

Thinking Space No.42

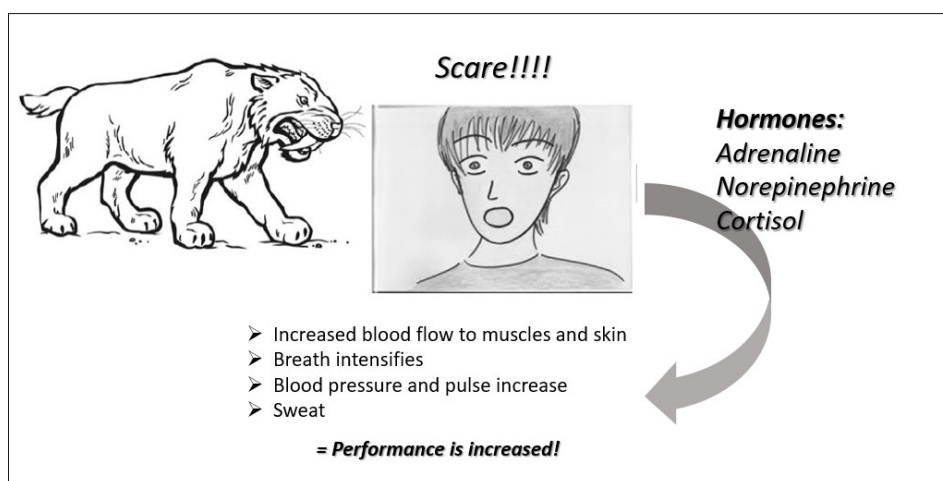
What does "having stress" mean? - what happens in the body when there is stress?

Susanna Lopez, Silke Schoolmann, KIZ Sinnova, January 2021

All our ancestors down to the unicellular organisms were very successful: they managed to survive until they reproduced. The protective mechanism that emerged and was inherited early on in evolutionary history, which we now call "stress", played an important role. This emergency response enables the mobilization of acute special forces to survive in dangerous situations. While this alarm system is still extremely useful, it can be harmful if the stress becomes permanent in our daily lives. When training NEETs, we suggest to include a module making them aware of modern stressors and to present techniques to deal with them.

If a perception - from outside or inside the body – is interpreted by the central nervous system as a danger to the system, the organism is elevated to an alert and readiness state for immediate action. This mainly affects muscles, breathing and circulation, but also the information processing in the brain changes. If we feel threatened, hormones (including adrenaline, noradrenaline, cortisol) are released into the blood system as messenger substances. Our vegetative nervous system (Latin = not subject to the will) is activated while its opponent, the parasympathetic nervous system that establishes rest and regeneration, is meanwhile inhibited. In response to this activation, the organism begins to produce more energy to be more efficient in the short term (!); at the same time, the blood flow is redistributed and all functions that are not vital at the moment are tuned down.

The alarm reaction itself is (for a short time) completely harmless, even desirable to be efficient and to master special requirements. In the long term, however, it can make you sick. In the example below it means fighting, or better running away. The following strong physical exertion disintegrates the stress hormones again. If these substances stay too long and often in the body, they can cause harm.



Source: own graphic

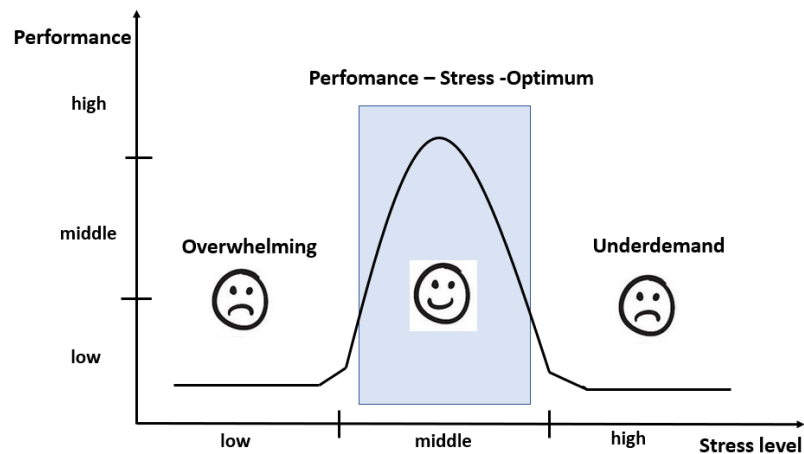
Modern stressors are different from the ones of our ancestors, but they trigger the same physical reactions. These stressors include:

- Time stress: Deadline pressure - not only at work but also in your free time

- Traffic stress: long journeys to work, traffic jams, delays from public transport
- Information stress: flooding or too little information
- Density stress: overcrowding and tightness in buses and trains, on streets, doctors' offices and shops or Online stress: constant availability via online devices
- Stress from uncertainty and worries about the future of work stress: excessive or insufficient demands.

In addition to these general stressors, NEETS certainly have to deal with additional stress factors including:

- Family obligations, pressure, expectations, possibly many people in a small apartment
- Financial emergency combined with daily fears - roof over your head, rent arrears, no / not enough money for education, food etc.
- Perhaps the only one in the area who is aiming for further training and no understanding in the social environment, no space (in the broadest sense) for learning.

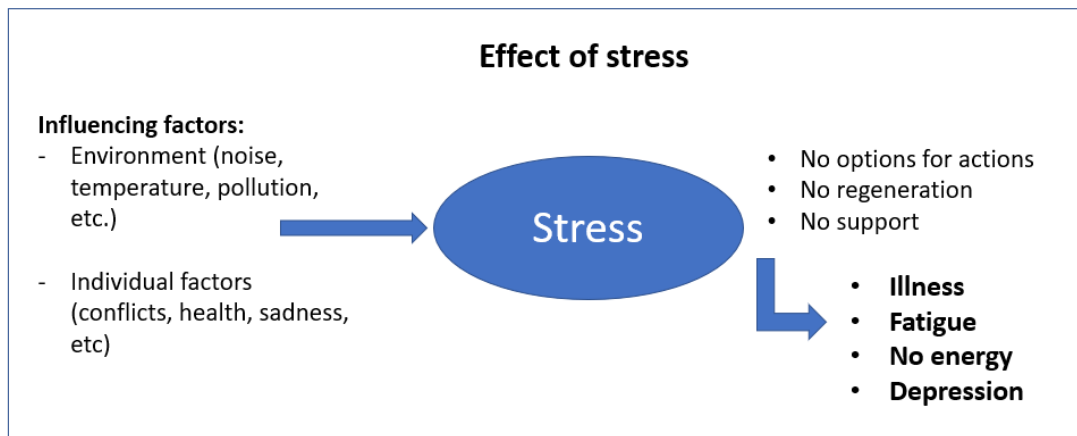


Source: own graphic

However, stress is not only negative; in the right amount, it can even improve performance. Important to note, this “right” level varies for every person - just like every person reacts stressed to different things.

Stress prevention

As stress can really get us going, we need to look at the effects of stress:

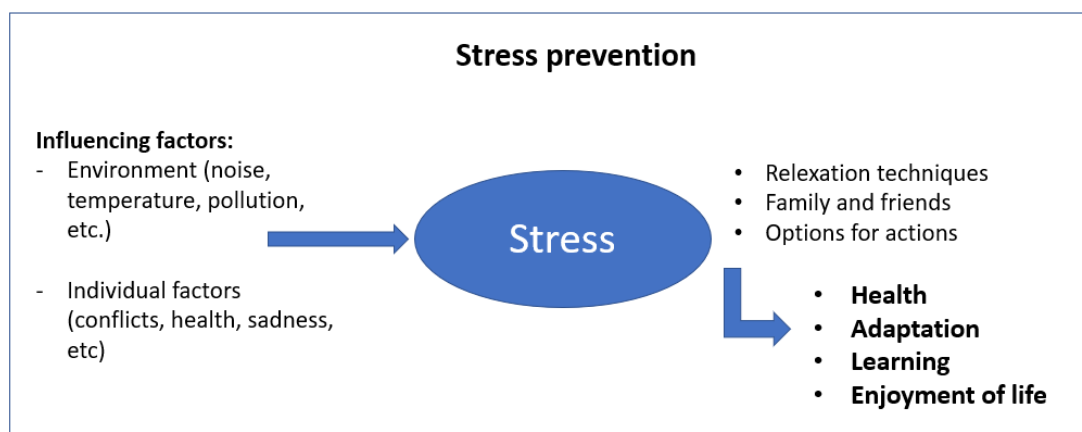


Source: own graphic

Consequences of "permanent stress" can for example be:

- High blood pressure, heart attack risk increases
- Diabetes or Headache / migraine or stomach ulcers, diarrhea or chronic fatigue
- Insomnia
- Sexual disorders, menstrual disorders
- Lack of energy / feelings of weakness
- Weight loss or gain
- Blemished skin, skin diseases.

What can you do? At best, everyone knows one or more methods to relieve stress, reduce it and recover again.



Source: own graphic

Helpful techniques to reduce stress in general:

- Train yourself further, expand your knowledge
- Organizational improvements at work, with family and in leisure time (time management)
- Self-management: We know what is important and are able to set priorities, set tasks to distribute (in the family / work). Helping others, yes, but not at all costs.

- Develop and improve social and communication skills. This means to expand one's skills on how to deal with conflict, how to be calmer with his everyday problems.
- Look for assistance.

Helpful techniques for mental stress prevention:

- Abstain from perfectionism! Recognize your own performance limits
- Do not perceive difficulties as a threat, but as a challenge
- Do not get bogged down in the details, focus on the "essential" ones and keep more inner distance
- Have less fixed ideas and expectations of others and yourself
- Don't take yourself so seriously.

Helpful techniques for regenerative stress management (recovery):

- Walks & exercise
- Special physical and mental techniques
- Conversations with family / friends
- Healthy and varied diet
- Learn to enjoy the little things in everyday life
- Sufficient sleep
- Regular compensation through hobbies and leisure activities.

*This Thinking Space Paper is based on an unpublished KIZ document and was translated and adapted by Sylvie Feindt.

Sources:

Gerd Kaluza (2018), Gelassen und sicher im Stress. Das Stresskompetenz-Buch: Stress erkennen, verstehen, bewältigen, 7.Auflage.

<http://www.lindemann-coach.de/privatkunden/korper/stress-was-passiert-im-korper/>

<https://www.4teachers.de>

<https://www.liebenswert-magazin.de>

<https://www.clixmix.de>

<https://pixabay.com> (Licence free pictures)