

What happens when stress is chronic?

Our baseline relaxed physiological state (BRPS) is critical to keeping us alive; it helps with cell regeneration; and replenishing the body's energy reserves. BRPS helps us constantly to recover mentally and physically and enhances longevity. So says [Dr Etienne van der Walt](#), neurologist and an authority in applied behavioural neuroscience. He explains that our BRPS is not a state of laziness or apathy. In this state, we are alert, and we can engage in silent reflection to function optimally.

Chronic stress

We move in and out of our BPRS at least 100 times a day. It's a constant back-and-forth between a state of stress and BPRS. When you're in BRPS, you sleep well, your heart rate is good, your digestive system works well. However, when stress is constant, it means we are constantly out of our BRPS, and under these conditions, even when you sleep, you can never quite reach BPRS, as chronic stress never really allows for restful sleep.

Chronic stress enables an environment for cancer cells to have an opportunity to grow, and injured cells are unable to heal.

How much can you take before you break?

Resilience is not tenacity or grit. It is an innate neurobiological capacity which exists in everyone. It's what our ancestors had to help them adapt to change. It is the ability to bounce back and bounce forward. Resilience allows us all to overcome challenges.

If the challenges come too thick and fast, they may override our resilience and we will break. Breaking means the stress is too much – too much energy is being assigned to tasks. Excessive, chronic stress causes a leakage of energy, and this constant leakage causes illness. Resilience is the body and brain's capacity to prevent implosion in the presence of chronic stress. It allows us to learn and grow through stressful situations and enables us to bounce forward.

Five high-performance domains to build resilience

Etienne lists 'five big things' that help build resilience:

1. Connectors result in social safety. This involves bonding with others (built on trust) and belonging (feeling a sense of connection).
2. Transformers – a shift in mindset. This means moving from an individual competitive mindset to a collaborative competitive one. It involves engaging the part of the brain that sees the bigger picture, not just the details.
3. Energy. This is finite and allows us to think, learn, allocate resources and work together. The key to having energy is optimising the energy we have. Humour, curiosity, optimism and enthusiasm help increase energy.
4. Rhythms. Being conscious or mindful of rhythms such as nutrition, exercise, movement and breathing.
5. Innovators. This means cultivating learning and innovation and being a life-long learner.

Managing stress – specifically chronic stress – is a critical step to living a life of confidence.

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