



Managing Stress

Covering:

HLTWHS006 Manage personal stressors in the work environment

Reference Materials

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All enquiries about this facilitator guide should be directed to:

National Training Manager
St John Ambulance Australia
PO Box 292
Deakin West ACT 2600
Email: training@stjohn.org.au

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Understanding Stress

What is stress?

- The interaction between your coping skills and the demands of your environment
- A reaction which occurs when the actual or perceived demands made on an individual overwhelm that person's ability or resources to manage the situation.
- An individual perception and assessment of the environment
- The rate of wear and tear on the body caused by living
- It comes as a response to any situation which puts pressure on our resources and coping ability
- The situation may involve a gradual build-up of pressure, or it may be a sudden stressful event

Evolutionary View of Stress

- In evolutionary terms stress is good for us
- Humans evolved from a fairly dangerous environment
- Humans developed a sympathetic nervous system, capable of pumping chemicals to prepare our body for action in microseconds
- Hearts raced, breathing rate increased, brains on red alert and focused, muscles tensed, energy released from emergency stores
- Once the immediate danger has passed, our parasympathetic nervous system takes over – it reverses the changes

Basic Facts

- Stress adds flavour, challenge and opportunity to life
- Without stress life would be pretty dull and boring
- Too much stress can seriously affect your physical and mental well-being
- Too little or too much stress can result in deterioration in performance and health
- It is important for your health to find an optimum level of stress that we can learn to manage effectively

Did you know that excessive stress ...

- Doubles our risk of heart attacks
- Increases our likelihood of developing serious illnesses like cancer
- Weakens the immune system
- Makes people more susceptible to colds and flu's
- Leads to ailments from gum disease to osteoporosis
- Causes premature aging
- Leads to life-threatening illnesses like diabetes, heart disease and cancer

Unhealthy stress

- Lack of concentration
- Memory loss
- Poor decision-making
- Worry, anxiety, fear
- Depression
- Fail to meet deadlines
- Increased conflict
- Poor work quality
- Sleep difficulties
- Ineffective problem solving
- Overly self-critical
- Low motivation
- Confusion
- Increased mistakes
- Easily disgruntled
- Emotional outbursts
- Change in drug/alcohol/nicotine use

Healthy stress

- High energy levels
- Good concentration
- Deadlines met
- Good information flow
- Efficient decision-making
- Cheerful manner
- Appropriate sense of humour
- Enhanced achievements
- High level of motivation
- Feeling valued & competent
- Good team spirit

The Fight/Flight Response

- When we feel threatened, our bodies are “hard-wired” to either fight or run away
- Most modern stressful situations do not offer this choice
- Today, our stressors are much more subtle and complex
- In many modern situations we cope better, think more clearly and make better judgments if our stress is at a manageable level

Cumulative Stress

- Series of smaller problems that go on for a long time
- Not possible to relax between demands
- May be the sheer quantity or continuity of the work
- Resources, opportunities and supports needed to manage the stress are lacking (this can relate to work place and concurrent home issues)
- Nervous energy is aroused to deal with the situation and emotional reserves are used up to cope with worries and feelings without realising it

Chronic Stress

- Chronic stress can occur when the stressors of life are unrelenting or go unchecked
- It can inhibit digestion, reproduction, growth, tissue repair and the responses of your immune and inflammatory system
- Chronic stress can make you more susceptible to colds and flu, can exacerbate some diseases, and worsen some conditions
- Fortunately, you can reduce stress levels through the ‘relaxation response’-using your mind to change your physiology

Sources of Stress

- The amount of stress that you can tolerate before you become distressed varies with your life situation and age
- It is crucial to recognise stressful situations, address them, and develop strategies to manage your stress

Perception

- Stress is unique to each of us
- While we often think of stress as the result of external events, the events themselves are not always stressful
- It is the way in which the individual interprets and reacts to an event that produces stress
- The key to stress reduction is identifying strategies that suit you as an individual

Personal Stress Questionnaire

Complete this questionnaire which is in five sections.

1. Stressors

On the following page is a list of situations that many people find stressful. Use the rating scale to identify how you react to each of these situations.

Rating scale:

1 = Highly effective

2 = Balanced

3 = Strained

4 = Stressed out

N/A = Does not apply to me

		1	2	3	4	N/A
Work changes and pressures						
1	Too many responsibilities					
2	Demanding or unreasonable deadlines					
3	Conflicts with or conflicting demands unclear expectations from superiors or management					
4	Demanding or difficult customers					
5	Difficult co-workers					
6	Lack of control over my workload or decisions affecting my job					
7	Office politics					
8	Job insecurity due to cutbacks, layoffs, downsizing, reorganisation					
9	Limited opportunity for advancement or inadequate pay					
10	Too much or too little contact with people					
11	Too many hassles and interruptions					
12	Other work stressor					

		1	2	3	4	N/A
Personal and home life						
13	Death of a significant person, i.e. a spouse, friend, relative or family member					
14	Separation or divorce					
15	Serious illness or injury					
16	Not enough money or heavy debt					
17	Conflicts with partner, in-laws, family or friends					
18	Sexual conflicts or frustration					
19	Problems with child care					
20	Conflict with spiritual, moral or ethical values					
21	Other personal stressors					
Sub-total						

Total score:

2. Close relationships

Use the scale given below to answer the following questions according to your relationship with your significant other (e.g. spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, partner). Please answer all items.

Rating scale:

- 1 = Very satisfied
- 2 = Somewhat satisfied
- 3 = Somewhat dissatisfied
- 4 = Very dissatisfied

	1	2	3	4
Degree of communication				
Ability to resolve conflicts				
Handling of money				
Sexual relationship				
Sharing duties and household chores				
Degree of affection				
How well I get along with my partner's friends and relatives				
How well my partner gets along with my friends and relatives				
Degree of closeness				
My role in the relationship				
My partner's role in the relationship				
Raising children (If you don't have any children, please put your overall satisfaction with your relationship for this question)				
Leisure activities with my partner				
Sub-total				

Total score:

3. Medical and mental health conditions

Please answer the following questions by selecting a single response.

Rating scale:

1 = I have never had this condition and have no family history of it.

2 = I have never had this condition, but have a family history of it.

3 = I had this condition in the past, but it has been treated.

4 = I currently have this condition.

	1	2	3	4
High cholesterol				
Diabetes				
Cancer				
High blood pressure				
Heart disease				
Anaemia				
Stroke				
Seizures				
Asthma				
Arthritis				
Heart Attack				
Mood disorder				
Anxiety disorder				
Schizophrenia				
Substance-related disorders				
Eating disorder (anorexia, bulimia)				
Sleep disorder				
Sub-total				

Total score:

4. Signs and symptoms of stress

The following is a list of physical, mental, emotional and behavioural symptoms of stress. If a symptom is applied to you over the past 6 months or you anticipate the symptom occurring in the coming year, please rate the severity of the symptom you have experienced or anticipate experiencing on the 4 point scale next to the item. Please rate every item.

Rating scale:

- 1 = Low or none
- 2 = Mild
- 3 = Moderate
- 4 = Severe
- N/A = Not applicable

	1	2	3	4	N/A
Physical symptoms					
Headaches (tension, migraines)					
Back pain					
Tense neck and jaw					
Sleeplessness					
Cold hands or feet					
Fatigue low energy, tired					
Diarrhoea					
Nail biting					
Reduced immunity (frequent colds or flus, allergies or infections)					
Heart racing or rapid pulse					
Loss of appetite					
Ulcers					
Frowning, wrinkled forehead					
Trembling or shaking					
Nausea					
Mental symptoms					
Suicidal					
Forgetfulness					
Disorganised thinking					
Lack concentration or attention					
Obsessive thinking					
Worry					
Unable to prioritise					
Decision-making difficulties					
Irrational beliefs and self talk					
Disturbing thoughts or daydreams					

	1	2	3	4	N/A
Emotional symptoms					
Anger, irritability					
Depressed, sad, downhearted, blue					
Helpless					
Pessimism					
Flattened effect (e.g. feelings are dulled)					
Impatient					
Frustrated					
Feel inadequate					
Feel suicidal					
Tenseness or uptight					
Personal behavioural signs					
Lack close relationships					
Won't take risks					
Avoid change					
Poor self-esteem					
Lack self-forgiveness					
Indecisive					
Lack drive, unmotivated					
Overreacting					
Passive, dependent, controlled by others					
Fear losing control					
Domineering					
Critical					
Lack compassion					
Can't relax					
Unable to express true feelings					

	1	2	3	4	N/A
Work behaviour signs					
Lose creativity					
Aggressive/hostile					
Rigidity / by the book					
Low motivation					
Lack self-initiative					
Absenteeism					
Avoid responsibility					
Inability to work well with others					
Poor time management					
Create tension in others					
Poor communications					
Waste time or procrastination					
Unable to complete tasks					
Crisis oriented					
Lose clarity of goals					
Sub-total					

Total score:

5. Stress coping skills and personal resources

The following is a list of coping skills, habits and personal resources that are effective for combating and preventing stress. Please rate on the 4 point scale the level of your ability to apply each skill to reduce your stress.

Rating scale:

- 1 = Strongly agree
- 2 = Somewhat agree
- 3 = Somewhat disagree
- 4 = Strongly disagree

	1	2	3	4
I have good nutritional habits that include eating a balanced diet, taking appropriate nutritional supplements and limiting caffeine, sugar and fat intake.				
I am aware when stress builds up in my body and use relaxation techniques to reduce body tension.				
I am physically fit and use regular exercise to combat and prevent stress.				
I am able to ask for and receive support from friends, family members or professionals as a buffer against stress.				
I am able to effectively listen to others and comfortably express my own thoughts, feelings and opinions.				
In conflict situations, I am able to speak up on my own behalf, honestly express my opinions, feelings, and wishes, give constructive criticism and refuse unrealistic requests.				
I am good at managing money, do not needlessly worry about financial matters, and have enough money to meet most of my needs and use in the service of reducing stress.				
I am able to efficiently manage my time.				
I am able to establish priorities, take action on my plans, goals and set limits, schedule effectively, avoid procrastination and pace my efforts.				
I am skilled at defining problems, approaching them in a timely and logical way, obtaining information, finding workable solutions, considering alternatives, seeing potential consequences and evaluating the results of my actions.				
I am able to reduce stress by consciously monitoring, challenging and changing negative thought patterns, placing problems into proper perspective, practicing relaxation techniques, mentally rehearsing coping behaviours and using positive self-talk and visual images.				
I am able to change rigid and absolute stress-inducing beliefs into more functional beliefs such as ' <i>I can be happy even if others disapprove of me</i> ', ' <i>The world doesn't have to meet my wishes all the time</i> ' and ' <i>I don't have to be perfect to be worthwhile</i> '.				
I do not take myself too seriously and use humour to balance life's frustrations.				
Sub-total				

Total score:

Results

Section 1

0 - 21	Excellent
22 - 42	Good
43 - 64	Fair
65 - 84	Poor

Total Score

0 - 129
 You are experiencing very little stress and have excellent strategies for dealing with it. Keep up the great work.

Section 2

0 - 13	Excellent
14 - 27	Good
28 - 41	Fair
42 - 52	Poor

130 - 257
 You experiencing some stress but generally are able to deal with it in an effective manner. If your stress is occurring in one or two main areas, then the strategies in this course will help you reduce it.

Section 3

0 - 17	Excellent
18 - 34	Good
35 - 51	Fair
52 - 68	Poor

258 - 387
 You have aspects of your life or certain periods of time that cause you significant stress. Having identified what they are, you can now take steps to reduce the stress that you are experiencing.

Section 4

0 - 65	Excellent
66 - 130	Good
131 - 195	Fair
196 - 260	Poor

388 - 516
 You are feeling very stressed for most of the time and it is affecting your work and home situations. Having identified your stress levels, and which areas are the most concerning, you are in a great position to gain a great deal from this course.

Section 5

0 - 13	Excellent
14 - 26	Good
27 - 40	Fair
41 - 52	Poor

Your personal stress balance

Using your sub-totals record your results in the chart below. Is one area causing you more problems than others?

Poor					
Fair					
Good					
Excellent					
	Stressors at work and home	Close relationships	Health	Signs and symptoms	Coping skills and strategies

Managing Stress

The best way to cope with stress is to recognise when your stress levels are building

Stress signals fall into 4 categories:

1. Thoughts
2. Feelings
3. Behaviour
4. Physical symptoms

Thoughts

Self criticism	Preoccupation with the future
Difficulty concentrating or making decisions	Repetitive thoughts
Forgetfulness	Fear of failure

Feelings

Anxiety	Fear
Irritability	Moodiness
Embarrassment	

Behaviour

Stuttering or other speech difficulties	Nervous laughter
Crying	Teeth grinding
Acting impulsively	Increased smoking
Alcohol or other drug use	Increased or decreased appetite

Physical symptoms

Tight muscles	Headaches
Cold or sweaty hands	Back or neck problems
Sleep disturbances	More colds and infections
Stomach distress	Fatigue
Rapid breathing or pounding heart	Dry mouth
Trembling	

Five Strategies for Managing Stress

1. Modifying Stressors – What can I change?
2. Changing our self-talk changing perceptions – Replacing irrational beliefs
3. Effective communication – Increased self awareness – expressing feelings – being assertive – resolving conflict
4. Living a healthy life style – balanced diet and sleep – exercise and relaxation
5. Using a social support network – talking to family and friends

Coping Strategies

Everybody is an expert in coping. We all cope in different ways. Some of our coping styles are effective and reduce our level of stress, others are less effective and can serve to increase the amount of stress we are experiencing.

Task Orientated Coping Strategies: these are used to alter the problem causing the stress. Examples are:

- Use problem solving techniques
- Schedule time better
- Think about how you have solved similar problems
- Think things through before acting

Emotion Orientated Coping: are strategies which alter our emotional response to the problem causing the stress.

- Sense of humour
- Optimism – positive outlook
- Journaling

Avoidance Coping: are strategies which enables you to avoid both the problem and how you feel about it. This form of coping is further divided into two sub-categories:

- Distraction: doing other things to avoid dealing with the stressful situation or the feelings evoked such as shopping or eating; and
- Social Diversion: becoming more involved with friends and social activities such as sports and parties to become distracted from the problem

Self Care Strategies

Some techniques you can use to relieve stress:

- Breathing
- Stretching
- Take a break
- Self- Talk
- Exercise
- Meditation
- Plenty of rest/ sleep
- Talk to friends/ family members / co-workers – don't isolate yourself
- Recognise stress and think of ways to deal with the cause
- (Special note: - turning to cigarettes, coffee, alcohol and other drugs is not a long term solution!)

Change how you look at time

- Develop a realistic schedule of daily activities that includes time for work, sleep, relationships and recreation
- Use a daily 'to do' list
- Use your time and energy efficiently
- Improve your physical surroundings by tidying your house or straightening the office
- Ensure you set aside time for relaxation – we all service our cars to get from A-B, we need to do the same for our bodies



Debriefing

- Debriefing with a colleague, friend or family member can serve to decrease stress reactions.
- They provide individuals an opportunity to express their emotions
- As the debriefer:
 - Actively listen
 - Validate thoughts and feelings
 - Normalise
 - Reassure
 - Refer onto professional help if required
- As the person being debriefed:
 - Think about the appropriateness of who you share your experience with
 - It is important to share with someone who will make you feel less stressed, rather than more stressed
- Consider seeking professional assistance if the experience of stress is long standing

Active or Passive Stress Management

Passive coping strategies, such as escaping, avoiding, and denial of the stressor, can be contrasted to active coping strategies, such as seeking social support, engaging in activism, or acceptance.

1. Read the statements in the table below and determine whether you are an active stress manager or a passive victim of stress in each instance.

Active stress manager	Passive victim of stress	Rate yourself: Active/Passive
Puts energy into areas that can be managed.	Leaves many things to fate or chance.	
Anticipates and plans for the future.	Does not think ahead and does not set clear priorities.	
Has reserves of time, energy for the unexpected, unplanned and crisis events.	Faces deadlines by cramming at the last minute.	
Takes time to evaluate alternative strategies.	Let problems accumulate.	
Adopts a strategy to reduce stress directly.	Increases levels of stress with their own reaction.	
Avoids overloading capacity by pacing and relaxing.	Lack of pacing, self-care or diversion.	
Seeks help and support as much as possible.	Works alone and does not call on help or outside resources.	
Manages time by focusing on priorities.	Takes on tasks that cannot be completed or are overwhelming.	

Work Life Balance

- "Work-life balance "was coined to address the unhealthy life choices that many people were making;
- They were choosing to neglect other important areas of their lives such as family, friends and hobbies in favour of work-related chores and goals.

What is balance?

BALANCE means being in control and feeling comfortable with your choices.

Work – life balance concepts

- Time balance, which concerns the amount of time given to work and non-work roles.
- Involvement balance, meaning the level of psychological involvement in, or commitment to, work and non-work roles.
- Satisfaction balance or the level of satisfaction with work and non-work roles.

Balancing work and life

- Imbalance is often a cause of stress
- Your work life effects your life at home, and vice versa

Why is it so difficult to balance?

AT WORK:

- People working longer hours
- Changing accountability – more work, less staff
- Changing role of men and women
- Changing work patterns
- Organisation Culture (promotion of those who are seen to “put in”)
- Techno-stress
- Baby boomer/Gen X/ Gen Y

Why is it so difficult to balance?

Outside of work:

- Changing gender roles
- Dual careers
- Mortgage Stress
- Consumerism
- Travel
- Changing family structures – caring, singles

The Australian Work & Life Index (2007)

- 60.7% reported work regularly keeps them from spending time with families/friends
- More than half often feel they are rushed or pressed for time
- 1 out of 4 employees feel that their lives are “out-of-balance”
- Less than half reported they had a good fit between their actual and preferred working hours

What happens if it is ‘out of whack’

- Stress
- Physical symptoms
- Fatigue
- Family Breakdown
- Conflict
- Depression

Time Poverty

- Understand time poverty – which activities can be abandon?
- Your values determine how you spend your money, your time and your energy
- How long since you examined them?
- Don’t they change along with our life stages?
- What did you value most when you were 20?

Are you suffering from Time Poverty?

- Life has become a sum of tasks, usually the short term ones take priority
- Feeling of “if only I have 30 hours a day”
- A takeaway fan? – home cooked meals are a thing of the past
- Running from appointments to appointments (cramming in a teleconference in between)

- Taking work home
- In this highly connected world, you are disconnected from people who matter to you
- “Leisure time” means small chunks of stressful moments (ask the parents)
- “Sunset fatigue”

Tips for Work

- Prioritising
- Procrastination
- Say ‘No’
- Managing email

Prioritising

It’s not about who shouts the loudest, It’s about the interactions between importance and urgency.

ABC MODEL

- A: MUST be done today (deadline, meetings)
- B: Should be done today (often today’s B become an A item tomorrow)
- C: NICE to do today (not critical, either the tasks are optional or can wait)

Complete a list – first thing in the morning and highlight all the A’s

- Don’t attempt to do a B if any of the A’s are not done
- Ignore C....for now, they’ll go on to the tomorrow’s list
- Add any new items to the bottom of your list

Avoid Procrastination

- Tackle the most Challenging A task before dealing with the rest of the day
- Focus on one thing at a time to minimise the sense of being overwhelmed
- Break large project into small achievable tasks – add them to the list
- Don’t keep any task undone till the last minute – create deadlines



Saying “No”

BAD REASONS:

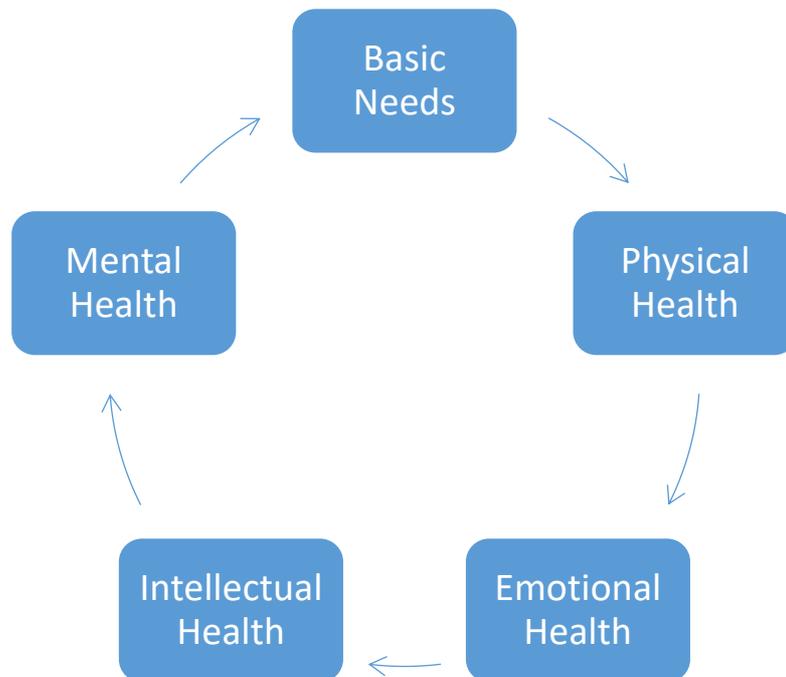
- It's too difficult
- I feel like I'm asking other people to do my work
- Even if you are willing to work 12 hours a day, there are just not enough hours
- Other work will be compromised
- Lacking the necessary skills

Work Strategies; Managing Email

- Check email at set times
- Check your email only 3 times a day
- Empty your inbox at least once a day
- Create folders to file your email
- Use Rules in Outlook
- Two minute rule
- Drag emails into your calendar and assign time to work on them

Are you happy about yourself?

- Do I get enough time to spend with the people I love?
- Can I enjoy the things I work so hard to have?
- AM I (still) HAVING FUN?



Do not confuse having a career with Having a life!

What leads to success?

- Push yourself; mentally, physically, intellectually
- Passion; work for love
- Work; have fun working, make work fun
- Serve; serving others is a privilege, create something of value
- Focus; focus fully on one thing, don't have partial focus
- Persist; through failure, through CRAP: criticism, rejection, assholes, pressure
- Ideas; listen, observe, be curious, ask questions, problem solve, make connections
- Good, get good at what you do (practice, practice, practice)



Work/Life Balance Questionnaire

1. Assess your own work and life balance by responding either true or false to the following statements.

	True	False
I find myself spending more and more time on work-related projects.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often feel like I do not have enough time for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often feel like I do not have enough time for my family and friends.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often feel like I have too much to do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have lost sight of why I chose my career.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have lost sight of who I am as an individual.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I cannot define myself without reference to my career.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I cannot remember the last time I spent a whole day relaxing or engaging in leisure activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel stressed out most of the time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I wish I had more time for hobbies or personal interests.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel like I never have a break between demands or projects.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I cannot remember the last time I went to the movies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have missed family or personal events because of work demands.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel like everything I do is for the benefit of other people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often bring work home with me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often work on weekends or on my days off.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I find it difficult to leave tasks for tomorrow.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am comfortable delegating work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am good at prioritising competing demands.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I dread going to work every day.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Burnout rating scale

Think over the past 3 months and score the following questions according to how often you have experienced these symptoms.

- 0 = Never
- 1 = Very rarely
- 2 = Rarely
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Often
- 5 = Very often

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Do you feel fatigued in a way that rest or sleep does not relieve?						
Do you feel more cynical, pessimistic or disillusioned about things that you used to feel positive about?						
Do you feel a sadness or emptiness inside?						
Do you have physical symptoms of stress e.g. insomnia, stomach pains, headaches, migraines?						
Is your memory unreliable?						
Are you irritable or emotional?						
Have you been susceptible to illness lately, e.g. colds, flu, food allergies, hay fever?						
Do you feel like isolating yourself from colleagues, friends or family?						
Is it hard to enjoy yourself, have fun, relax and experience joy in your life?						
Do you feel that you are accomplishing less in your work?						

Adding up your total score will give you some indications whether you are likely to burn out or not.

0 – 15	You are doing well.
16 – 25	Some attention needed, you could be a candidate.
26 – 35	You are on the road to burnout. Make changes now.
36 – 50	You need to take action immediately – your health and wellbeing are threatened.