

The Stress Response



The stress response is a natural response that affects everyone.

It is based upon a very normal and useful response that occurs throughout the animal kingdom.

The best way to explain how it works is to look at an example of an emergency.

Imagine you are at your front door with your key in your lock. As you push open the front door, you discover all your possessions in chaos. You have been robbed... and they may still be there.

In this situation your body would instantly organise itself to tackle any danger that might suddenly occur. Some of the things that happen are:

- Muscles become more tense, trembling can occur
- Heart beats faster
- Skin chills and/or sweats
- Lungs breathe deep and quick

All these things together, we call the stress response, also known as fight, flight & freeze.

It prepares our bodies to be ready for action by making us more alert, getting muscles into standby mode, etc.

Our bodies are well equipped to deal with being stressed as long as there are periods of relaxation in between. This allows other functions of the body to get attention and acts as a balance and restoration for our bodies.

During chronic stress, for example persistent pain, the body's capacity to trigger the relaxation response is compromised and we therefore need to make an effort to ensure our bodies get a break from being in the stressed state all the time.

Many people notice that during times of increased stress their pain increases, therefore managing our stresses, including our physical stress responses is very important in the management of persistent pain.

Pain and stress can create a vicious circle.

Your pain problem is a stressor in itself and increases your stress levels. The stress response in turn can contribute to your pain levels.

Next resource:
Naming the fear