forward or backward, but you choose the direction” – Chelsea Eriau

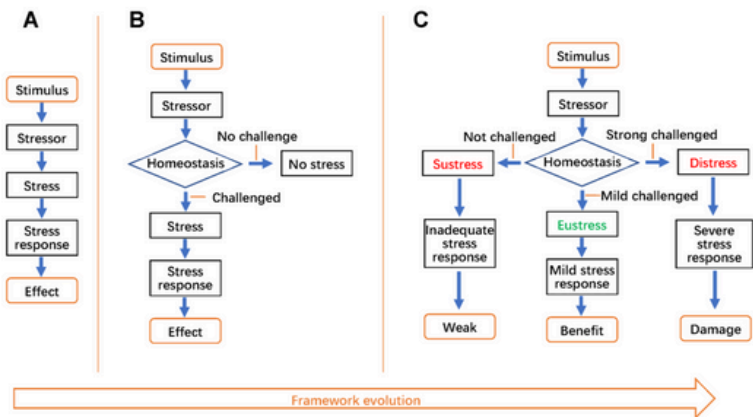


FIGURE 1: The evolution of the framework of the stress system. (A) The basic framework of the stress system. (B) The developing framework of the stress system. (C) The mature framework of the stress system.

CHAPTER II

Identifying Stress Symptoms.

Have you discussed your stress symptoms with a medical professional?

Stress symptoms can also be the same as symptoms of a medical condition. Therefore, consulting with a doctor and discussing your symptoms is the first step to stress management.



Some common signs of stress:

- **Physical:** headaches or migraines; muscle tension, especially in neck or shoulders; fatigue or low energy; digestive issues; insomnia; oversleeping; rapid heartbeat; chest pain; skin conditions.
- **Emotional:** irritability; short temper; anxiety or nervousness; depression or persistent sadness; mood swings; feeling overwhelmed or out of control.
- **Cognitive:** difficulty concentrating or making decisions; forgetfulness; constant worry; negative thinking or catastrophising.
- **Behavioural:** changes in appetite; procrastination; social withdrawal; increased use of alcohol, caffeine, or drugs; nail biting, pacing or other nervous habits.

CHAPTER III

Some Common Causes of Stress.

- **Work-Related:** heavy workload or unrealistic deadlines; job insecurity or unemployment; conflicts with co-workers or managers; lack of control or autonomy; burnout from overworking.
- **Financial:** debt or financial instability; unexpected expenses; cost of living increases; pressure to provide for others.
- **Relationships:** conflicts with a partner, family or friend; divorce, separation or breakups; feeling unsupported or misunderstood; caregiving responsibilities.
- **Health:** chronic illness or injury; mental health conditions (anxiety, depression); concerns about personal or loved one's health; poor sleep; fatigue; medically unexplained illnesses.
- **Major Life Events:** moving house; loss of a loved one; becoming a parent; retirement; starting or ending a job; getting married.
- **Internal or Emotional Pressures:** perfectionism; negative self-talk; fear of failure or rejection; lack of self-confidence; feeling overwhelmed or out of control.
- **Environmental Factors:** noise; crowding; lack of privacy; commuting or traffic; natural disasters or global events.
- **Digital and Information Overload:** constant notifications and messages; doomscrolling or bad news fatigue; pressure to be available or responsive 24/7; social media comparison or cyberbullying.
- **Spirituality:** feeling alone, judged, or unsupported in your beliefs; neglecting spiritual routines or questioning long-held beliefs.

CHAPTER IV

Short-Term Strategies for Stress Relief.

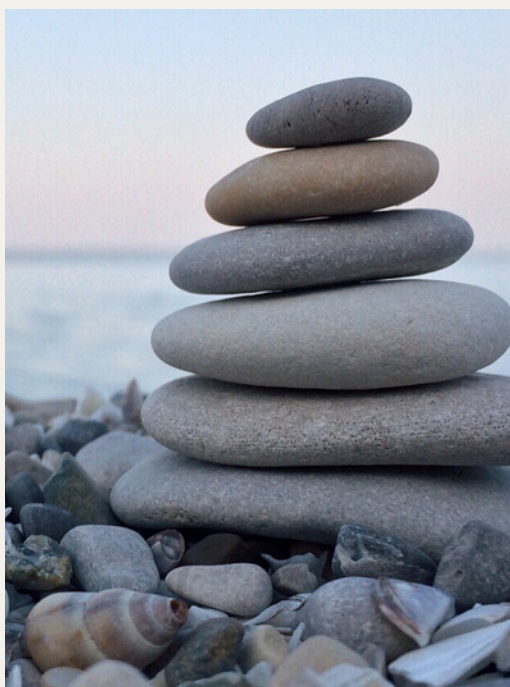
- **Deep Breathing:** Take in some deep breaths. This slows the heart rate and calms the nervous system.
- **Go for a walk:** Walking for 10-15 minutes, especially in nature, can clear the mind. Movement reduces tension and boosts mood.
- **Listen to calming music or sounds:** Use soothing playlists, ocean waves or sounds from nature. Music has a direct effect on your emotional state.
- **Do a brain dump or journal:** Write everything on your mind for 5-10 minutes. This releases mental pressure and provides clarity.
- **Use grounding techniques:** Try the 5-4-3-2-1 method - name 5 things you see, 4 things you feel, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, 1 thing you taste. This brings your focus back to the present moment.
- **Take a mindful break:** Sip tea, stretch, or sit quietly for a few minutes. Step away from what was overstimulating you.
- **Change your temperature:** Splash cold water on your face. This can 'reset' your nervous system and reduce anxiety quickly.
- **Laugh or smile:** Watch a funny video or talk to someone who makes you laugh. Laughter can reduce cortisol levels.
- **Talk to someone:** Vent to a friend, partner, or therapist. Expressing thoughts aloud helps process emotions.
- **Do a quick activity you enjoy:** Read a page from a book, doodle or do a puzzle. Shifting your focus to something enjoyable interrupts the stress cycle.

CHAPTER V

Long-Term Strategies to Build Resilience.

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from stress, adversity, or trauma—and the mind, body, and soul each play an important role in building and sustaining that capacity. Consider incorporating the following to build resilience when drafting your stress management plan:

- Physical Health
- Mental Health
- Sleeping Routines
- Nutritional Intake
- Fluid Intake
- Meaningful Work
- Healthy Relationships
- Physical Exercise
- Mental Exercise
- Learning
- Socialising
- Enjoyment
- Relaxation
- Recreation
- Hobbies
- Spirituality



CONCLUSION

Seeking Professional Support.

In conclusion, mastering stress management through a multidimensional approach involves identifying stressors and stress symptoms, applying strategies to relieve stress responses, evaluating what changes can be made to decrease stress levels, and adopting healthy routines and lifestyle choices to build resilience.

The root cause of stress is not always obvious. Stress and the impact of stress can be complex. If your stress levels are not improving and you are not hitting your goals, I can help you through deeper exploration.

If you are ready to take the next step, or if you have questions before deciding, I can be contacted on 0416 127 042 or book a discovery call <https://www.paulaackers.com.au>

- Paula Ackers