

## Why a little bit of stress is a good thing

We are constantly told stress is bad for our health, but facing occasional adrenaline-fuelled days can actually bring benefits, NATASHA HOLT discovers

Llanelli Star · 4 Aug 2021 · 34

### Brain boost



SMALL amounts of stress have been scientifically proven to stimulate production of neurotrophins which strengthen connections between brain neurons.

“In the short term this can boost concentration and propel us into action,” explains Dr Elena Touroni, consultant psychologist and cofounder of MyOnlineTherapy.

“For instance, research shows a certain level of anxiety and stress can help us prepare more effectively for an exam.” Strangely enough, research has also shown a little stress can be good for unborn babies too. A 2006 study by Johns Hopkins university, US, showed most children born to women who had mild to moderate levels of stress in pregnancy had better motor and development skills by age two than those born to unstressed mothers.

### Added immunity

“The body’s response to stress is also designed to help us fight off bacteria,” explains Dr Touroni. “Mild stress raises production of cortisol which triggers our fight or flight response.

“That boost of cortisol also stimulates our immune system to fight whatever is attacking it.”

This is supported by a 2012 study on rats which showed exposing them to mild stress produced a “massive mobilisation” of numerous immune cells in their bloodstream. “Over the short term your immune system will function better but it’s important to remember chronic stress will weaken the immune system. Too much is never a good thing,” says Dr Touroni.

### No fear

If you’ve ever successfully coped with a stressful situation, you will feel much less anxious about facing a similar challenge when it crops up again. “This is down to exposure,” says

Dr Touroni.

“If we’ve been exposed to change in the past, we’re less likely to fear it in the future.”

**Extra confidence**

“As you gain mastery over a situation you build resilience, and with resilience comes an increase in confidence,” says Dr Touroni. Knowing you survived the situation the first time boosts your confidence and makes you stronger and more determined to tackle it head on when it arises again.

A little stress also helps you perform better. “On the whole, we learn to adapt by being exposed to challenging experiences in life,” explains Dr Touroni. “If we weren’t exposed to situations that cause a certain level of stress, we wouldn’t develop resilience.”

**Stronger relationships**

When we turn to friends, family and colleagues in times of stress it strengthens bonds between us.

“Adversity can strengthen a relationship, provided it was managed in an effective way,” agrees Dr Touroni. Opening up to others can lead to more honest friendships.

**Motivation**

Stress forces the body to produce cortisol which provokes our fight or flight response. That’s why deadlines often force us to get jobs done.

“Stress can be motivating in the sense it pushes us into action,” says Dr Touroni. “A certain level of stress can be helpful, provided it doesn’t overwhelm us.”