Mastering Your Mindset

The Neurosymphony Of Stress And How To Calm Your Anxious Mind

Dr Sarah McKay
Dr Sarah McKay Dphil (Oxon)

www.theneuroacademy.com

Twitter @SarahMMcKay
Facebook @YourBrainHealth
Topics for today

• What is stress?
• The orchestrated neuro-symphony of stress
• What stress does to your brain
• To bend or break?
• Finding your calm.
What is stress?
It’s stressful if it exceeds your perceived ability to cope.
jumpy on alert all the time body aches falling ill more often can’t focus on anything unable to take information in hard to think properly distracted times of being confused tingling fingers questioning ‘Why?’ replaying of memories sleeping more unable to sleep eating more eating less scared terrified feeling unsafe feeling unable to cope being afraid to go back where quakes happened – or could happen unable to sit still – always moving mood changes rapid heart rate unable to move – wanting to be still angry frustrated irritable not wanting, or unable, to remember anxious hysterical or irrational at times overwhelmed detached – switched off have lost interest in anything else survivor guilt nightmares flashbacks vivid memories depression having suicidal thoughts or talking about suicide feeling unable to cope at all not wanting to be with others much wanting to be with others a lot
1. Quick-acting autonomic response: Fight, Flee or Freeze

Noradrenaline
2. Long-lasting via HPA axis: Maintain Vigilance
Your stress response is complex and nuanced.

Joëls & Baram Nature Neuroscience 2009
Stress response is orchestrated over time.

Joëls & Baram Nature Neuroscience 2009
Just because you’re stressed doesn’t mean you’re not coping

Level of stress

Low        Moderate      High

Performance

Eustress sweet spot

Distress

Meh
Does distress change the brain?
Christchurch Earthquake children
Swedish Widows
Day-to-day life can stress you out.
Resilience: to bend or break?

We can *learn* to bend not break.
Mindfulness & meditation work, but not for everyone.
MEDITATION stresses me out

HERE'S WHAT I DO INSTEAD
Know your tipping point
Nap.
Breathe in a box.
Relax. Muscle by muscle.
Connect.
Read (fiction).
Get curious about your emotions.
Find YOUR moment or place of calm.
Q&A