



Treating Chronic Stress

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Session 1

Understanding Chronic Stress

What Is Stress?

Stress is a natural adaptive response of the body to a perceived threat.

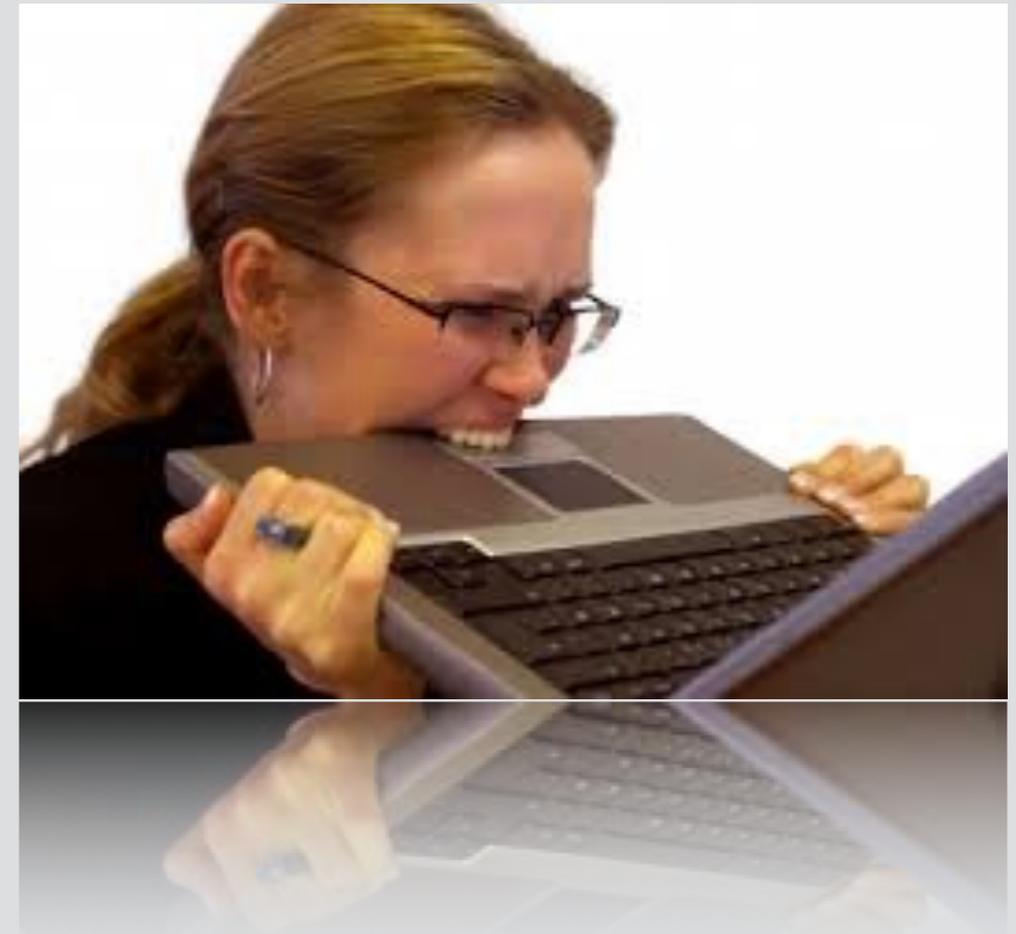
Your stress response (fight-flight-freeze response) is an attempt of the nervous system to enhance your chances of survival when faced with danger.



On exposure to prolonged and repeated stressors, the nervous system can lose its adaptive ability for **turning off** the stress response, leading to exaggerated **chronic stress** symptoms.

Causes of and Contributors to Stress

1. Financial crisis
2. Health-related issues
3. Life changes
4. Work pressures
5. Interpersonal relationships
6. Traumatic events
7. Negative thoughts processes
8. Repressed negative emotions
9. Drug and alcohol abuse
10. Genetic predisposition
11. Brain injury



4 Categories of Stress symptoms

1. Physical Symptoms
2. Emotional Symptoms
3. Psychological Symptoms
4. Behavioural Symptoms



Physical Symptoms

- ★ Aches/pains
- ★ Muscle tension
- ★ Grinding teeth
- ★ Frequent colds/infections
- ★ Hyperventilating
- ★ Lump in the throat
- ★ Frequent pins & needles
- ★ Dizziness
- ★ Palpitations
- ★ Panic attacks/nausea
- ★ Physical tiredness
- ★ Menstrual changes/loss of libido/sexual problems

Emotional Symptoms

- ★ Feeling out of control
- ★ Lack of motivation
- ★ Angry
- ★ Frustrated
- ★ Lack of confidence
- ★ Lack of self-esteem
- ★ Irritable
- ★ Mood swings
- ★ Extra sensitive to criticism
- ★ Defensive
- ★ Tearful

Psychological Symptoms

- ☆ Inability to concentrate or make simple decisions
- ☆ Excessive Worrying
- ☆ Negative thinking
- ☆ Depression & anxiety
- ☆ Memory lapses
- ☆ Becoming rather vague
- ☆ Easily distracted
- ☆ Less intuitive & creative

Behavioural Symptoms

- ★ Social withdrawal
- ★ Relationship problems
- ★ Insomnia or waking tired
- ★ Reckless
- ★ Aggressive/anger outbursts
- ★ Nervous
- ★ Uncharacteristically lying
- ★ Prone to accidents
- ★ forgetfulness
- ★ Increased reliance on alcohol, smoking, caffeine or drugs
- ★ Becoming a workaholic
- ★ Poor time management
- ★ Poor standards of work

Chronic Stress Development

In 1936, **Hans Selye**, known as the father of stress research, introduced what he called the “General Adaptation Syndrome” model of stress (GAS).

Selye’s model of stress suggests that the human body responds to stress in **three stages**:

1. The Alarm Stage
2. The Resistance Stage
3. The Exhaustion Stage

1. The Alarm Stage

- ☆ This is when the alarm signal is activated because a situation or an experience has been perceived as threatening or harmful to your well-being.
- ☆ At this stage, the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) is activated. The SNS is the system responsible for the body's "fight-or-flight" response.
- ☆ Stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline are released into the blood stream.
- ☆ The body is now well furnished with additional energy to help fight the stress.

2. The Resistance Stage

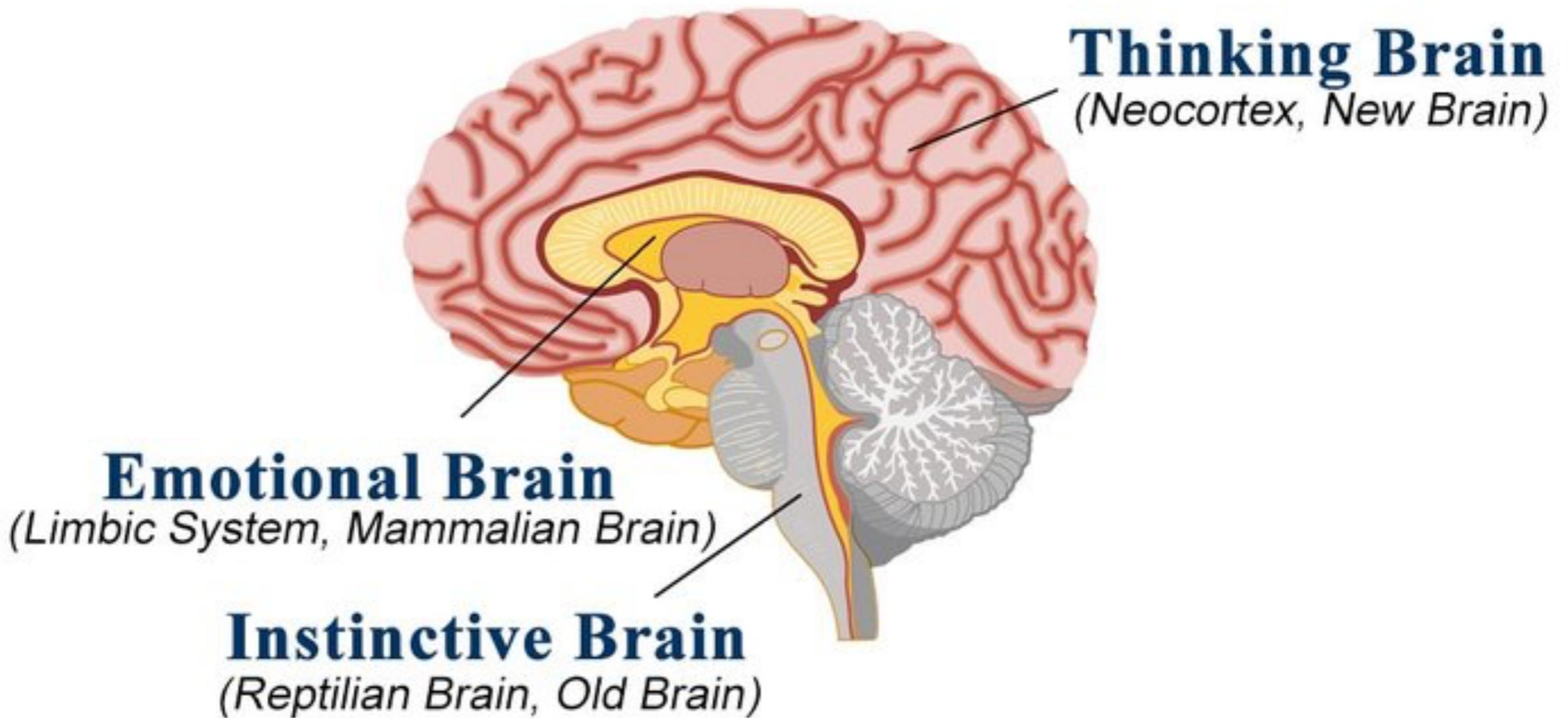
- ☆ This is the stage where your body's "Rest and Digest" response kicks in to restore balance. The parasympathetic nervous system is activated, (PNS) which is responsible for healing, growth, body repair and rejuvenation.
- ☆ If the stress inducing-situation persists, the body will continue to attempt to restore homeostasis and healing.
- ☆ Due to the limitation of the body's adaptive energy, constant exposure to the stress-inducing situation can weaken the body's effectiveness to restore balance.

3. The Exhaustion Stage

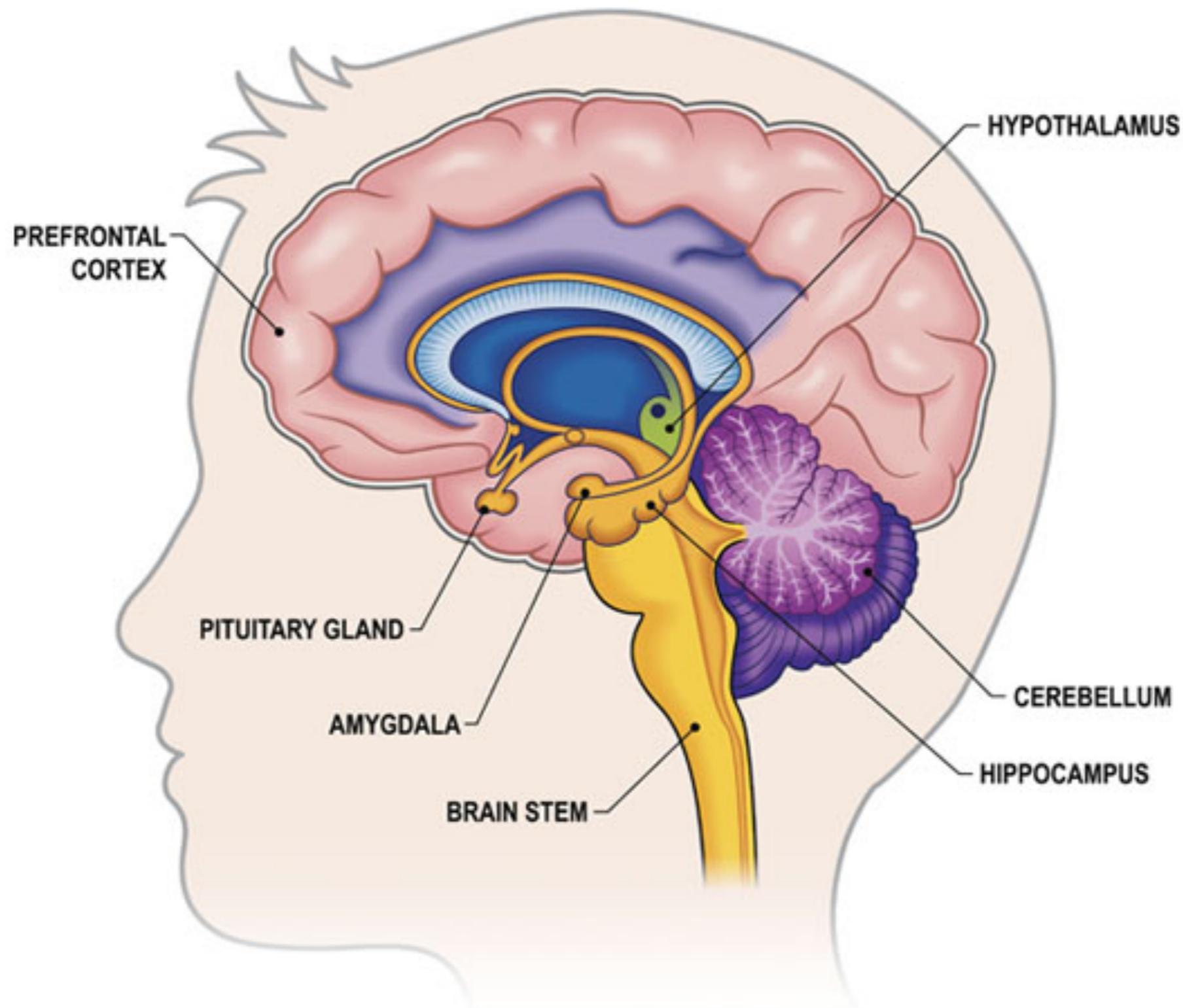
- ☆ At this stage, the adaptation process has failed. The body has lost the battle to restore internal balance because of the persistence of the stressor.
- ☆ All the resources have been exhausted. The body is now exposed to greater hazards.
- ☆ The effects of this failure can include heart and blood vessels conditions and stress-related diseases such as heart disease, stroke, rheumatoid arthritis, impaired thinking and memory, chronic anxiety disorders and depression, etc.
- ☆ The key task here is to ensure that your body's adaptive energy is not over-deployed to a stage of exhaustion.

Session 2

Regions of the Brain Implicated in Chronic Stress



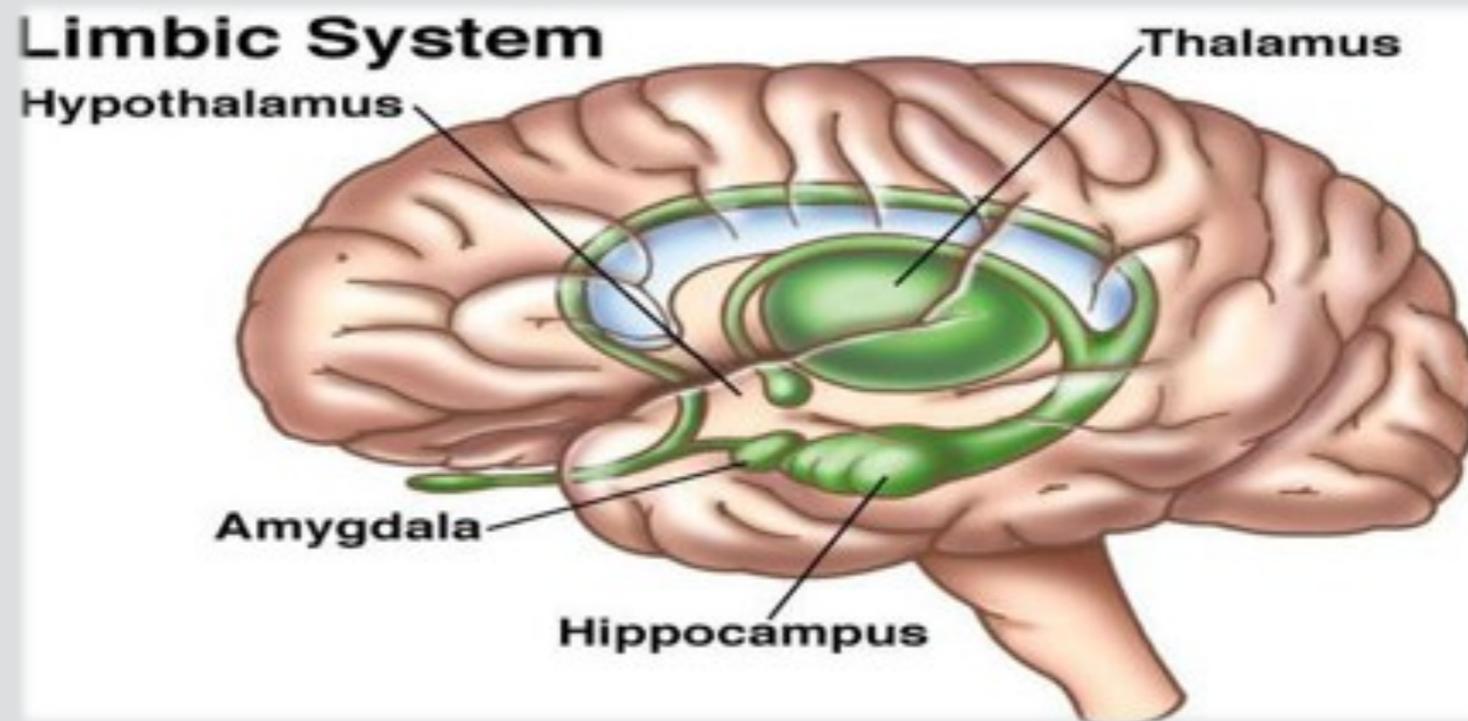
MacLean P, 1949; Ploog D.W et al.(2003)



Hypo-activation of the PFC and insufficient top-down control found in anxiety-related disorders:

Ball, T.M. et al., 2012; Goldin et al., 2009; Etkin et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2012

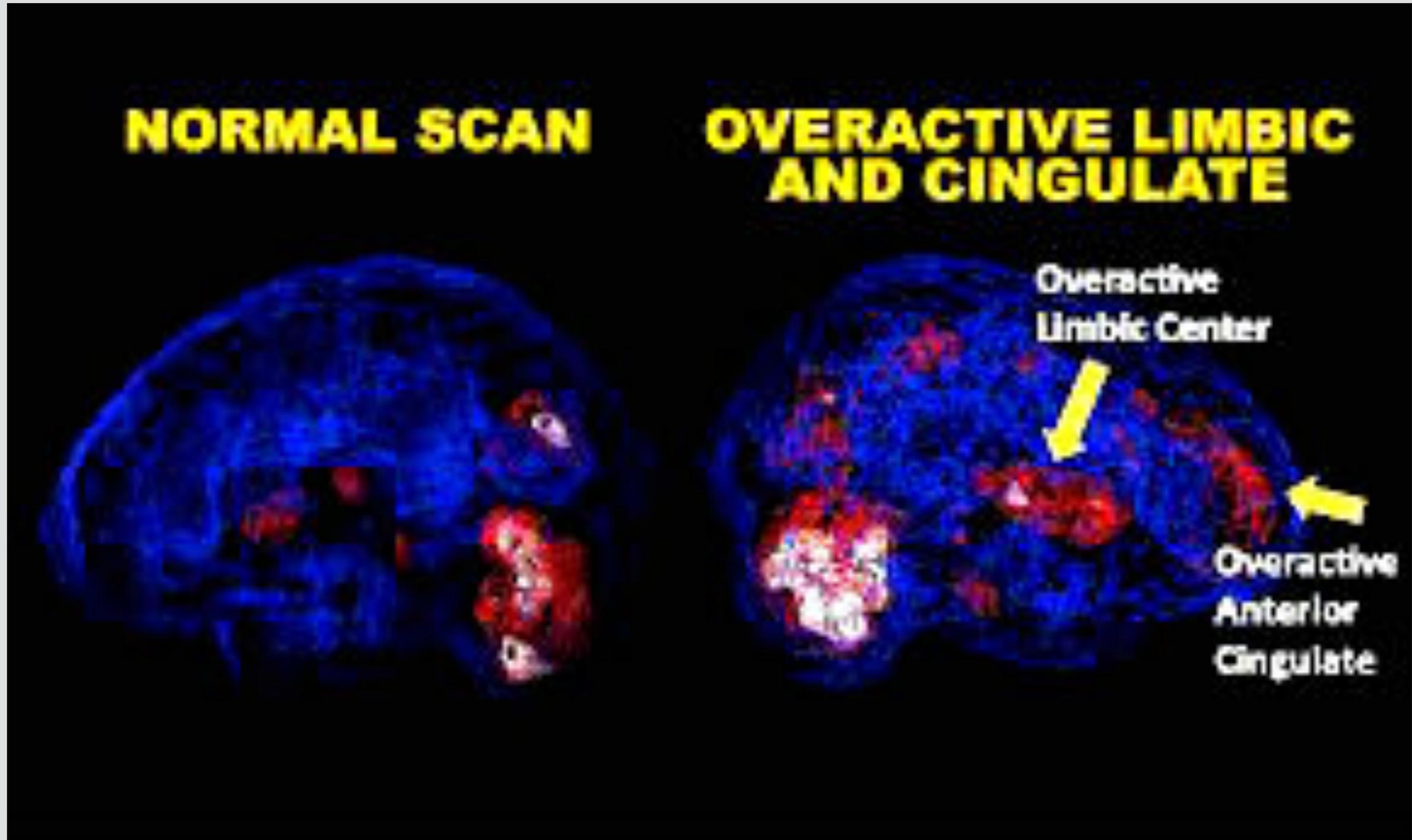
The Limbic System



The Limbic System Functions

- The limbic system sets the emotional tone of the mind.
- It modulates motivation and controls appetites and sleep cycles.
- It stores highly charged emotional memories.
- It promotes bonding and modulates libido.

SPECT Brain Imaging: Overactive Limbic System



The Limbic System Overactivity Symptoms

1. Feeling of sadness
2. Moodiness
3. Low energy
4. Excessive guilt
5. Crying spells
6. Lower interest in things usually considered fun
7. Low self-esteem
8. Decreased interest in sex

The Limbic System Overactivity Symptoms

9. Negative sensitivity to smells/odours
10. Forgetfulness
11. Poor concentration
12. My feelings are often or easily hurt
13. Feeling overwhelmed by day to day tasks
14. Over sensitivity to criticism
15. Lacking confidence in own abilities

The Limbic System Rating Scale

0=never

1=rarely

2=occasionally

3=frequently

4=very frequently

****** 5 or more issues rated 3 or 4 signifies a high likelihood of the limbic system issues.******

Limbic System Recovery Tips

- Regular exercise
- Healthy Waist to Height Ratio (WHtR): Your waist size in inches should be less than or equal to half your height
- Regular exposure to soothing scents. Pleasing fragrances are like anti-inflammatory for the brain
- 7-8 hours of sleep daily
- Regular massage sessions
- Regular breathing and meditation exercises

Limbic System Recovery Tips

- Identify your passion and purpose
- Practise gratitude and appreciation daily
- Surround yourself with positive people
- Engage in acts of kindness
- Reduce alcohol consumption, caffeine and quit smoking
- A balanced diet of high-quality proteins, healthy fats, and fewer carbohydrates will help balance your mood
- Brain health supplements: Omega 3 fatty acids, magnesium, B complex vitamins, vitamin D, vitamin C

Session 3

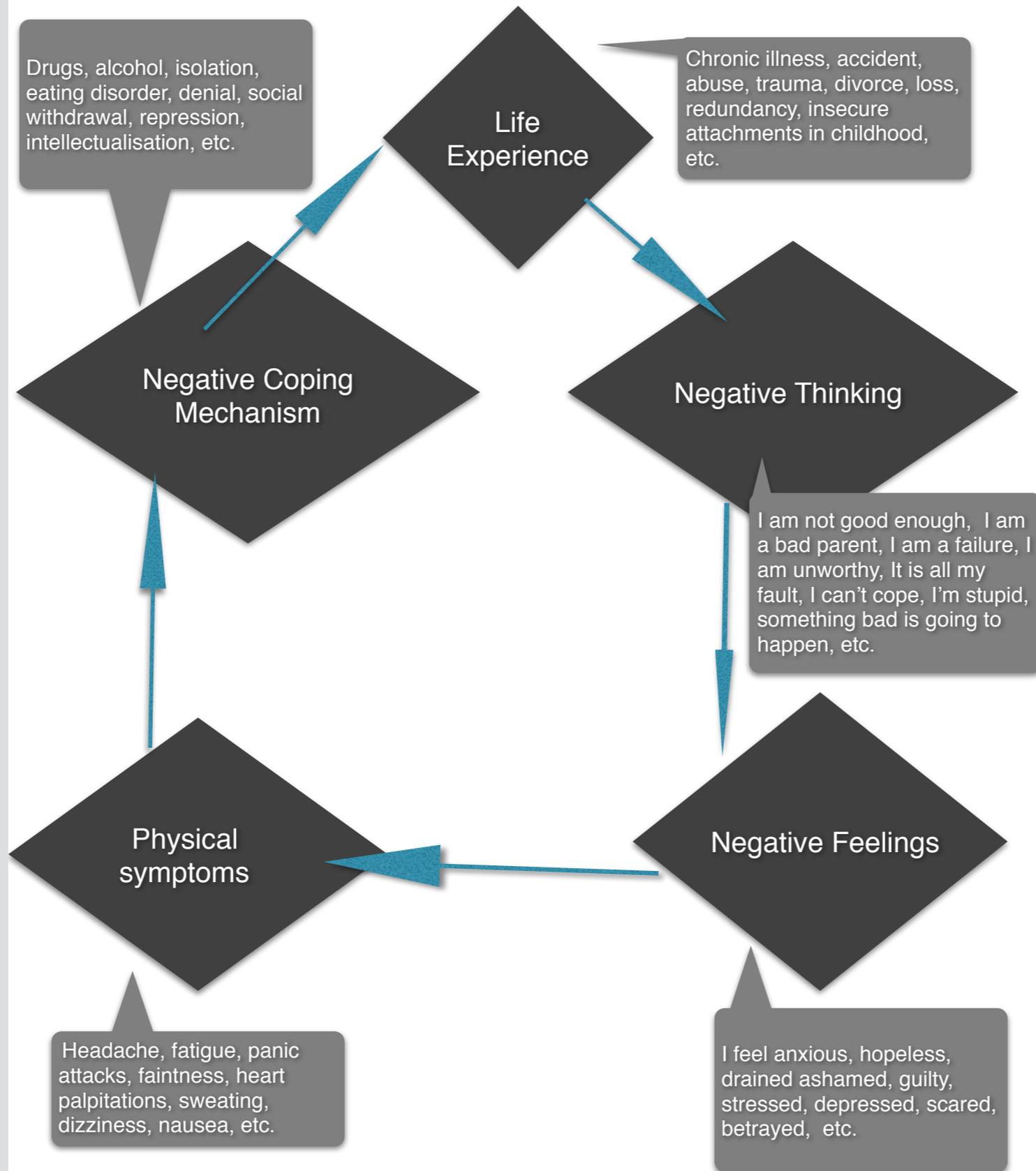
The Stress Cycle and Recovery

The Stress Cycle

- ❖ #1: Your *life experience*
- ❖ #2: Your *pattern of thoughts*
- ❖ #3: Your *negative feelings*
- ❖ #4: Your *physical symptoms*
- ❖ #5: Your *avoidance mechanisms*

The Stress Cycle

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The Stress Scale (Top 8 Most Stressful Life Events)

By Dr. Richard Holmes and Dr Thomas Rahe (The Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS))

- ❖ #1: Death of spouse
- ❖ #2: Divorce
- ❖ #3: Marital separation
- ❖ #4: Jail term
- ❖ #5: Death of close family member
- ❖ #6: Personal injury or illness
- ❖ #7: Marriage
- ❖ #8: Redundancy / Fired at work

Activity

1. Take one of the life events from the **Stress Scale** below and running through the **Stress Cycle**.

The Stress Scale (by Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe)

- ❖ #1: Death of spouse
- ❖ #2: Divorce
- ❖ #3: Marital separation
- ❖ #4: Jail term
- ❖ #5: Death of close family member
- ❖ #6: Personal injury or illness
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The Stress Cycle

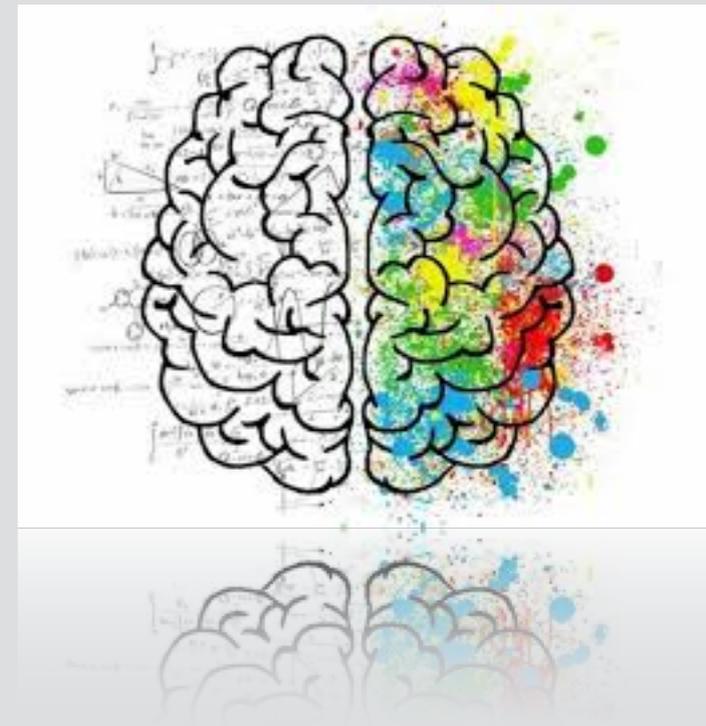
- ❖ #1: Life experience
- ❖ #2: Negative thinking
- ❖ #3: Negative feeling
- ❖ #4: Physical symptoms
- ❖ #5: Negative coping mechanism

Session 4

Chronic Stress Recovery Steps The **S.T.R.E.S.S.** Recovery Framework

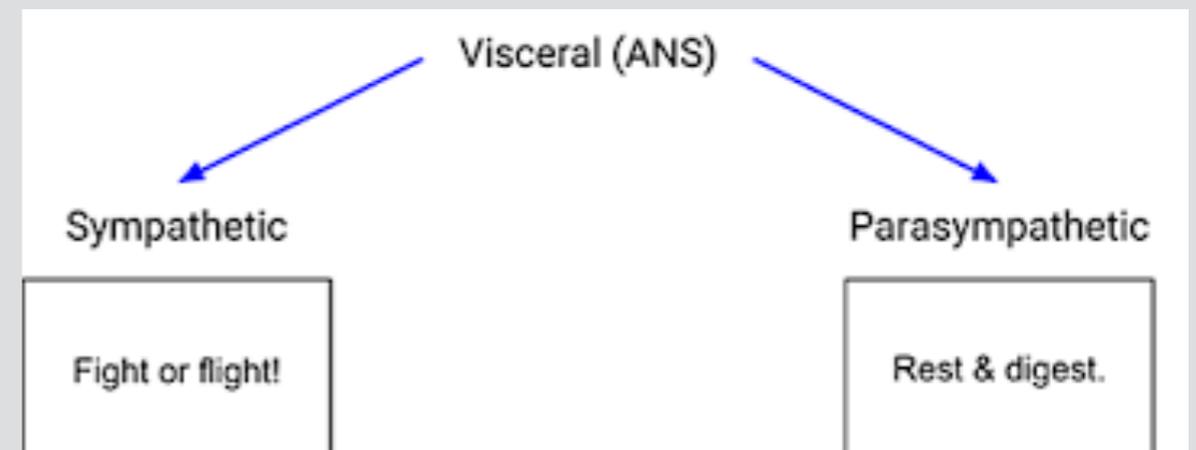
Transforming Chronic Stress

- ★ **S**trengthen the parasympathetic centre
- ★ **T**erminate excessive sympathetic sources
- ★ **R**emove key subconscious negative beliefs
- ★ **E**volve the brain towards calm and confidence
- ★ **S**tamp out a negative avoidance
- ★ **S**trengthen the balance and communication of key hormones



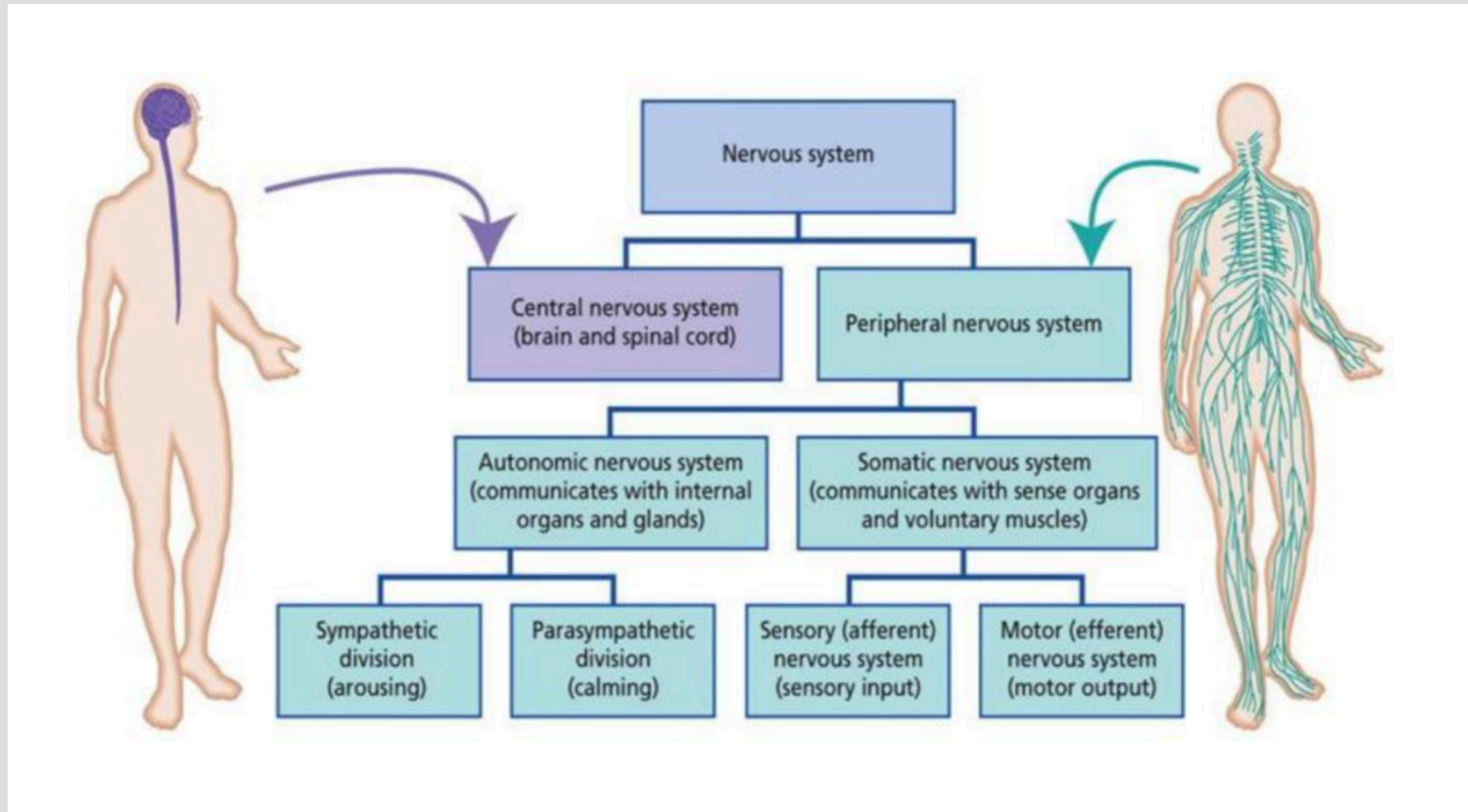
1. Strengthen the parasympathetic centre

- How can you increase your parasympathetic activity?
 - Regular aerobic exercise at least 4 times a week (not less than 30 minutes long each time)
 - Identify what you really love and enjoy doing, then do it daily.
 - Regularly stimulate the vagus nerve for safety, healing and spontaneous social engagement



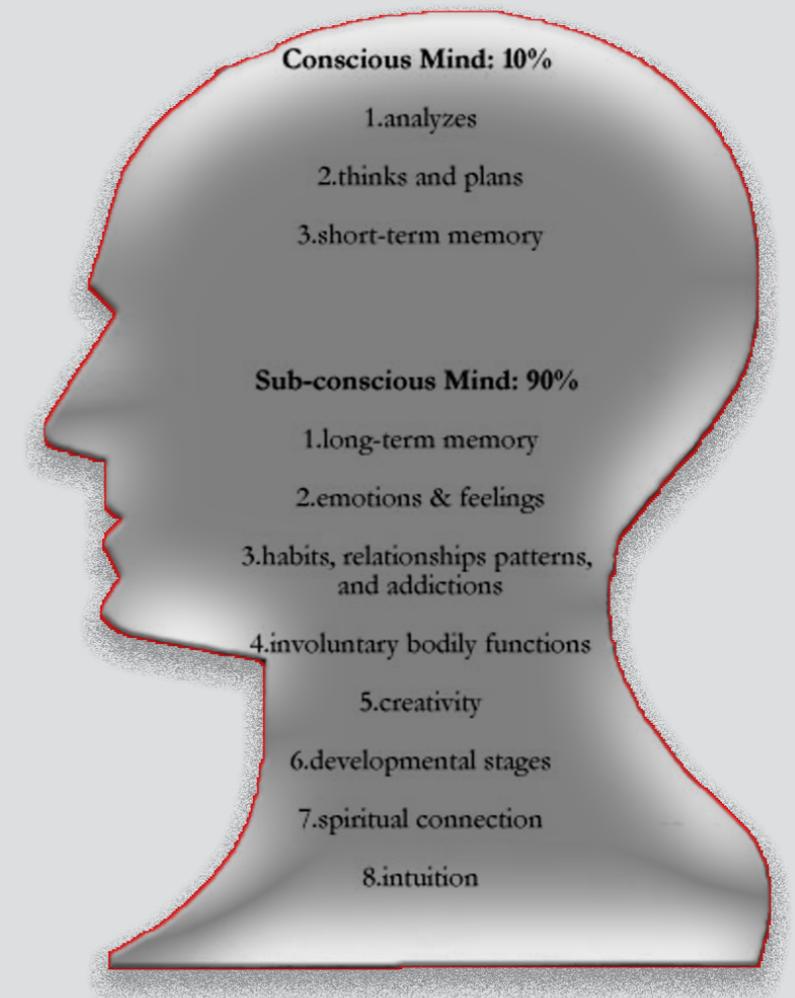
2. Terminate the sympathetic sources

Identify your major sources of stress



3. Remove key subconscious negative beliefs

- What deep subconscious belief could be blocking your transformation?
- What recent incident pressed your button?
- Use the 'Beam of Light Method' to expose and release your deep unconscious negative belief.



4. Evolve the brain towards calm and confidence (re-programme the subconscious)

- Take a few moments to think about what you really want in life
- Starting with 'I' or 'I AM', write a few sentences detailing what you want as though it is already your reality. How would you like your brain to wire itself in the next 21 days?
- Use daily guided meditation to map your new intention in the brain and detach your new self from your old self.
- Experience the new self by feel the feeling, using all your senses.



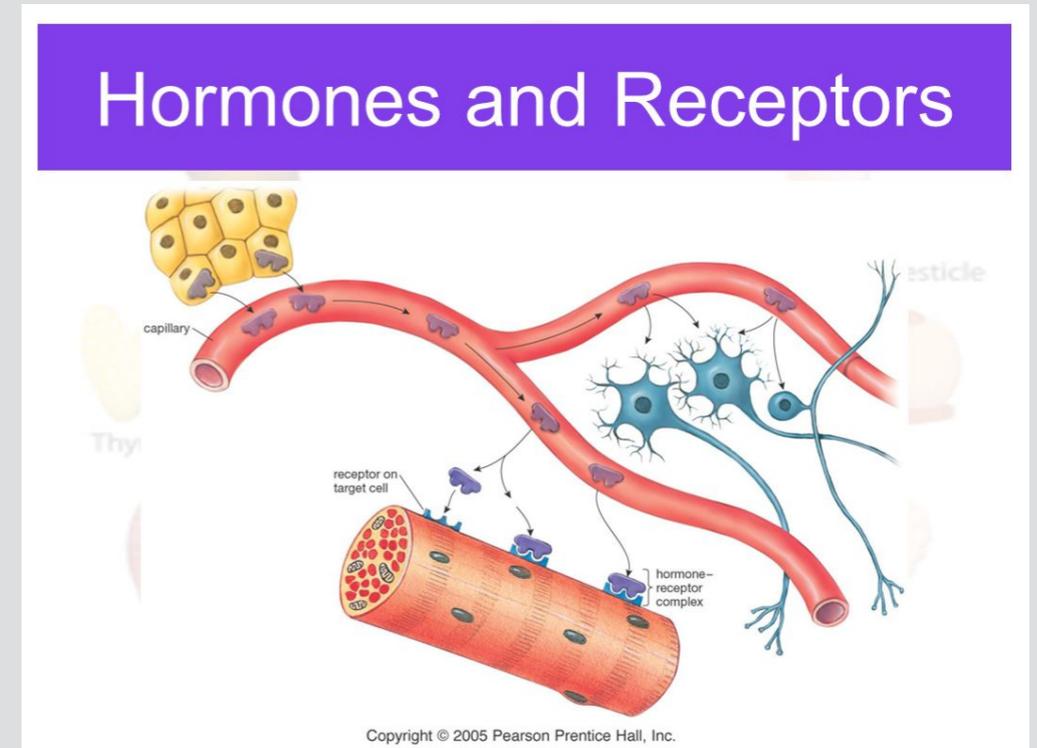
5. Stamp out an avoidance

- Identify one avoidance that you want to challenge (we recommend a less severe avoidance).
- Use the ***Imaginary desensitisation technique*** to kill the fear gradually. Do this for at least 21 days.
- Once comfortable and confident with the imaginary desensitisation activity, attempt the ***direct desensitisation technique***. *This is when you physically challenge your avoidance.*



6. Strengthen the balance and communication of key hormones for cortisol reduction

- Insulin control
- Calorie restriction
- Eicosanoids modulation



Q&A Session

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“There are no constraints on the human mind, no walls around the human spirit, no barriers to our progress except those we ourselves erect.”

—Ronald Reagan, 40th U.S President

The End

Additional Materials

Negative Emotions & Their Effects On the Human Organs

Negative Emotions	Organ Affected	Tissues Affected	Orifice Affected (Senses)
Sadness, Grief, Resentment	Lungs, Large Intestine	Artries and Veins	Tongue
Doubt, Confusion, Indecision	Heart	Skin	Nose
Worry, Anxiety, Depression, Obsessions	Stomach	Muscles	Mouth
Anger, Low Self-Esteem	Liver	Tendon	Eyes
Fear, Panic, Agitations, Lack of Willpower	Kidney	Bones	Ear

11 Harmful Ways to Coping With Stress: Unhelpful Coping Mechanisms

- Drinking too much
- Smoking
- Sleeping too much
- Procrastinating
- Watching too much TV or playing too much games
- Overeating or under-eating
- Isolating yourself from friends and family
- Withdrawing from activities you enjoy
- Depending on pills or drugs to relax
- Over-busyness or workaholism
- Taking out your stress on others



21 Ways to Reduce Stress

- Getting enough sleep
- Spending time with positive people
- Healthy eating
- Regular exercise
- Reducing the intake of caffeine and sugar
- Eliminating drugs, alcohol and cigarettes
- Refusing to bottle-in your painful feelings
- Seeing problems as opportunities
- Creating your ideal environment for calm
- Looking at the bigger picture
- Doing something you enjoy daily
- Accepting the uncontrollable
- Laughing aloud
- Initiating a compromise or reconciliation
- Refusing to get stuck in perfectionism
- Avoiding sensitive arguments
- Becoming more assertive
- Mastering time management
- Learning to say no
- Avoiding stressful people
- Knowing your stress triggers