

A PERPETUAL STRUGGLE

HOW MODERN LIFE IS THE PERFECT PRECURSOR FOR A CHRONICALLY STRESSFUL HABITAT

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Bills need to be paid, deadlines need to be met, that unsatisfactory figure on the cashpoint screen needs to stretch a little longer than anticipated. To top it all, the washing machine has just decided to keel over with exhaustion. So, you better sort that out too.



Photograph sourced from: Knights Property Services

A degree of longevity lies in each of these modern worries.

They are all by-products of our civilisation. Whether it's your parents, your neighbor or yourself; our environment ascribes these demands which need to be addressed in order to stay afloat.

They can all prescribe a sense of extreme worry when we try to address them, and together, form a tightly knit blanket which can consume the individual in a state of perpetual stress and rumination.

Anxiety and its temporary utility

In abstract terms, stress and anxiety are innate responses our bodies summon to demand a response. Anxiety has been a utility for humans historically.

In primitive terms, anxiety would have instigated in a circumstance of high stress; a predator approaches, adrenaline is released as our heart rate rises and our focus narrows to aid our escape. Any sort of pleasure or desire subsides as stress hormones are released to help us get out.

This is known as the *'fight or flight'* response, and it was a necessary response to external danger. We would, as the name suggests, fight off the impending danger or flee the scene.

Stress in the contemporary context

Contemporarily, the predator is now those winter bills that are leaving us economically strained for the remaining days or weeks before payday. For some, it is the absence of knowing when they will next be able to eat or provide for their family.

Our environment has rapidly adapted to accommodate the mechanisms of global economic functionality; ever-increasing efficiency in the pursuit of economic growth. However, our bodies have fallen short. Humans persist in responding to these modern-day stressors like how we would have reacted to a predator in proximity.



Breaking point. Cartoon sourced from: www.jomec.co.uk

These contemporary struggles are also no longer temporary, proving stress to be a chronic accessory to modern existence. It is experienced daily and can be entirely debilitating for those which it inhabits.

Research has shown that long-term exposure to cortisol has extremely detrimental impacts on our bodies.

We are simply not built to withstand the long-term symptoms of stress.

Stress impacts our bodily functions, from cognitive abilities to cardiovascular and immune systems; numerous studies suggest that stress hormones weaken the immune system, with a 2004 study pointing towards melancholic women's increased risk of cancer than less stressed women (*Yaribeygi, H. et al., 2017*).

This is not unfamiliar to us, yet the seemingly existential dilemma is rooted in the modern environment. We are encouraged to make decisions in the present to sustain us in the future, disrupting the utility of stress which is intrinsically short-term.

How do we provide mitigating mechanisms for modern day stress when our environment relies so heavily on future-orientated planning?

A disposition more concerned with the present moment is an advisory measure. Engaging in mindful activities and steering your mind clear of future problems is a mitigating force, by which you can concentrate on *how you actually feel*.

We cannot alter external experiences, but we have the power to choose how we react to them. As Naval Ravikant puts it;

'you want to be the coolest cucumber in a crisis'

A calm, collected mind, when confronted with issues, will fair far better than the mind consumed by the negative.

Stress is a necessary reaction to certain external conditions. However, to polarize rational from irrational anxieties, and to permit rumination around stressors which can be solved is an attempt to alleviate some of this modern existentialism.

