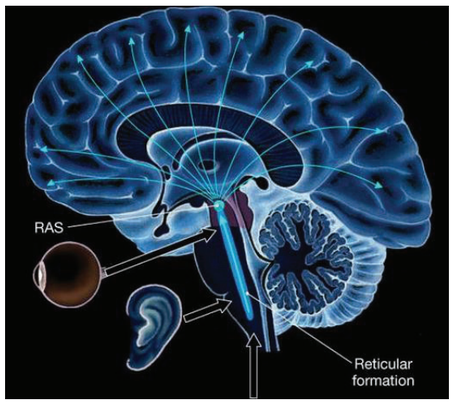
So the importance of getting together with others, whether it be via continuing professional development, workshops, peer groups or supervision, it's vital for our own wellbeing and is shown to make us more effective and resilient.

I often say that it's a good idea to experience hypnotherapy yourself on a regular basis as it can often refresh the benefits that we experience first hand and this reminds us how beneficial hypnotherapy can be to our clients. Experiencing hypnosis for ourselves also re invigorates our confidence in the consulting room; we know that it can work because we have seen it work first hand for ourselves and many others. In this way we are looking after ourselves too as I often think that we are all so passionate about helping others that sometimes we forget to help ourselves.



So in looking after ourselves we have that essential spare capacity which strengthens our consulting style and can benefit the results we get with our clients. Hypnotherapy and the profession is constantly changing and evolving all the time and it will continue to do so. It's important that we mirror those sentiments too.

So if we get what we focus on and our RAS directs our attention to what we bring our attention to, how do we harness what we see to our advantage? How do we learn to filter appropriately and bring into reality what we want?

That is up to you.

The other advantage we have is practice, the more people we see the better we can be and the better we can be the more effective we are.

So, what's stopping you now?

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STRESS, DISEASE, AND THE POWER OF THE MIND

Trevor Eddolls looks at its impact on the body and the control we possess

We all know what stress is and we, at least, sometimes claim to suffer from it. But what is stress really, and how does it impact on the body? Where does illness fit in? And how can hypnotherapy help?

WHAT IS STRESS?

So what is stress? Wikipedia suggests that stress is the failure of an organism to respond appropriately to emotional or physical threats, whether actual or imagined. [i]

It's worth noting that according to transactional theory, [ii] anything has the potential to be a stressor and cause an individual to experience stress. It all depends on how that person interprets the stressor and the meaning they give to it. And, it can surprise some people to realise that not all events stress all people equally. Like me, you probably find that fits very nicely with what you've been telling clients: "Although we cannot necessarily control the events in our lives, we can control our response to those events. The events themselves don't cause us to become depressed, stressed, angry, etc. It is for this very reason that learning to change our thinking habits can have such an incredible effect on our lives."

We also know that using the right pre-frontal cortex to negatively introspect on past events and to negatively predict future events can add to the amount of stress that we feel.

The most common physical symptom of stress is headache caused by people tensing their neck, forehead, and shoulder muscles. Longer-term stress can lead to digestive problems, insomnia, fatigue, high blood pressure, nervousness and excessive sweating, heart disease, strokes and even hair loss. Emotional responses to stress include anxiety, anger, depression, irritability, frustration, over-reaction to everyday problems, memory loss and a lack of concentration. Psychological responses include withdrawal from society, phobias, compulsive behaviours, eating disorders and night terrors [iii].

It's important to recognise that not all stress is necessarily bad. For example, Selye [iv] (1975) published an article entitled "Confusion and controversy in the stress

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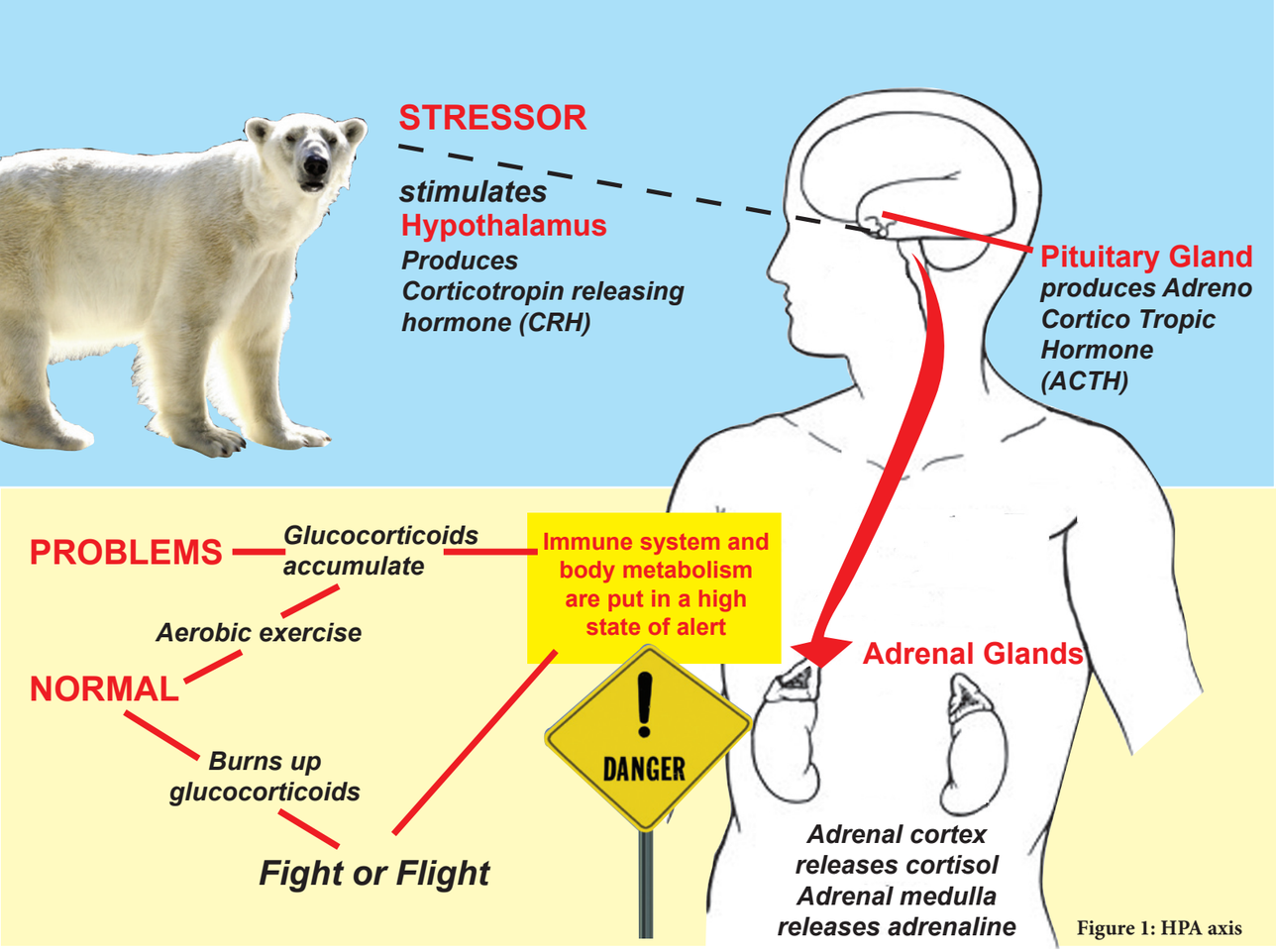

Figure 1: HPA axis

field" in the Journal of Human Stress. He suggested a model that divided stress into 'eustress' and 'distress'. He suggested that where stress enhances function (and this could be physical or mental resulting from strength training or challenging work) it can be thought of as eustress. Negative stress – distress – is what most people think of as stress, and this may lead to problems. But basically Selye's conclusion was that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger!

Selye's research led him to a three-stage theory known as GAS (General Adaptation Syndrome):

1. **Alarm** - when a threat or stressor is first identified, the body's fight or flight response kicks in with the production of adrenaline. At the same time some cortisol is produced from what's called the HPA axis (see later).
2. **Resistance** If the stressor continues, the body tries to cope with it, but, even so, resources are gradually used up.
3. **Exhaustion** – the body's resources are used up and this can lead to illness such as ulcers, depression, diabetes, digestive system issues, and cardiovascular problems.

Normally a stressor will come and then go. The body will activate its fight or flight response when it first identifies the stressor and then (slowly) return to normal once the stressor has gone.

Fight or flight symptoms: [v]

- Dilation of the pupils, for maximum visual perception.
- Constriction of the arteries to maximize blood pressure to muscles.
- Adrenal glands produce cortisol, adrenaline, and noradrenaline.

Let's take a more detailed look at what happens with that fight or flight response (often extended to freeze, fight, or flee) – see Figure 1. Firstly, a stressor occurs – our old friend the polar bear appearing – and the (paraventricular nucleus of the) hypothalamus produces Corticotropin-Releasing Hormone (CRH), which used to be known as Corticotropin-Releasing Factor (CRF). This (with vasopressin) stimulates the (anterior lobe of the) pituitary gland to produce ACTH (AdrenoCorticoTropic Hormone). This triggers the production and release of corticosteroids and cortisol from the cortex of the adrenal glands. These chemicals put the body into a high 'readiness' state. Heart rate, blood pressure, and respiration rise so that muscles and the brain are supplied with more blood and, consequently, more oxygen. Blood flow decreases to the stomach, kidneys, skin, and liver. Sexual and immune functions are suppressed. Endorphins - natural opiates - are released to relieve potential pain. Fats and sugars are produced to supply extra energy. The sympathetic nervous system is stimulated. (The parasympathetic system has the opposite effect on the body – turning down the various systems.) Flight and fight burns up the glucocorticoids – and once the person is safe, the body's chemistry returns to normal. The immune systems starts to work again as the body rests and repairs itself. Note that glucocorticoids act on the hypothalamus and pituitary to suppress CRH and ACTH production. This is a negative feedback cycle.

But what happens if the stressor continues? In this case, the glucocorticoids accumulate in the body and their action can be toxic. One way of burning them up is strenuous exercise (which it thinks is like fight or flight response).

This response system is known as the HPA (Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal) [vi] axis (see Figure 1). It's also associated with a number of illnesses such as anxiety, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, fibromyalgia, and irritable bowel syndrome. Doctors will usually treat these symptoms with antidepressants. We know an alternative therapy!

The hypothalamus also produces Thyrotropin-Releasing Hormone (TRH) which stimulate the thyroid gland to secrete thyroxine. Thyroxine controls the rate of metabolic processes in the body.

The adrenal gland is also stimulated by the sympathetic nervous system. Adrenaline and noradrenaline are produced in the adrenal medulla, and they increase heart rate and respiration rate, and raise blood pressure. Adrenaline and noradrenaline positively feedback to the pituitary and increase the breakdown of pro-opiomelanocortins (POMCs) into ACTH and β-endorphins.

Coffee raises your cortisol level, increases your feelings of stress and anxiety, and raises your blood pressure. One study found that a large dose of caffeine can mimic the symptoms of anxiety disorders. Withdrawal from caffeine does too. Other studies found that people with panic disorder react more strongly to the identical amounts of caffeine than a 'typical' person. [vii]

So what you end up with is:

- **Adrenaline**, which tends to act more strongly on beta receptors (eg lipolysis, increasing insulin secretion, increasing heart rate, and increasing arteriolar dilation and so decreasing blood pressure).
- **Noradrenaline**, which tends to act more strongly at alpha receptors (eg decreasing insulin secretion, causing arteriolar constriction and so increasing blood pressure, contracting sphincters, sweating, and dilating pupils).
- **Cortisol** and **corticosteroids,** which increase blood sugar through gluconeogenesis; suppress the immune system; and aid in fat, protein, and carbohydrate metabolism.

STRESS AND DISEASE

So, that's all very interesting but what has stress got to do with disease? [viii] Firstly, as we said above, stress can suppress the immune system. Now that means your body's natural immune system isn't doing its job – or not as effectively as it should be. Let's just have a brief look at how the immune system works [ix] – and be prepared for more scientific naming!

White blood cells (technically called leucocytes) include a wide range of different types of cells whose job is to identify and eliminate invaders and internal cells that have become 'alien'. Mast cells are associated with inflammation. Phagocytes engulf pathogens. There are macrophages, neutrophils, and dendritic phagocytes! Your own cells can be programmed to die in a process called apoptosis. The phagocytes clear up the mess. There are basophils and eosinphils, which along with neutrophils are called granulocytes. There are the wonderfully named Natural Killer (NK) cells.

These attack tumour cells and cells infected with viruses. T-cells are produced in the thymus. They can 'remember' old infections. They're part of the innate immune system. There's also the adaptive immune system which comprises lymphocytes. B-cells (from bone marrow) and T-cells make up most of the lymphocytes.

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In a variety of ways, they identify what's healthy for you and what isn't, and deal with the non-you parts – and that includes cancer cells.

Reduced immune levels lead to an increase in the number of cancerous body cells that can be found. Researchers have also identified what they called biobehavioural risk factors in the development of cancer.

These were:

- Social isolation / low social support
- Depression
- Chronic psychological stress.

In terms of stress, they found that it increases the risk of cancer due to the increase in the level of noradrenaline. This raised noradrenaline level also increases the risk of metastasis (that is the cancer spreading round the body). They also found that some cancer cells are stimulated to grow in the presence of cortisol. And cortisol reduces apoptosis (programmed cell death).

A study of habitual coffee drinkers found that subjects produced more adrenaline and noradrenaline and had higher blood pressure on days when they drank caffeine compared to days when they didn't. [x]

Unsurprisingly, their results indicate that interacting with others reduces cancers (both in terms of size and number). Social isolation results in acquired vigilance (stress), which results in bigger tumours [xi]. Depression is also linked to patients having larger and greater number of cancers. And depression speeds up how far and how fast a cancer progresses. The medical profession's preferred treatment seems to be beta-blockers, which reduce cancer growth, but have other effects round the body.

RELAXATION AND ATTITUDE

The other important finding is that relaxation (particularly visualisations) has been shown to un-suppress the immune system. Clearly, this gives hypnotherapists an important role to play in helping people both before cancers become a problem and in reducing the scale of the problem.

Of course, other relaxation strategies are available, such as exercise, yoga, meditation, listening to music, etc.

Other studies have found that patients undergoing treatment who have a positive attitude and want to get well do so sooner than others. They usually avoid the biobehavioural risks listed above. Studies have found a positive attitude increases the antibodies in the body, whereas emotional stress reduces the level of antibodies. Norman Cousins [xii] in 1989 identified four ingredients of what he called hardiness.

The components were:

- Positive expectations (versus negative expectations)
- Relaxation (versus stress)
- Positive emotions (versus negative emotions)
- Active role (versus passive role). [xiii]

Clearly, hypnotherapists can help people with this.

Sandra Levy of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute found joy levels to be the second best predictor of survival time for patients with recurrent breast cancer. She found more than half of the fluctuation in white blood cell levels could be attributed to psychological factors, including patients' perceived social support and how they coped with stress.

David McCelland [xiv] of Boston University (1986, 1988) found immune system activity is high:

- In people who are experiencing positive emotions
- Among those with a strong sense of humour
- In people experiencing love.

Immune system activity was found to be low in those people who are stressed or out of control.

Other studies have shown that **it takes only 5 minutes of relaxation to produce dramatic brain wave changes** [xv].

In fact, numerous studies have shown amazing results [xvi] in terms of the power of the mind to influence the body or parts of the body, including an ability to reduce bleeding and even to reduce tumour sizes. You're probably familiar with experiments where people have been able to reduce the amount of pain they feel, and others where people have anaesthetised areas of their body (indeed dentistry and medical operations have taken place using just hypnosis). This amazing connection between the brain and body comes as a surprise to some people, but surely not to us.

CONCLUSION

Stress is a good thing provided that it stops quickly and allows the body to recover. However, excessive stress leads to a reduction in the performance of the immune system – and ultimately disease. A person's attitude towards their recovery is affected by their support networks and the amount of stress they have experienced, and it, in turn, affects how long their recovery takes and how successful it is. Helping a person to relax and focus on the positives is one of the things a hypnotherapist can do to help an ill person on the road to recovery. Being in control and in your intellectual brain allows you to chose how stressful you perceive events to be.

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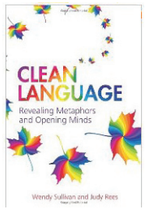

Clean Language

– Revealing Metaphors and Opening Minds

By Wendy Sullivan and Judy Rees
Published by Crown Publishing (2008).
ISBN 978-184590125-7
★★★★

This is an excellent book for making you think about the questions you ask clients. The authors tell us that we make assumptions all the time. And we fill in the gaps in what people say with our own pictures, etc. So, when you say chair, you might be thinking of an armchair and I might be thinking of an office chair (my example). Because of this, they suggest there is a need for clean language – to reduce any misunderstandings and to avoid having to clarify exactly what the other person has just said.

The authors explain that information transmitted in language fits into three categories – sensory, abstract, or metaphoric. Sensory information relates to the (five) senses, (QI and Wikipedia show how many more senses there really are!) Abstract information consists of concepts, thoughts, and 'labels' that are not based on senses and include categorization, and expressions of beliefs and emotions. Metaphoric expressions describe one kind of thing in terms of another. When working in metaphor, the people or things that a person refers to are known as 'symbols'. The specific details of something are its 'attributes'. And the symbols are arranged in a 'metaphor landscape'.

So, the 12 clean language questions they suggest you use are:

1. (And) what kind of X (is that X)?
2. (And) is there anything else about X?
3. (And) where is X? Or (and) whereabouts is X?
4. (And) that's X like what?
5. (And) is there a relationship between X and Y?
6. (And) when X, what happens to Y?
7. (And) then what happens? Or (and) what happens next?
8. (And) what happens just before X?
9. (And) where would X come from?
10. (And) what would X like to have happen?
11. (And) what needs to happen for X?
12. (And) can X happen?

The authors inform us that to be successful, it's best to ask these questions about the positive things people say. Now, all this X stuff may seem a tad confusing, but it's just a place holder for whatever the client has just said. How to use clean languages, and exercises to practice using it, are clearly explained in the book.

Near the end, they give four questions to use when motivating people, and they are ideal for use in a hypnotherapy situation. The therapist should ask: "And what would you like to have happen? What needs to happen for that to happen? And can you? And will you?" That last question is not one of the original clean language questions.

Well worth a read. **Trevor Eddolls**