

# Reframing stress

A short guide to understanding and managing stress

**A series of e-guides  
on Mental Fitness**

Cognomie Ltd

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**Mental Fitness for forward  
thinking organisations**



# Introduction

## A brief background to stress

Welcome to our e-guide to stress. We're going to cover some advice on understanding the principles of stress and explore ways to reframe stress and make the most of its benefits. Yes, stress has benefits.

At Cognomie we frame our thinking and approach around the principles of Mental Fitness. Mental Fitness provides a framework for us and you to manage our ability to excel and achieve the goals we desire, as well as find happiness and reward from both our working lives and our personal lives. We strongly believe in addressing these two areas of our lives holistically to achieve the best outcomes.

There are 12 areas to Mental Fitness but in this guide we're just going to focus on the foundation of stress. If you want to learn more about the other foundations, you can subscribe to our newsletter and receive the guides to the other areas, or just get in touch. We love talking to people.

We'll cover some more detail on the Mental Fitness framework at the end of this guide.



## Mental Fitness Foundations



Sleep



Confidence



Happiness



Motivation



Optimism



Resilience



Physical Fitness



Relationships



Work Life  
Balance



Anxiety



Stress



Communication



# We all experience stress in some form. We need to learn to understand its triggers for us and work with it

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Whilst we could talk all day about stress, we don't want to add to any stress burden you might already be carrying. Instead for the purpose of this guide we want to explain some of the fundamentals around stress and then explore some impact of stress on work and productivity. We'll then go on to some more practical elements on how you might assess your own stress and provide some tips and tricks on stress management.

You may think that you don't get stressed, but the truth is, we all get stressed, we just have different

triggers and vulnerabilities that bring that stress on. Equally, we need to change our views of stress. Feeling stress is not a weakness or a thing to be associated with failure. It's just stress and it affects us all in different ways. What stresses one person might be fun for someone else, it's very personal.

If you're here just to find out about managing your own stress, then skip down to section 12, we're not going to be offended and at the end of the day, we just want to help.





# Why stress can be important. And why it can be a problem.

In order for us to be able to manage stress, we need to start by understanding it better. There have been various definitions of stress over time, but we like this one from Stephen Palmer, a psychologist and coach from 1989.

“The psychological, physiological and behavioural response by an individual when they perceive a lack of equilibrium between the demands placed upon them and their ability to meet those demands, which, over a period of time, leads to ill-health “

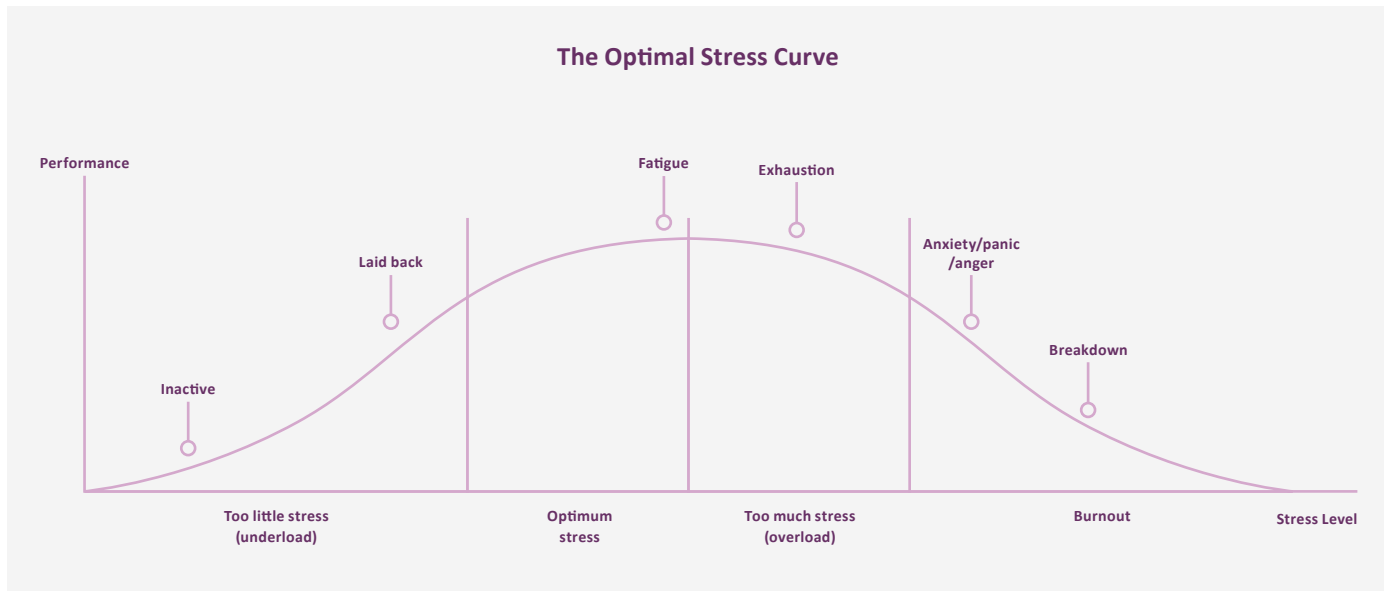
Some believe that stress is a state of mind, but it very much is a physical presence. When a stressful event occurs, or continues to occur, it triggers rapid communication between two areas of your brain, the hypothalamus and pituitary. These then communicate with the adrenal gland, which releases the stress related hormones - dopamine, epinephrine (also known as adrenaline), norepinephrine (noradrenaline),

and cortisol. The introduction of these hormones into our bodies can cause elevated heart rate, blood pressure and breathing rate. This can lead to increased alertness and cognitive ability, that might in some situations save your life or make you more productive. But too much and it can lead to a negative impact, creating a sense of loss of control, despair or helplessness.





# Eustress vs. Distress



**Getting the balance right** - Not all stress is bad, managing the balance is what matters most

These two different aspects of stress are often referred to as Eustress (positive stress) and Distress (negative stress). Getting the balance right on your stress levels can be the difference between stress playing a positive role in your life and performance, to it becoming negative and reducing your performance.

| Eustress                         | Distress                          |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Positive, energising, productive | Negative, restless, de-energising |
| More focus                       | Less focus                        |
| Short term                       | Long term                         |
| Exciting                         | Worrying / scary                  |
| Within coping mechanisms         | I can't handle this               |
| Creates confidence               | Creates insecurity                |
| Drives productivity              | Productivity sapping              |
| Manageable                       | Overwhelming                      |
| Healthy                          | Exhausting, can lead to fatigue   |



# Stress and productivity

There's no getting away from it, too much stress and our productivity can bottom out. As we've already discussed, too much stress will tip us over the top of the curve and into Distress. This undoubtedly leads to reduced productivity, not just at work, but across our lives - so avoiding if possible is a better outcome for everyone.

The indicators can be anything from a lack of focus, procrastination to an inability to be able to cope with the tasks that we might face at work or home and even depression. There has been a lot

of study into stress and its impact on productivity and the data is very clear. The following data is from a Health and Safety Executive statistical analysis report in Great Britain. In the report they identify that 828,000 workers suffered from work-related stress from 2019 to 2020 and that a whopping 17.9 million days were lost to stress-related illness and conditions.

In 2019/2020 work-related anxiety or depression accounted for 51% of all working days lost to ill health. These are not small numbers.



**828,000**

Number of workers suffering  
from work-related stress in Great  
Britain 2019-2020



**17.9 million**

Number of days lost to work-  
related stress in Great Britain  
2019-2020



In 2019/20 stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 51% of all work-related ill health cases and 55% of all working days lost due to work-related ill health.

**HSE Work-related stress statistics in  
Great Britain 2019/2020**

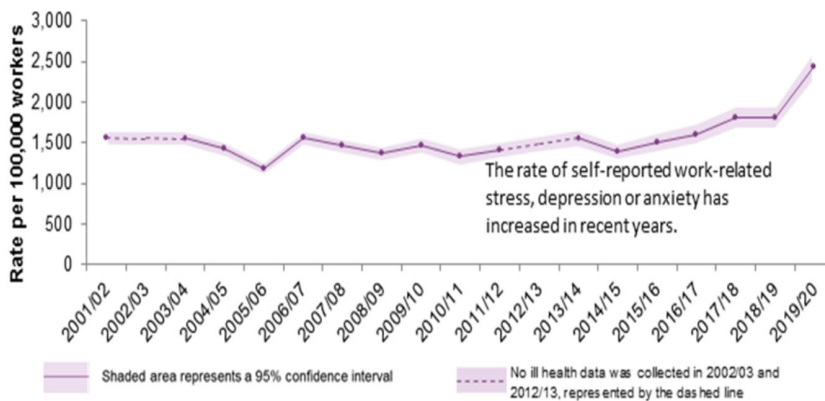


# Too much stress and our productivity can bottom out...

# 2,440

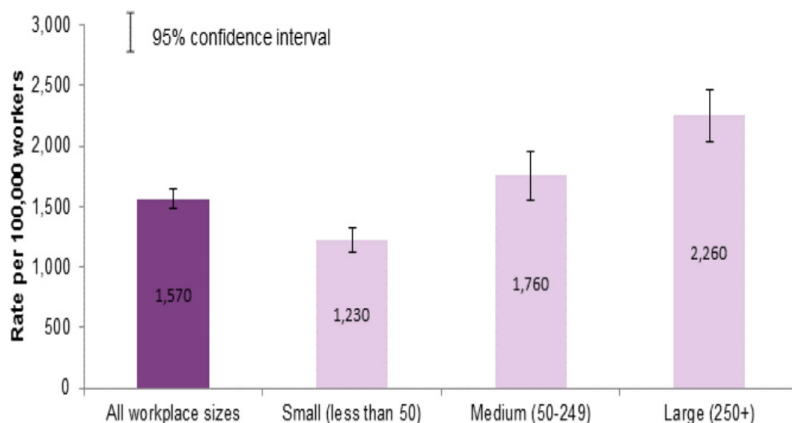
Number of employees per 100,000 suffering from work-related stress in 2020

Work-related Stress, depression or anxiety per 100,000 workers: new and long-standing



Source: LFS annual estimate, from 2001/02 to 2019/20

HSE Work-related stress statistics in Great Britain  
2019/2020 - Labour Force Survey (LFS)



Source: LFS, estimated annual average 2017/19-2019/20  
95% confidence intervals are shown on the chart.

HSE Work-related stress statistics in Great Britain  
2019/2020 - Labour Force Survey (LFS)

## Work-related stress is trending upwards

Sadly, looking at the data, the negative impact of work-related stress is trending upwards. From 2019 to 2020 the prevalence of work-related stress in employees was 2,440 per 100,000. That's going to have a significant impact on productivity in any workforce.

## Larger organisations suffer from higher rates of work-related stress

Work-related stress was statistically more prevalent in larger organisations. Smaller organisations had significantly lower rates of work-related stress





# The impact of Covid on our stress levels





# How Covid and the lockdown has impacted on our stress levels



## Gaining a better understanding of how the Covid pandemic may have influenced stress for all of us

Modern life contains plenty of reasons to suffer from excess levels of stress anyway. The added impact of Covid in some areas of our working lives is clear, with significant numbers of employees working from home, remote from their usual office working and to complicate matters further many coping with home schooling whilst trying to complete their usual workloads. This is before we consider the impact of concerns relating to Covid might have on households, be it from fear of contracting the virus, or from actually dealing with infections.

Trying to assess the impact these additional pressures might have on stress levels for work forces may take several years to truly understand. Some initial studies by the Labour Force Survey suggested that Covid had only a small impact on increased stress levels for employees, but this data was taken in March 2020, missing the later part of wave 1 and not including any of wave 2. Our own Cognomie data gives us a clear indication that stress levels have risen since Covid began to impact.

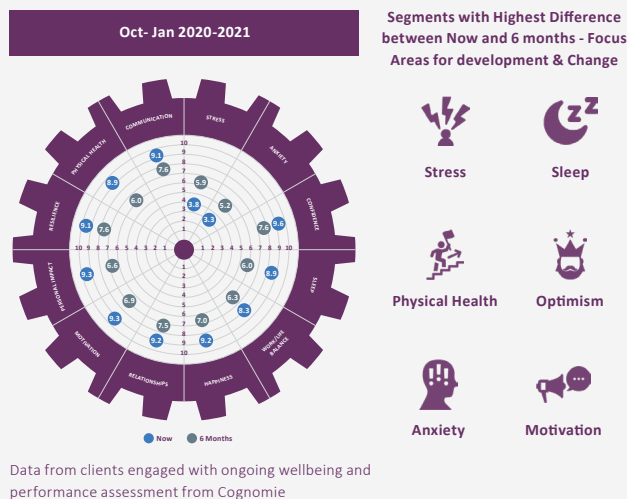


# The impact of Covid on stress in data

Digging deeper into our proprietary data to explore Covid's effect on stress levels

## MFQ Survey - FOUNDATIONS - COVID

Segment Average Score - Now & 6 Months



## Cognomie Coaching

Leadership data - from EMEA population of c.3000

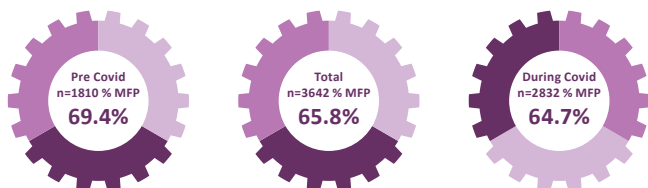
Senior Leadership (VP+ C-Suite) N=370 Difference between senior leadership (VP + C-Suite) and non- leadership from Mental Fitness Pulse for teams and individual Cognosis questionnaires:

|                   |                                      |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Stress            | +16% more stress than all population |
| Anxiety           | +19% more anxiety                    |
| Sleep             | -6%                                  |
| Work/Life Balance | -21%                                 |
| Happiness         | -9%                                  |
| Motivation        | -14%                                 |
| Optimism          | -11%                                 |
| Resilience        | +6% Slightly higher resilience       |
| Physical Health   | -16%                                 |

Data from clients engaged with ongoing wellbeing and performance assessment from Cognomie

The data above is taken from our Cognosis Mental Health analysis tool that allows us to assess, measure and report on the current state of an organisation's wellbeing, helping us to identify key areas for development. Using this tool we've been able to analyse the impact of Covid on various aspects of organisational Mental Fitness throughout the pandemic. Our own data, whilst on a smaller scale than the

Labour Force Survey, indicates increased levels of stress during lockdown in comparison to time periods prior to lockdown. Whilst this isn't attributed to Covid 19 in our reporting the potential for the lockdown to impact on the mental health of work forces is hard to ignore.

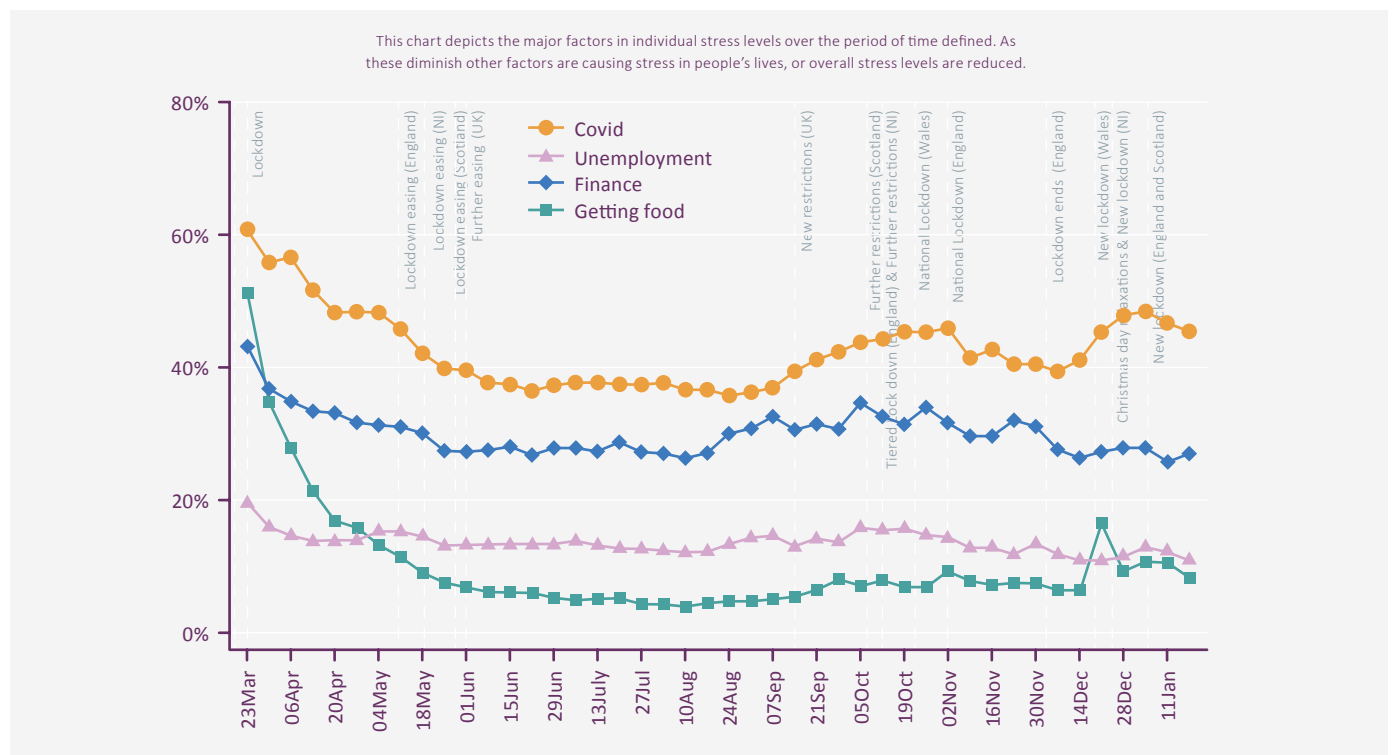


Our MFP score, which is representative of the overall scoring across the Mental Fitness foundations, saw a significant decline over the year of 2020.

## 4.7% decrease in wellbeing during the pandemic - Cognomie Mental Fitness data



# Roughly 30% of respondents state Covid as a factor in causing stress or major stress. Up to 60% state it as an overall cause of stress - MetLife Employee Benefit Trends



## UCL Covid Social Study

As part of the ongoing UCL Covid Related Social Study, roughly 30% of all respondents reported that Covid and concerns relating to Covid (catching Covid and worrying about becoming seriously ill from Covid) were a major factor in increasing their stress.


2 in 3 employees state they are feeling more stressed than before the COVID-19 pandemic

4 in 10 employees stated they struggle to navigate the demands that come with today's more flexible, "always-on" work-life world

## MetLife Employee Benefit Trends 2020

MetLife ran their Employee Benefit Trends and produced the "Navigating Together: Supporting Employee Wellbeing in Uncertain Times" report that identified significant impacts on stress during the pandemic period to date. Impact on daily routine, challenges around dealing with the blended world of home and work and reports of tiredness, stress and burnout feature significantly.



A woman with brown hair in a braid is talking on a blue smartphone. She is wearing a black and white checkered top. In the foreground, there is a stack of colorful sticky notes (yellow, orange, red, pink, blue, green) and some papers. A teal semi-transparent rectangle is on the left side of the image, containing white text.

# Your relationship with stress





# Stress is personal

Now we've explored what stress is, the effect it can have on us and our productivity, and how stress has affected the workplace during the Covid lockdown. It's time to dig deeper into your personal relationship with stress. Something that might cause one person a great degree of stress, might not even raise someone else's Cortisol levels. We all have a different relationship to stress and respond to different triggers.





# What kind of stress responder are you?

We all respond to stress in different ways. Here's 10 ways we might respond. Recognise yourself in any of them?

No. 1

## HEAD IN THE SAND

You recognise your stress. But then simply ignore it and hope it goes away. It won't. And like an ignored splinter it risks growing into something bigger.



No. 2

## IN DENIAL

This is the full-on, no holds barred, head in the sand, fingers in your ears approach. The idea that if you don't acknowledge it, it doesn't actually exist. (It does and denying it usually makes it worse).



No. 3

## SUCK IT UP

"It's inevitable. It's a part of life.". The danger is embracing the inevitability of stress to the point where you are more than comfortable for it to be ever-present in your life. Potentially an unhealthy response as the overload of stress hormones plays havoc with your system.



No. 4

## DECLARE WAR

There are those for whom their response to stress is to wage war against it. To beat it. It's them versus their stress. Last person standing. You cannot defeat an opponent you do not understand. It is an opponent that can never be (nor needs to be) defeated, but rather can (and should) be tamed and managed.



No. 5

## PLAY IT DOWN

"It's character building". "It keeps you on your toes". Nice idea, but it doesn't work that way. Yes, stress can have its upsides but just as one bad apple can ruin the whole barrel, so one negative impact of stress can undermine and undo all the good bits that may be present.





The net result of any or all of those responses to stress is fear, inactivity and a failure to manage the stress you experience. Which opens the door for a negative cycle to be unleashed where guilt, shame and avoidance create more stress. If those responses to stress all lead to such negative outcomes, how should you respond to stress?

No. 6

#### IT'S ALL ABOUT CHOICE

"Maybe I chose to feel stressed. Maybe I can just 'unchoose' it." Sorry. Not going to happen. Being stressed is not a choice, nor is not being stressed. The factors that lie behind stress ARE a matter of choice - our relationships, the job we do, etc. - but stress itself is not a choice, it is an outcome of choices.



No. 7

#### ALL IN THE MIND

"Stress isn't real. It only exists in my head?" A common response, and at the heart of the reluctance to open up a dialogue about stress. But stress is very much in the body, too. Weight gain, sleeplessness, infertility, fatigue, irritability - they are very much physical, and very much the reality of stress.



No. 8

#### STRESS AS A SUPERPOWER

"The more stressed you are, the more motivated you are". Stress may motivate you to do something different or new, or to work that little bit harder. But, if you keep facing the same stresses your ability to follow through on things will be crushed. Stress is a fight or flight response, and you are not meant to stay in that state for anything more than a brief moment.



No. 9

#### PASS THE MEDICATION

Medication may well be (and often is) part of the solution - that initial band-aid to stop stress in its tracks and give you the space to regroup and reassess. But where this response falls down is that medication alone won't fix your stress, it'll merely help you cope with it in the here and now.



No. 10

#### ALL IN THE SAME BOAT

Just at the point you should be asking for some help, you tell yourself that many have it far worse. The problem with this approach is that if you don't address it, it will get worse. Of course there are others who are suffering from stress, but you can't compare your situation with others. Your situation is unique to you. Own it and the effects it has on you will also be unique.







# Taking control of your stress

The common theme in those characters we've described is avoidance. It is nearly always easier (at first) to avoid acknowledging our stress than beginning to accept it and reframe it so that we are in the driving seat and in control of where we're going. So now it's time to explore some ways we can change gear and hit the road again, exploring new ways of thinking about stress. This is not about developing some positive mindset

that is not grounded in reality - developing a delusional approach to stress. It's about revealing and holding on to the facts, so that you establish a firm foundation upon which you can build solid structures and take control of the stress you encounter. And remember: no amount of changed thinking will ever make stress your friend, but it can help you turn it into your ally.



Photo credit – Holly Mandarin, Unsplash - <https://unsplash.com/@hollymandarich>

// The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another. **William James**



# 7 Steps to reframing stress

In order to work better with our stress, we can try to reframe it into things that are easier to work with and understand. We can take control of the stress, rather than it controlling us

## Step 1

### View your stress through a different lens

Look at the causes not the stress itself.

You can't make change when you're in conflict with stress.

## See things differently

Stress is not the cause of the conflict, the circumstances resulting in your stress are. Stress is not the bad guy here, he's just the front-man. Those circumstances are the bad guy.

Only when you identify, and change, the circumstances that cause your stress will you remove the cause of the conflict. And when there is no cause for conflict, there is no enemy. And when there is no enemy, there is no war.

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MAKE PEACE WITH YOUR STRESS. FOCUS ON IDENTIFYING THE CAUSES.

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## Step 2

### Not guilty verdict

Blaming yourself will make the stress feel worse. This is not your fault.

You can't make change when you think it's all your fault.

## Declare yourself innocent

Acknowledge that guilt and shame have no part to play in your relationship with stress. Struggling to cope, needing to take your foot off the gas for a bit, changing direction – that's not failing, and it doesn't make you a disappointment. There is no shame in stress, and even less shame in admitting that you are suffering its effects.

And there is no shame in wanting something different for your life.

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FORGIVE YOURSELF.

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## Step 3

### Focus on the facts

Facts help us establish a firm foundation upon which you can build solid structures and take control of the stress you encounter.

You can't make stress your friend, but it can be an ally.

## Challenge your thinking

Challenge and dismantle those views you hold of stress that are just plain wrong: that stress is a sign of weakness, it doesn't exist, it's inevitable and so on.

Take each view you hold of stress and put it in the dock. Challenge it, test it, accuse it. Root out the flaws in your current thinking, and focus on the facts.

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REJECT PRECONCEPTIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS. FIND THE FACTS.

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## Step 4

### Ignoring stress won't make it go away

Saying something out loud makes it real. Stand in front of a mirror and say it to yourself. Say it to a partner. Say it to a wall.

Make it real.

## Acknowledge reality

Say the words out loud: "I am experiencing stress", or "I feel stressed". There is something about saying words out loud, as opposed to holding them within, that brings a reality to your circumstances. Until you acknowledge the reality of something, you can't change it. Simply denying its existence, or burying your head in the sand may avoid the problem in the short-term, but no amount of ignoring or denying will make it actually go away.

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MAKE IT REAL. THEN BEGIN TO DEVELOP YOUR STRATEGY.

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## Step 5

### Unpick your experiences

Ask yourself why and where your stress occurs and how it makes you feel.

Putting yourself in control of stress requires intent and action.

## Stress under the microscope

Ask yourself some simple, but crucial, questions:

- Why is your stress occurring? Looming deadlines? A clash with your values? Something else?
- Where does it show itself? At work? At home? With particular people? In a particular place?
- What effect does it have? When stress does put in an appearance, how does it make you feel?
- What messages do you give yourself when you feel its effects? When you experience stress, how do you respond?

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UNDERSTAND WHAT GIVES YOUR STRESS ITS POWER. SO YOU CAN TAKE THAT POWER AWAY.

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## Step 6

### Own your stress

Identify the things that need to change. Be realistic but firm about how you can begin to change them.

You drive.

## In the driving seat

You identified the causes of your stress. What do you need to do take charge of those situations? Is it a question of better time management, hanging out with a different group of people, or changing your routine, for example? And, if it is, what changes could you make? Or is it something bigger than time management, a change of friends, or tweaks to your routine? Perhaps you need to make wider-reaching changes in your life. Are there circumstances that give rise to your stress that do not fit with who you are? What is it that jars against your values, or robs you of your joy? What would have to be different for that stress you feel in those moments to have no air to breathe?

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NOW YOU UNDERSTAND IT INSIDE AND OUT, YOU HOLD THE CARDS.

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## Step 7

### Find common ground

See stress in a different light. Instead of always seeing it as a negative, work to identify how to make it positive.

Work with your stress.

## Don't fight it, work with it

While it may not feel like it, stress actually wants to be on your side, rooting for you, not fighting against you. And that common ground that you and your stress response share - that desire for you to experience good things - is your starting point. And, from that starting point, you can explore the root cause events that trigger your stress more constructively - not automatically seeing them in a negative light, but being open to the possibility there may be something positive and helpful to be found.

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USE STRESS IN A POSITIVE FASHION.

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# Stress first aid



It's all very well us providing a way of reframing stress to help to deal with it in the long term. But what about the here and now? Sometimes stress can simply feel overwhelming and it's a challenge to even create a calm space to be able to think in. Here are two techniques that can be helpful 'in the moment' to try and ground ourselves and feel like we're in control of our stress.

## No 1. Ground yourself

This simple technique is easy to remember and a good way to create some breathing space to reflect on things. It's called 54321 and it helps us reconnect with our senses. You can do it anywhere and it only takes a few minutes. You can make the observations in your head or write them down:



### 5 - SEE

Take note of 5 things you can SEE in the environment around you.



### 4 - FEEL

Take note of 4 things you can touch. Touch them and notice how they FEEL.



### 3 - HEAR

3 - Take note of 3 things you can HEAR. Listen and notice how they sound.



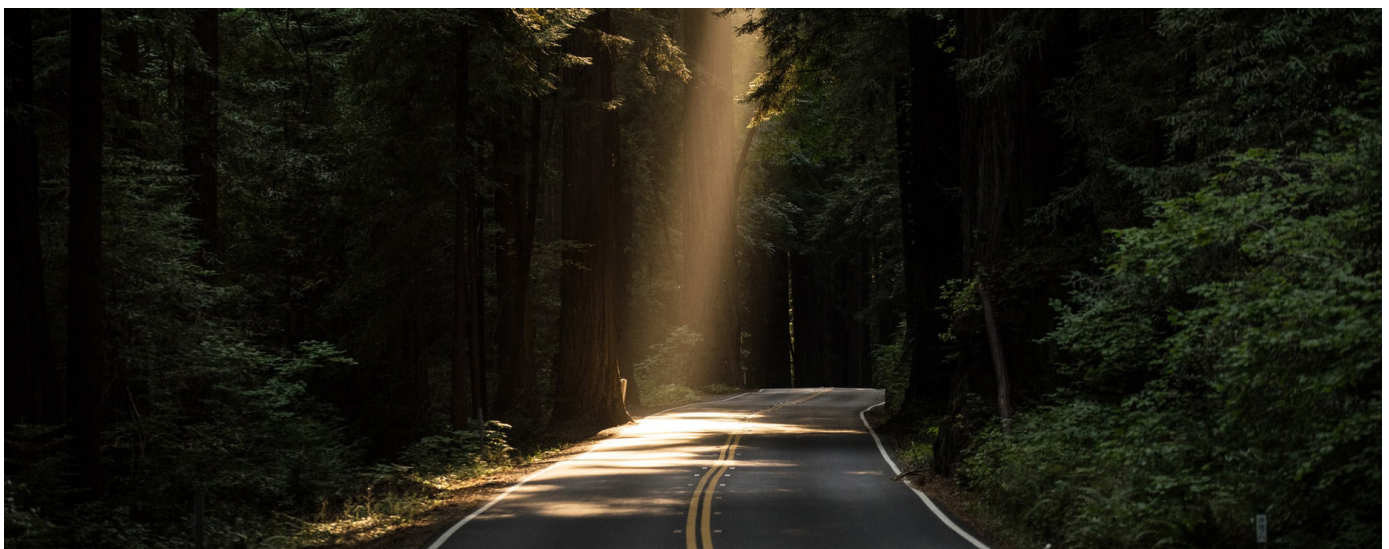
### 2 - SMELL

Take note of 2 things you can SMELL. Breathe them in and describe them in your mind.



### 1 - TASTE

Finally take note of 1 thing you can TASTE. This could be something nearby, or even your own skin.





## No 2. Box it up

Stress can occur because of the sheer volume of things we have going on that our brains are trying to make sense of. This simple technique is based on the idea of Cognitive Defusion and helps us to see our thoughts as what they are, rather than let our thoughts overwhelm us.

### You will need:

- A few minutes
- Your brain
- Some imaginary storage boxes (a mixture of different sizes)
- An imaginary pen
- An imaginary storage area

1

Spend some time just listening to your thoughts. If you're doing this exercise it's probably because you have lots of thoughts whirling around, and your stress is coming from thinking about lots of different things.

2

Now try and identify one of the largest thoughts. What is one of the bigger things contributing to your stress? A project you need to finish? Worries about your relationship? A health problem? Something else? Put this thought in a box and label the box using the marker pen.

3

Now do the same with 2 or 3 more thoughts. You can select a box based on the size of thought or just choose to tidy them all away neatly in the same size box.

4

The aim is to end up visualizing a few storage boxes labelled with some of your sources of stress.





# Watch out!



3 things that can stop us  
reframing our stress

It's easy to let things get in the way of taking steps towards approaching stress with a positive mindset. Here's 3 things to watch out for that can act as barriers to the best intentions.



1

## DON'T ROCK THE BOAT

The status quo is the easy option. It's comfortable, risk-free and predictable. Change, on the other hand, can be daunting. Change involves tough decisions. It can mean hardship and upheaval. It may cause tensions and frictions in relationships. In fact, change is everything the status quo is not: uncomfortable, filled with risk, and more often than not, completely unpredictable.



2

## FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

Not only is there the fear of change being hard and unpleasant, and stirring up difficulties and turmoil, there's also the fear of 'what if'. What if you screw it up? What if what you end up with is worse than what you started with? What if you lose everything – the good and the bad – that you currently have? What if it doesn't work out and there's no way back? What if you choose the wrong option? The fear that all those 'what ifs?' creates can be paralysing.



3

## DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

Fast cars, snappy suits, closets filled with shoes, fancy restaurants, big houses, exclusive vacations, the latest gadgets, perfectly manicured features. Social norms suggest that these are the things that define success.

Only that's not how it is. Success may look like some, or all, of those things for you. But it also may look like raising happy kids, being in a loving relationship, completing an overseas aid project, living a self-sufficient life on the land. It may not involve cars of any kind, fast or otherwise.

RECOGNITION IS A BIG STEP IN ITSELF TO OVERCOMING BARRIERS LIKE THESE. RECOGNISE YOURSELF IN ANY OF THEM? IF SO THEN TAKE CONTROL OF THEM AS WELL AND MAKE AN ACTIVE CHOICE NOT TO LET THESE BE YOUR REASON NOT TO ACT.



# Embracing change

We're not ending this e-guide with a nice simple "10 steps to removing stress" conclusion. Change is a journey. An adventure – filled with highs and lows, twists and turns, laughter and tears. When you throw off any preconceptions that you can fix all this with a formula or a 10-step process, and embrace that adventure, the game changes.



There are some things that can help you on your journey towards reframing stress.

## Understand your relationship with stress

Knowing that you are under stress and knowing that something needs to change does not make you ready to make that change happen. Wherever you are on your journey, that's ok. It's about understanding where you are, how ready you are for change, and what you want to come next.

Are you aware of stress but not interested in changing anything right now?

Maybe you're ready to make some changes, you have had enough of your stress, and you are prepared for what lies ahead.

Perhaps you recognised your stress long ago.

Or maybe you are so in control of your stress that it is now not even a thing for you. There may be some stress in your life, but these days it just passes you by.

## Achieve some quick wins

There are some simple things you can do right here, right now that help you more actively manage your stress

- Mindfulness - Spend 10 minutes a day doing some simple mindfulness practice
- Exercise every day
- Eat fresh food
- Reduce alcohol

## Own your triggers

With the basics nailed down, identify the activities, people or places that cause you to experience stress.

A great way to do this is to keep a stress journal to track when you feel particularly stressed, and what was going on when those feelings came up.

When you know what, who or where causes your stress, look for the situations you find yourself in where those activities, people or places become a factor (sometimes it's easier not to put yourself in a situation in the first place, than to try and extricate yourself from it).

## Find what needs to change

With your stressors, and the situations that fuel them identified, you can take a step back and survey the landscape. What would need to change for you to not feel stressed?

What would need to change for those stressors not to be a stressor any more? And, if they will always be a stressor for you, what will need to change so that you can avoid situations where they feature? Start imagining a day where the stress you experience is not present, or, at the very least, is well and truly under your control. What is it about that day that means you are in control and not your stress? List the differences.

## Get strategic

The changes needed will be different. Some will need to be made first. Some will take longer. Some will be harder to implement. To make the changes that need to be made, you need some goals, and you need a plan to guide your actions.

Start by looking at the changes you have identified and begin to think about the goals you will need to achieve to make each change happen.

Next, pick apart each goal so you can figure out what needs to be done to achieve it. Some quick win goals may only need one or two actions to be taken to achieve them, some may require multiple actions that may need to be spread over a period of time. Identify your actions and put them in order.

## Follow through

To see those changes you identified become a reality you actually need to carry out the plan.

Start by making a permanent reminder of why you are making all these changes. Create a picture of your 'in control' day in a way that works for you. It could be a 'dream board', featuring images that represent that day. Some people write it out as a poem or a piece of prose, or draw it. It doesn't matter how you do it, as long as it is meaningful (and inspiring) for you.

With the reason why you are doing all this firmly in your mind, take your plan and, with each action on it, build up a to do list. Then do the work. Take that to do list and knock each 'to do' over, ticking each one as you go and refreshing the actions you need to tackle as you work your way through your list.

**"Build a to do list. Do the work. Tick off each action as you go. Reframe your stress action by action and tick by tick."**





# The beginning of your adventure

We've tried to provide a framework you can use to reframe how you perceive and experience stress and to begin to create a roadmap to help you navigate from where you are now to a life where you are well and truly in charge of stress, rather than it being in charge of you.

The person on the journey is you. This is not about creating a 'new' person, it's about stripping away the layers of interpretation that life, fear of change, and the status quo have built up to hide the real version of you from sight. Your roadmap is all about finding and liberating that person, so that you can become the person you really are and live the life that you were made for.

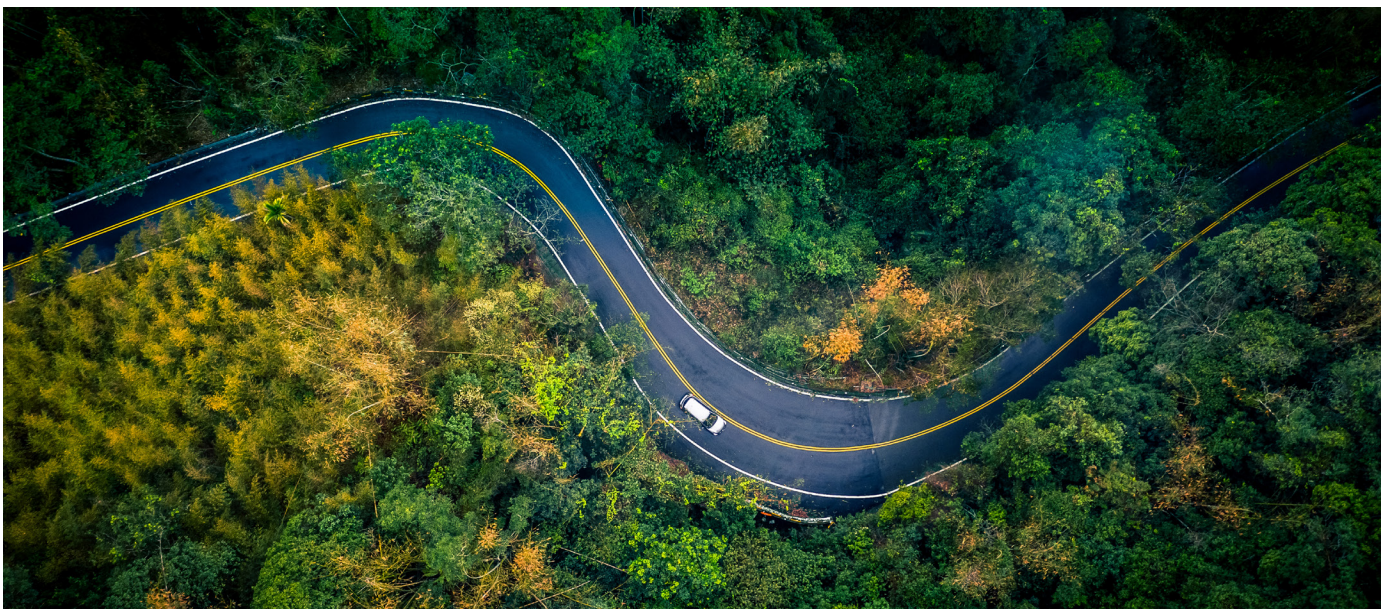
Your journey won't be a short one. It is better to be prepared for the long haul than expect to be able to hop straight to your destination.

There will be plenty of challenges along the way. Never lose sight of the reality that stress is a fact of life - you can't tame it once and forget about

it. Life ebbs and flows, new experiences come and go, and things change. And all of that means that, from time to time, no matter how good your abilities to manage it are, stress will, at some point, reappear. But that's OK. If you stay focused on your destination and the series of steps you need to take to arrive there, you can see each challenge as part of the adventure, rather than something to stop you in your tracks.

Any great adventure is about your personal journey. But it's also about the help you get along the way. It's your journey. But you don't have to complete it all alone. Over the next few pages you'll find some resources you can use to help you navigate and find your way, or get help with any challenges you may encounter.

For now we hope you can use this guide to start planning where you want to get to and the roadmap that will get you there. Enjoy the journey.







// For me, becoming isn't about arriving somewhere or achieving a certain aim. I see it instead as forward motion, a means of evolving, a way to reach continuously toward a better self. The journey doesn't end." **Michelle Obama**





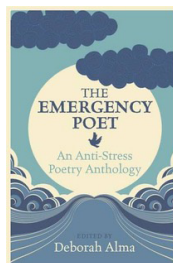
# Useful tools

A selection of tools, from books and audio files to web resources and apps that we like and found useful in gaining a better understanding of stress and how we might manage it.



Some good reads...

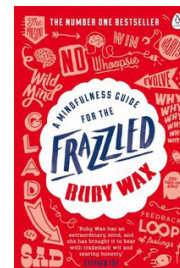
## What works best for you? Books, apps, audio...



### The Emergency Poet - An Anti-Stress Poetry Anthology

Deborah Alma

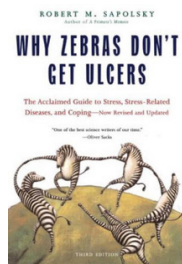
A brilliant new anthology of poems that will help you to overcome stress, depression and other anxieties.



### A Mindfulness Guide for the Frazzled

Ruby Wax

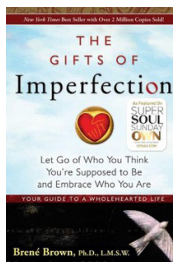
Five hundred years ago no one died of stress: we invented this concept and now we let it rule us. Let Ruby be your guide to a healthier, happier you. You've nothing to lose but your stress...



### Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers

Robert M. Sapolsky

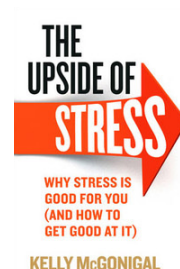
Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers features chapters on how stress affects sleep and addiction, as well as new insights into anxiety and personality disorder and the impact of spirituality on managing stress.



### The Gifts of Imperfection

Brené Brown

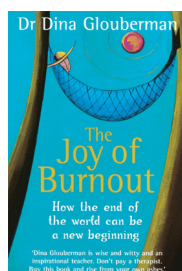
Brené Brown tries to help us find courage to overcome paralysing fear and self-consciousness, strengthening our connection to the world.



### The Upside of Stress

Kelly McGonigal

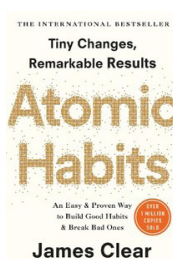
Over the years we've grown to see stress as Public Enemy No.1, responsible for countless health problems, relationship troubles, and unhappiness. But what if changing your mindset about stress could actually make you healthier, happier and better able to reach your goals?



### The Joy of Burnout

Dr. Dina Glouberman

This practical and challenging guide uncovers the life-saving message hidden in burnout, and takes us step by step to joy.



### Atomic Habits

James Clear

Transform your life with tiny changes in behaviour, starting now. People think that when you want to change your life, you need to think big. But world-renowned habits expert James Clear has discovered another way.

Audio help...



### Help with Sleep - Dr. David Peters

Mental Health Foundation

A audio link to help you to ground yourself through mindfulness before going to sleep. Audio file played through Soundcloud.

## Helpful apps and web resources...



### My Life - Stop, Think Breathe

Everyone is different. My Life offers personalised experiences to help you to be more mindful in your approach to your life.



### Guided Journaling

Presencing Institute

Help to track your thoughts and keep a journal of how you're feeling and when your triggers might occur. Allowing you to better understand your stress and then manage it better.



### 10 Stress Busters

National Health Service

If you're stressed, whether by your job or something more personal, the first step to feeling better is to identify the cause. This quick guide gives you 10 positive steps to focus your energy on.





## How we assess your organisation's Mental Fitness



### Cognosis Questionnaire



### Matching



### Evaluation



### Personal Development



### Improved Performance

# What is Mental Fitness?

"Mental Fitness helps to prevent poor mental health. It helps us to perform better at work and, ultimately to lead happier lives."

## A framework to help us to address all the components in our lives that contribute to wellbeing

From our happiness to managing stress and improving our physical health, it's an holistic approach to how we conduct and improve our lives.

Mental Fitness is the capacity and ability to improve your performance through taking control of your state of psychological and emotional wellbeing.

Mental Fitness is generated through the ability to identify and manage your internal capacities such as focus, attention, presence, perspective, confidence, the ability to appreciate strengths, positivity, determination and to achieve balance.

Secondly, Mental Fitness enables an individual to engage productively with their environment (whether work and home), to manage relationships positively, communicate well, and to feel fulfilled, motivated and optimistic.

A combination of all of these factors results in foundations of resourcefulness across the different skills and competencies important in a business setting.

These include: the ability to maintain a healthy sleep pattern, work-life balance and personal confidence and to communicate effectively and manage through uncertainty.

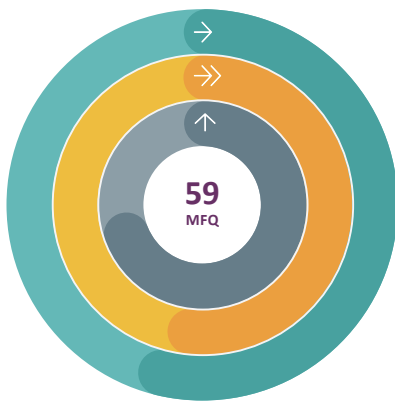
Developing a greater awareness of our Mental Fitness results in the development of a sense of wellbeing and happiness, valuable to each individual and invaluable to an organisation looking to sustain and improve business performance.





# Learn more about Cognomie

A global coaching consultancy with a difference. Using our unique digital platform, we're able to assess, measure and adjust your specific needs and then bring to bear our coaching network of experts and consultants on a global scale



## Measurement of effectiveness ensures our coaching work always remains on track

Our proprietary analysis platform allows us to identify the most effective way we can help your organisation, then match coach to coachee and provide ongoing performance analysis throughout the project lifetime.



A broad range of services, from coaching to consultancy



Our platform ensures tailored approaches to the coachee's needs



From healthcare, to cosmetics brands, to global consulting organisations - we've got the expertise to help

IMPROVING MENTAL FITNESS FOR EVERYONE

## Providing Mental Fitness for the world's forward thinking organisations.

We specialise in online coaching, training and consultancy to improve the wellbeing and performance of individuals and teams across a broad range of organisations.

We are powered by Cognosis - our data driven profiling and benchmarking tool. And supported by our global network of coaches, wellbeing and performance experts.

We use our proprietary Cognosis platform to benchmark individuals and use these insights to tailor personalised coaching and support at scale.

Our consulting-led process tailors this service to the needs of individual organisations.

Our approach is currently making a profound and sustainable difference to the wellbeing and productivity of teams and individuals all around the globe.

If you'd like to find out how our data-led approach can help your organisation improve productivity by strengthening the Mental Fitness of your team, we'd love to talk.

### Some of the sectors we work in

- 1 Energy
- 2 Telecommunications
- 3 Food retail
- 4 Healthcare
- 5 Hospitality
- 6 Consulting



# +90%

**Very good / excellent  
lasting results +6  
months post coaching**

#### **REDUCED ABSENCE RATE**

**DOWN 35% FOLLOWING INTERVENTION**

Increased wellbeing & satisfaction, reducing workforce absenteeism.

#### **INCREASED PERFORMANCE**

**UP 60% ON MEASURABLE INDICATORS**

Improved workforce performance following coaching and consultancy intervention for reported clients.



Improving Mental Fitness for everyone





# Meet Andy, our contributing author

## Andy White - Cognomie Coach and founder of Big Life Solutions

Following a personal experience with stress, Andy evolved his life for the better.



In early 2000 I found myself squarely in the eye of a storm. A storm where two worlds collided. The world of who I really was, but had spent 28 years denying, declared war on the world that I had convinced myself I wanted to live in. A world squarely defined by the success illusion but not a world that fitted who I really was. A world that was forcing me to live as a deeply flawed interpretation of the real me. A world that had become a pan of now exceedingly hot water.

As I squirmed in my pan, the guilt within me raged. I had it all. I was going places. My life was perfect. How could I be so ungrateful? How could I not want to give my wife and kids all that lay ahead in this world of career stardom? And then the other voice of guilt would have its say: how could I sacrifice my family for my own selfish gain? How could I prioritize my career over time with my wife and kids? How could I work harder for a fast car than I did on my relationships? How could I be such a jerk?

The battle raged inside. The tensions grew. The stress mounted. Headaches, sleeplessness, night sweats, IBS. All the signs were there. But I felt like I couldn't afford to be weak, or to fail. To

admit to stress was to commit career suicide. So I carried on. Until I couldn't carry on any more.

And the lid blew off. Big time.

I was in the shops and snapped at the poor girl serving. I don't remember what I actually said, but it couldn't have been good, because I remember my partner apologising to our server and marching me out of the shop with the instruction to "shut up and wait here". The next day I awoke feeling like I had been run over several times by an articulated lorry. Everything hurt. I couldn't move. I literally had to pick up my legs off the mattress so I could swing them out of the bed. I couldn't stand. I could only crawl to the bathroom. What the hell had happened to me?

What followed was nearly two years off work. Two years of putting myself back together after stress had tipped into burnout and a breakdown. Two years that saw me reach the lowest point of my life, a low point I have since come to call 'My Cheese Sandwich Incident'.

I had managed to put together the basic ingredients of one of my favourite sandwiches: cheese and ploughman's pickle. I had the bread. The cheese. The pickle. And the butter. I even had a knife and a plate. I knew what I needed in order to make the sandwich, I just had absolutely no clue how to make it.

No amount of telling myself to get a grip could point the way to turning those ingredients into my lunch. As someone used to running multiple projects at the same time, and being totally bulletproof and able to fix any problem, this was a very new, and very humiliating, experience.

But it also marked the turning point. For me, literally, the only way from there was up. I began an adventure of self-discovery, learning what made me who I really was, discovering the sources of the stress that had brought me to that point, and what needed to change, so I could start living my real life.

For me, discovering and committing to living my best life, took an existential crisis. A crisis that

literally very nearly killed me. But it didn't need to, and it most definitely should not have.

Even if you've skimmed over most of this e-guide so far, please pause here and take note:

You don't need to have your own cheese-sandwich moment to break free from the stress and challenges keeping you trapped in your gently warming pan of water. I hope you can step forward into your adventure and wish you all the best on your journey reframing stress.



Whilst we covered some details on understanding and managing stress, this is just a guide. If you believe you have issues with stress in your organisation, then get in touch

# About this guide, references & other information

## Our thanks

### Andy White

Contributing author and source of insight through the report

### Unsplash Photographers

Mimi Thian - <https://unsplash.com/@MimiThian>

John Towner - <https://unsplash.com/@heyowner>

Holly Mandarich - <https://unsplash.com/@hollymandarich>

## Get in touch



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[www.cognomie.com](https://www.cognomie.com)

## References

### HSE STRESS REPORT

A detailed report utilising the Labour Force Survey, detailing work-related stress, anxiety or depression statistics in Great Britain, 2020.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress.pdf>

### METLIFE - NAVIGATING TOGETHER: SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE WELLBEING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

A US report on how best to manage employee wellbeing during challenge times. Methodology details can be found on the full report.

<https://www.metlife.com/employee-benefit-trends/ebts2020-holistic-well-being-drives-workforce-success/>

### UCL - COVID SOCIAL STUDY

An ongoing social study that looks to investigate the social impact of Covid with the UK. This a broad reaching study that releases multiple data sets over time, The series of data sets can be accessed on the URL below.

<https://www.covidsocialstudy.org/results>

### POTENTIAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HSE

HSE report on the impact of the coronavirus in the workplace.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/adhoc-analysis/covid19-impact19-20.pdf>