

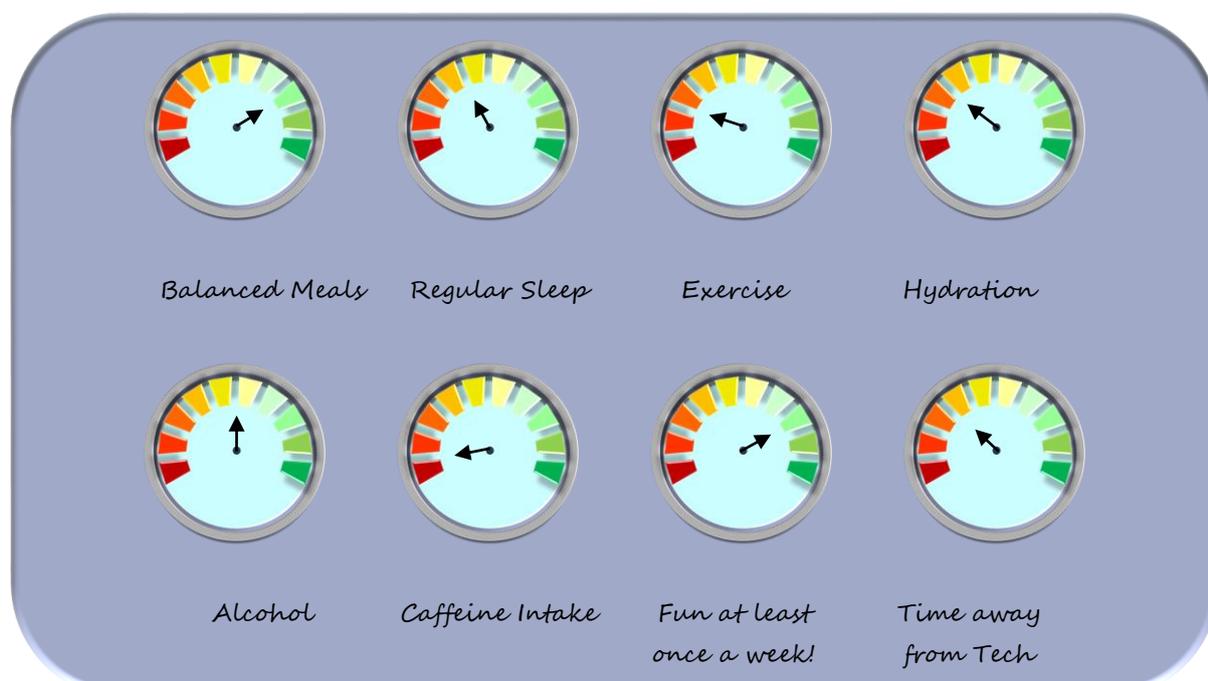
Modern Stresses Series: Changing the Dynamic

20th September 2016 ~ THE FOSTER PRACTICE by Zoe Foster

We often hear of 'one-off, quick-fixes' for stress. The fact is there are often a number of different things to consider when changing your stress dynamics. First of all, run a 'scan' of your stress management. This can allow you not only to see what is most affecting you, but also, how one aspect may affect another.

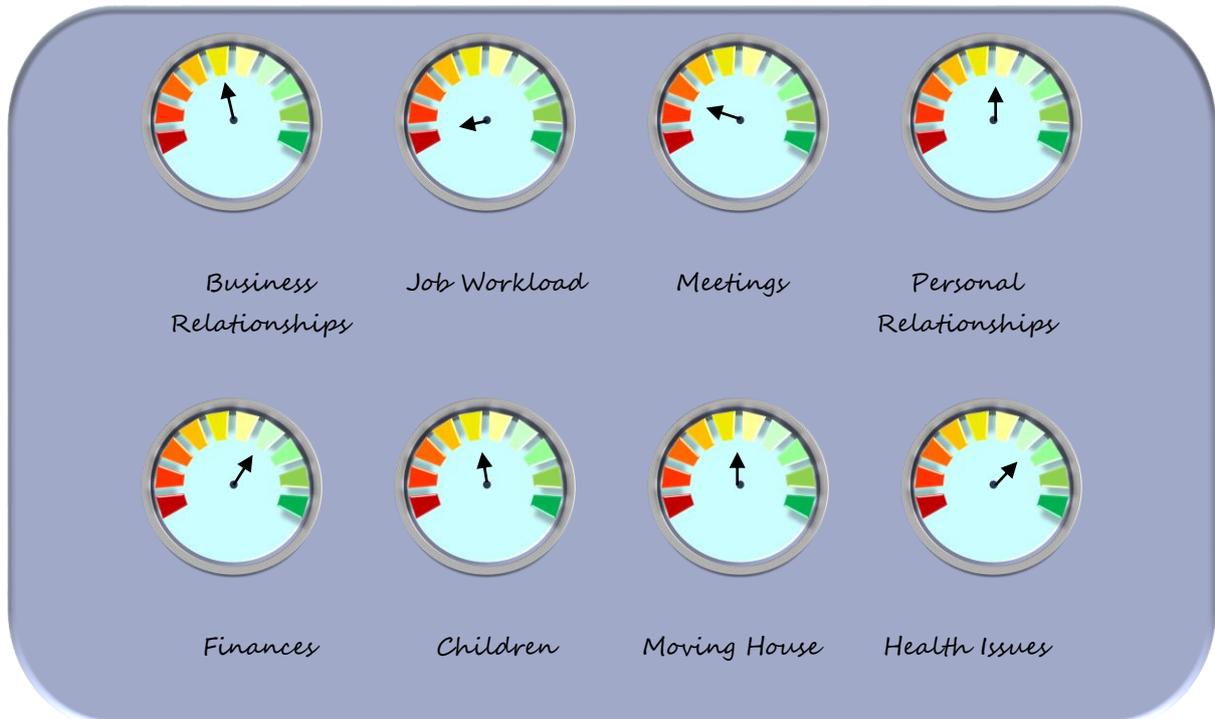
We can use lots of tools for this. I've decided to use a set of gauges to visualise areas that are likely to have an effect on our stress levels. This does require a bit of honesty and a little time to do a self-assessment. You can download one of these forms from [here](#).

This assessment comes in two parts. The first considers things that directly impact your body's response to stress. Changes to these areas will not take away the issues that are stressing you out. Instead they will help you function more effectively during stressful periods. Assess where you are on the gauge by drawing on an arrow. Here's an example:



Most people find it overwhelming to change a lot of things at once, so start with the low hanging fruit. In the example above, caffeine intake stands out and is likely to affect regular sleep. Some simple changes can be made like avoiding caffeine (coffee, tea, fizzy drinks) in the afternoon and evening. Exercising also stands out - a 20 minute walk several times a week will raise your endorphins, battling stress and depression. Hydration also appears low - good hydration helps our organ function, most notably brain function. Dehydration increases production of the stress hormone cortisol. There are other things you might like to consider for the core assessment. I have included a list of options on the [downloadable form](#).

Next we want to understand where/when you feel most stressed. This will help you understand what dynamics need to change. In the example below, I've used situations, but you could equally make statements such as; not feeling in control, always running late or feeling forgetful. Often things that are part of feeling overwhelmed.



The example above demonstrates workload is a problem and maybe further issues at work. Let's assess this for a moment. In today's world we are all expected to do more with less. However, employers also do not want employees signed off sick. Good self-management includes understanding what the priorities are, addressing conflicts and simply 'calling it out'. Feeling overwhelmed often makes for a reactive approach.

This may seem like an obvious statement, but sometimes we are too far involved to assess and make those changes. Consider the links between the gauges – you might determine in the example above that workload is affecting personal relationships. Challenge yourself with some questions. Is this temporary or integral to my life at the moment? What can I change in my management of the issue? Who do I need to speak to in order to help change this dynamic? Answering these are important in figuring out what needs to 'give'. You are in control of more than you may realise.

This second half is often more difficult because of this need to ask honest questions of ourselves. Sometimes we don't want to address the problem despite the stress it is causing us. If you believe you cannot do this work yourself; a counsellor or coach can be an effective way of crafting changes that work for you.

Always address the most impactful issues first rather than trying to fix all of them at once. Make time to plan a change of strategy. If something doesn't work, it's not a failure, try another angle. Winston Churchill said it – *'Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts'*.

Links:

- [The Foster Practice Website](#)
- [Positive vs Negative Stress](#)
- [Modern Stresses Series: The Body Response](#)
- [Modern Stresses Series: Relaxation Techniques](#)
- [NHS Choices – Struggling with Stress?](#)
- [NHS OneYou – Feeling Stressed?](#)