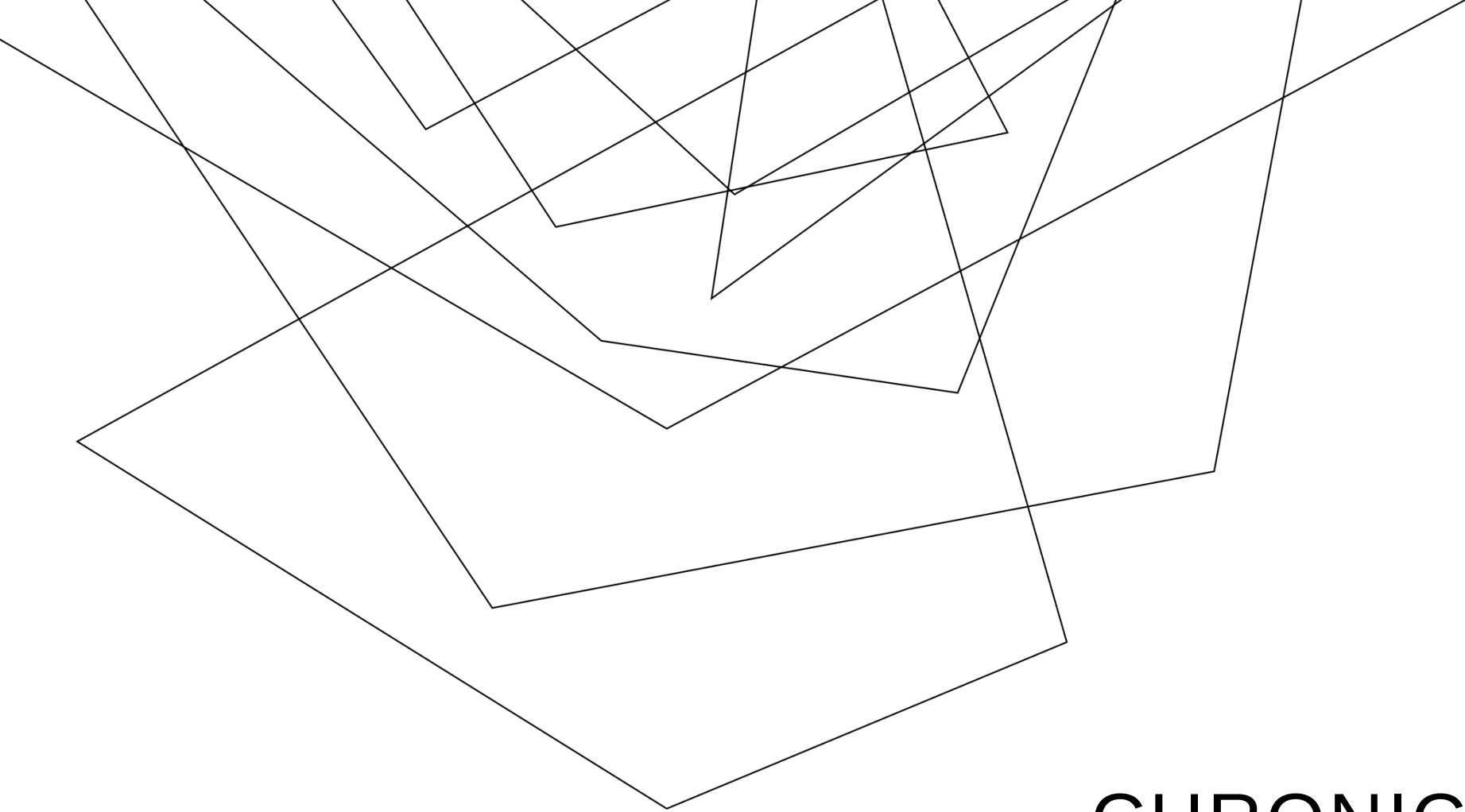




CHRONIC STRESS

CONTENTS

Topic one

Topic two

Topic three

Topic four

Topic five



Stress is;

“A state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances”

Oxford Dictionary (2025)

What is Chronic Stress?

Chronic Stress refers to a prolonged, continuous state of stress that occurs when an individual experiences and/or perceives a situation as threatening or overwhelming, but they feel unable to escape or resolve it.

Stress can be characterised as

- Acute
- Chronic
- Traumatic.

Symptoms

Behavioural

- Find it hard to make decision
- Unable to concentrate
- Unable to remember or memory worker slower
- Constantly worrying or experiencing feeling of dread
- Snap at people
- Bite Nails
- Pick or itch skin
- Grind teeth or clench jaw
- Losing interest in sex or not enjoying it
- Eating to much or too little
- Smoking; using of recreational drugs or drinking more than usual
- Restless
- Cry or feel tearful
- Spend or shop to much
- Not exercising as much as you usually would or exercising to much
- Withdraw from people around you

Physical

- Difficulty Breathing
- Panic Attacks
- Blurred eye sight/sore eyes
- Sleeping Problems
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches and headaches
- Chest pain and high blood pressure
- Indigestion or heartburn
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Feeling sick, dizzy, or fainting
- Sudden weight gain or weight loss
- Developing rashes or itchy skin
- Sweating
- Menstrual cycle changes
- Existing physical health problems worsening



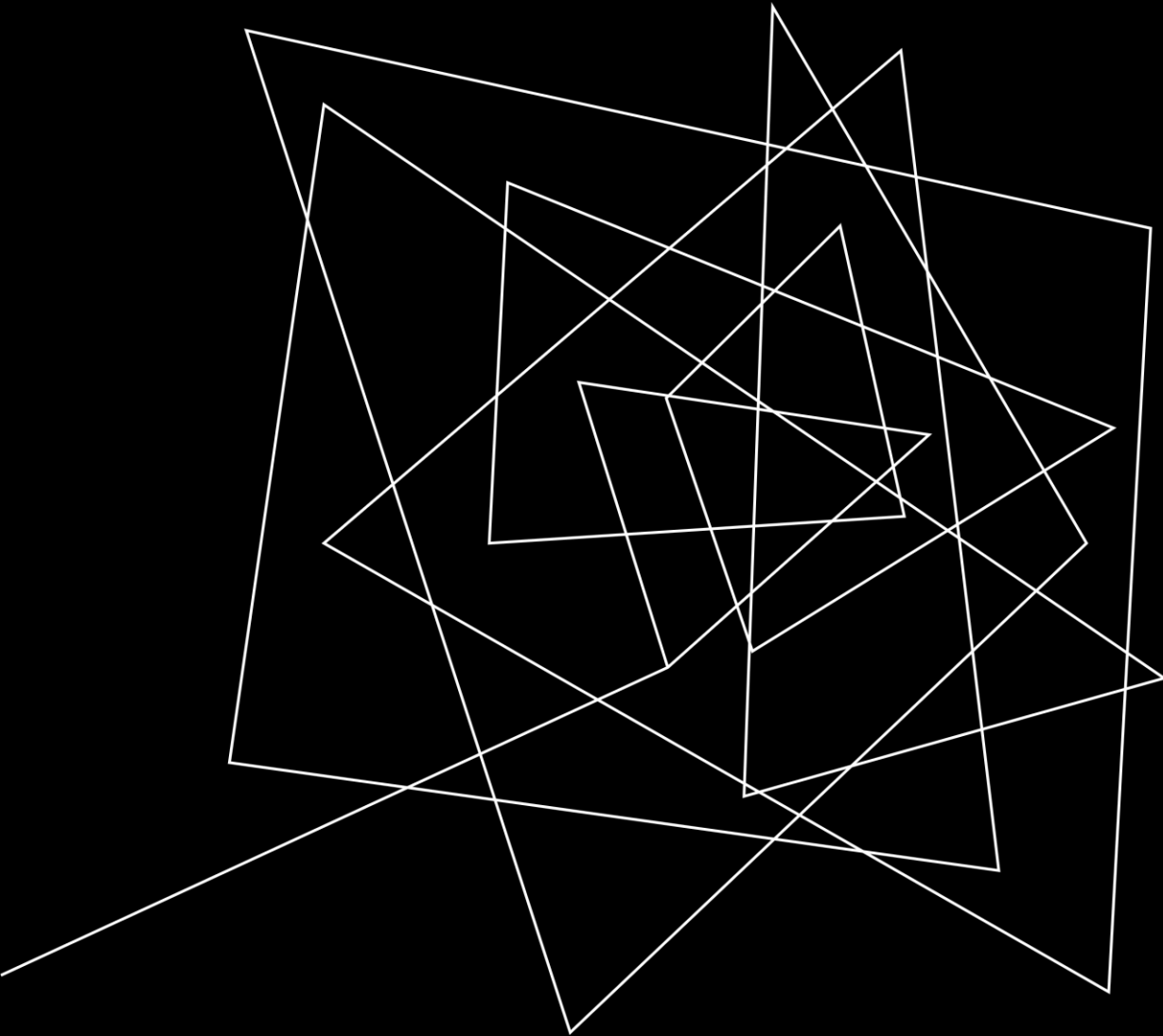
You might experience chronic stress if you are under a lot of pressure a lot of the time; not necessarily all of the time!

This is because of the what happens within the body when we experience a stressful situation and how the body tries to ensure your continued safety

GENERALISED ADAPTATION SYNDROME

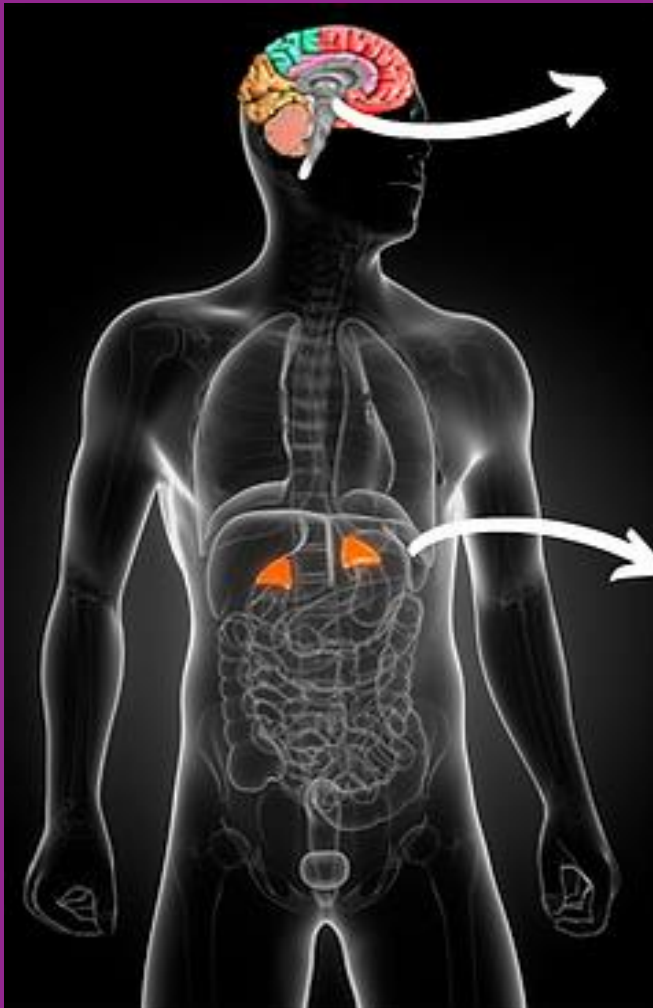
HAN SEYLE (1936)

- Alarm Reaction
- Resistance
- Exhaustion



How our Bodies Respond to Stress

Sympathetic Nervous System & The Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenalcortical (HPA) Axis



The Hypothalamus and
Pituitary gland

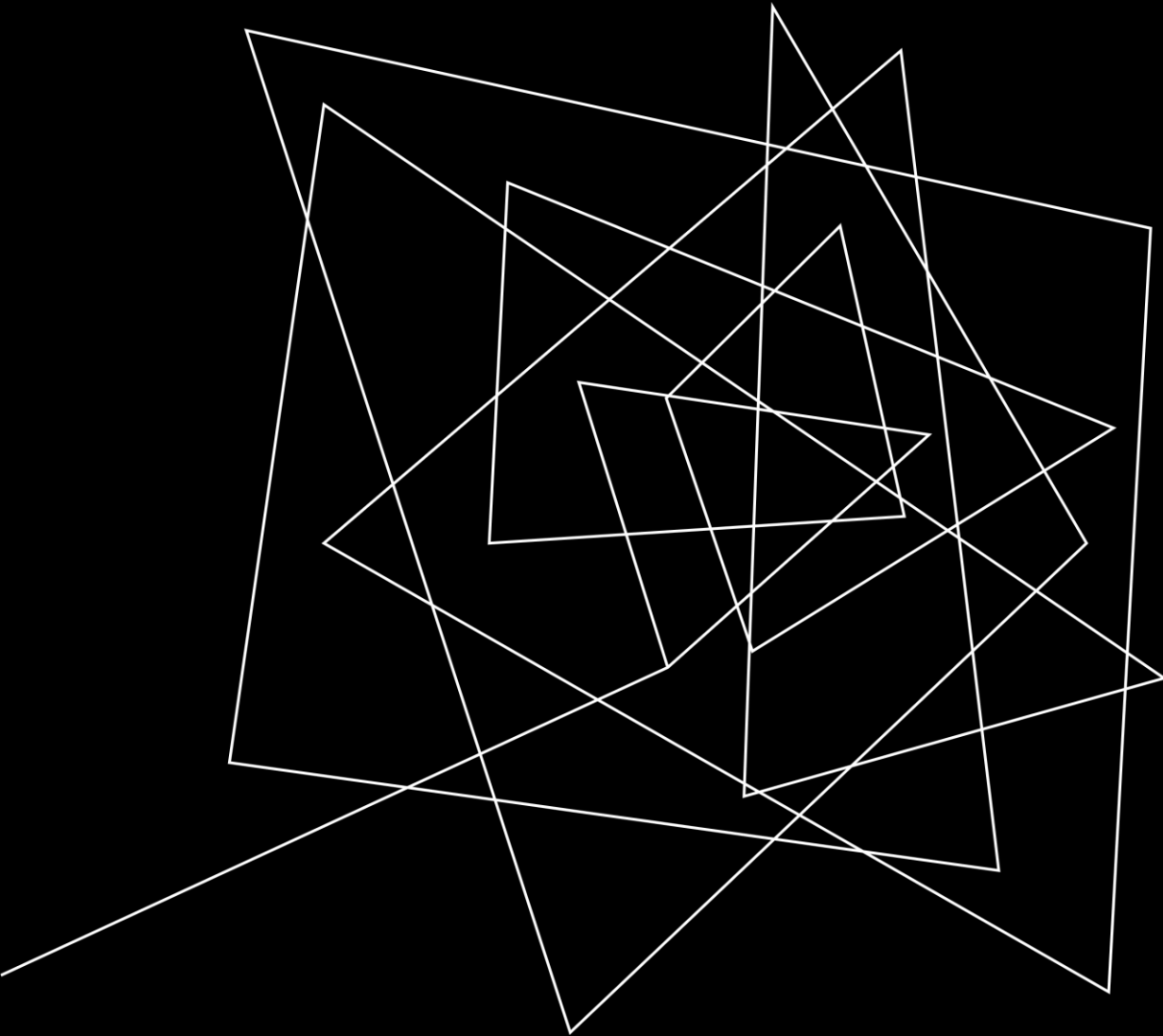
The Adrenal glands

This is how the body releases adrenaline, which causes the fight or flight response and cortisol that keep you in this response

CHRONIC STRESS & ALLOSTASIS

BRUCE MCEWEN
(1998)

- Allostasis the process the body achieves stability
- Allostatic load – wear and tear on the body



Diagnosis and Assessments

- Chronic Stress is not in the DSM-5, although acute stress and PTSD is.
- Blood test to show cortisol levels
- The Social Adjustment Rating Scale (Holmes & Rahe 1967) / Life Change Index Scale/Stress Test
- The Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al 1983)
although, this scale does not seem to be widely used by GPs in the UK

**Exercise & Sleep
Management**

Tension reduction and
rest

**Relaxation
Techniques**

Progressive Muscle
Relaxation & Deep
Breathing Exercises

Medication

SSRIs and SNRIs

TREATMENTS

**Mindfulness Based
Stress Reduction**

Paying attention to the
present moment &
body awareness
exercises

**Cognitive
Behavioural Therapy**

Change negative
thought patterns,
behaviours and emotion
responses

REGULATION, AWARENESS & PERCEPTION

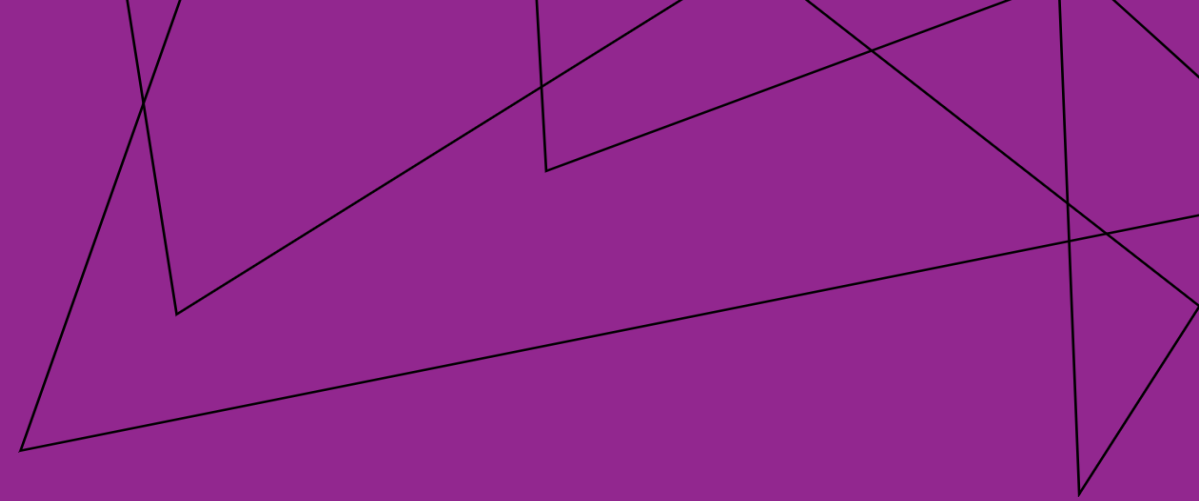
- Personal Growth
- Enhanced Self-Awareness
- Integration of Mind, Body & Emotions



Recommended treatments according to Policy, Access & Effectiveness

- N.I.C.E guidelines do not have an recommendation for chronic stress, recommendations can be found for PTSD, anxiety and depression and prevention of work related stress (employer responsibilities)
- N.I.C.E guidelines have made therapy like CBT more accessible

Recommended treatments according to Policy, Access & Effectiveness



- Some mental health charities to have help tools on their websites however, there is a lack of funding experienced in most which make in person work challenging
- Even if individuals are treated for these other conditions the recommendations are those for immediate relief like CBT, and mindfulness exercises and are not long term changes

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