



# Pressure management.

A certain amount of pressure is vital in order for us to perform at our best. However, if it creates strain and panic, our health and performance will suffer. Learn more in this factsheet.



## Pressure explained.

Pressure will affect us all at some point in our lives. Your perception of a situation and if you can cope with its demands will determine whether the pressure helps you succeed, or whether it becomes detrimental to your health and productivity. Everyone views situations and their ability to cope differently, so what's stressful for you might not necessarily be stressful for someone else. This is referred to as resilience, and your resilience can change on a daily basis, influenced by internal and external factors.

Identifying your stress triggers, accepting that some things can't be changed, and recognising your level of resilience at any given time, can all help you to deal with pressure.

## Pressure zones.

Pressure can be split up into different zones (Managing Pressure for Peak Performance – Stephen Williams – 2004). Understanding which zone you're in and how it might affect your health is vital to coping well with the situation at hand.

- Boredom zone - without stimulation and challenge we become bored and underachieve.
- Comfort zone - with more pressure (not too little and not too much) we enter a zone where we feel comfortable. There is a risk of becoming unproductive in this zone.
- Stretch zone - this is where we perform at our best. However, we need to keep 'jumping back' into the comfort zone to refresh and regroup. We can't stay in the stretch zone for too long without a release from the pressure, otherwise we will slip into the strain zone.
- Strain zone - the line between the stretch zone and the strain zone is a thin one. Our performance starts to fall off and we feel tired and fatigued - pressure turns into stress and we begin to experience difficulty concentrating, we become less creative and have lower intellectual performance.
- Panic zone - where we feel severely stressed and are at risk of serious health problems. The effects of pressure are quite considerable and we feel burnt out, exhausted and may even break down.

Ask yourself these questions when you're feeling under pressure: which zone am I in right now? Where do I spend most of my day? Make a note of how you feel when you're in each area.

## Signs of stress.

Stress can manifest itself emotionally, mentally and physically. You might feel overwhelmed, irritable, anxious or lacking in self-esteem. Your concentration might become difficult to maintain, with racing thoughts and worries spinning through your mind. You might also experience headaches, feeling dizzy, being unable to sleep, fatigue, and muscle pain.

For more information and advice on dealing with pressure and associated stress, visit the NHS Choices website. If you feel overwhelmed by stress, visit your GP.

## Developing resilience.

Your level of resilience will determine how you cope with and manage pressure. Your brain is like a computer, and if it's constantly running in overdrive it will burn out. Including downtime regularly will help to ensure your stress hormones have time to fall and your brain has time to process your day. Try activities such as colouring and jigsaw puzzles, which can create a quiet environment to help your brain reboot.

Mind Charity recommends developing resilience through lifestyle changes such as making time for friends and family, and practising being straightforward when communicating. Try combining regular exercise with healthy eating, and ensure that you take a break or holiday from your normal routine. Reward yourself for accomplishments in the face of pressure, and forgive yourself for any mistakes you make. Nobody is perfect, and putting extra pressure on yourself won't help.

Visit the Mind Charity website at [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) for more information on developing resilience.



After frequently finding myself in the 'panic' and 'strain' zones, I knew it was time to put my health first.