

# What stresses you?

## What is stress?

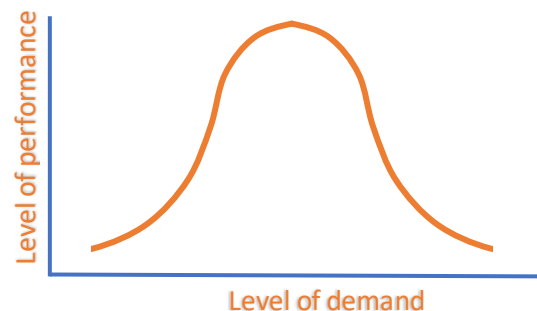


Stress is a physiological response to an environmental situation that occurs when the demands placed on an individual feel greater than their perceived ability to cope. These demands can stem from any source, personal or work related and when demands arise in different areas of life your ability to withstand demands in other areas diminishes.

Demand is balanced against the perceived ability to cope, so those with a strong sense of coping ability are less likely to feel overwhelmed by demands placed on them. It does not necessarily reflect an individuals' actual ability to cope.

The Yerkes-Dodson model (1908) suggested that there is a mid-point of demand at which performance improves which indicates a difference between pressure and stress.

This graph describes a generalised pattern that will differ for each individual, pressure or stress is a personal and individual response to context.



Different people will find different things stressful and to different degrees. This is important for your decision-making because a stressful specialty for one person may be a context that others thrive in.

## What do you look like when you are stressed?

In order to understand the types of contexts that are likely to be more stressful for you, you need to be able to recognise what you look like when you are under higher levels of stress.



In the grid on the next page add a few notes to describe how you feel and the types of behaviours you might exhibit. Pick out those behaviours others would see in you as well as the things only you might see when you are feeling positively pressurised and when you are feeling overwhelmed by the demands and stressed. Think about how this might appear in both high and low energy situations, for example, the difference between a stressed version of yourself running around at work and a stressed version of you at home for the weekend after a series of on-calls.

Yerkes, R. M., & Dodson, J. D. (1908). The relation of strength of stimulus to rapidity of habit-formation. *Journal of Comparative Neurology and Psychology*, 18(5), 459-482.

	<b>PRESSURED</b>	<b>STRESSED</b>
<b>HIGH ENERGY</b>	<i>When you have lots of energy what does a positively pressured version of you look like?</i>	<i>When you have lots of energy what does a stressed version of you look like?</i>
<b>LOW ENERGY</b>	<i>When you have little or no energy what does a positively pressured version of you look like?</i>	<i>When you have little or no energy what does a stressed version of you look like?</i>

## Work-related stress

The following six sources of workplace stress were identified as key organisational factors that cause stress (Palmer, Cooper & Thomas, 2004). Different people will experience these differently: some people find irregular work patterns more stressful than others, some like more control or autonomy while other may feel supported in a highly supervised environment.

Thinking about the behaviours that you exhibit when you are stressed, both high and low energy, consider the work-related factors that were present at these times and for each of the different work-based hazards:

1. Give a mark out of ten for how much personal significance that stressor has for you.
2. Identify exactly what it is that causes you stress. Which aspects of the work place stressor are most likely to make you feel like there is too much demand on you? Is it too little or too much?

Palmer, S., Cooper, C., & Thomas, K. (2004). A model of work stress to underpin the Health and Safety Executive advice for tackling work-related stress and stress risk assessments. *Counselling at Work, Winter*, 1-5.

Workplace stress hazard	Personal significance /10	Exactly what stresses you?
<b>Demands</b> Workload and work pattern (volume and complexity of work, shift work, deadlines).		
<b>Control</b> How much say and involvement you have in the way you work, how much autonomy and supervision you have.		
<b>Support</b> Amount of encouragement, nurturing and training resources provided by line managers and the organisation in general.		
<b>Relationships</b> The amount of conflict, harassment and bullying, how this is dealt with by the organisation.		
<b>Role</b> How well do people understand their role in the organisation, how well defined are people's jobs and responsibilities.		
<b>Change</b> How organisational change is managed and communicated (not the amount of change).		

*Looking at your specific stressors, are there any specialities that might be more or less stressful for you?*