



# WHAT'S IN YOUR STRESS CONTAINER? > > >

Stress awareness month has been held every year since 1992 to raise awareness of the causes and cures for our modern stress epidemic and this April is no different.

You may recall, this time last year I discussed how work was the number one cause of stress and worryingly how two-thirds of people with a mental health problem believe that workplace stress contributed to their illness.

Now, I'm not going to dwell on this as after all, we are all different and different things can and will cause us stress - whether that's work, home, or wherever we are or whatever we are doing. However, regardless of those causes, the reality is, it can often be all consuming. Our stresses interrupt our daily lives, be that at work, home or even at 3am when we're trying to sleep we instead suddenly find ourselves alert, mind racing. I'm sure we have all been there.

Stress isn't something we can turn on or off without helpful strategies. If work is causing us stress we take it home, conversely, if it's our home life causing our stresses we take it to work with us. We are the same person after all, the environment doesn't necessarily change how we are feeling.

Sometimes stress can be triggered by just one thing, equally and probably more often, stress can be a build-up of multiple events, and if you're anything like me, frequently you might not even know what's causing it until you start to feel the physical or emotional effects.

Understanding the triggers and taking action is the key and the stress container model can help do just that. If you are honest with yourself, this little exercise can be cathartic and powerful in helping address the causes of stress and help you to identify strategies to minimise it.



**Helpful coping strategies:**  
tap is open, stress flows out

**Unhelpful coping strategies:**  
tap is closed, container fills and overflows

With the stress container model, a person's ability to cope with stress or their vulnerability is represented by the size of the container. The bigger the container the more stress someone can cope with, or the lower that person's vulnerability is to stressors.

Many factors influence the size of someone's container and our container will be larger and smaller at different times of our lives. The smaller container will overflow more quickly compared to a person who perhaps practices stress management techniques or has built up a greater resilience hence a large container and low vulnerability and is able to cope with challenges more easily.

### The Technique: What's in your stress container?

1. Firstly, write down all your stressors in your container, in the diagram this is represented as the inverted triangle.
2. Now think about the positive strategies you apply. Be honest, are they helpful coping strategies such as exercising, getting a good night's sleep, eating a balanced diet, socialising with friends, taking regular breaks, mediating, and so on?
3. Now it's time to think about the not so positive. Are you regularly engaging in perhaps unhelpful coping strategies such as watching endless hours of TV, withdrawing from friends or your partner, or conversely jumping into a frenzied social life to avoid facing problems? Overeating or undereating, sleeping too much, self-medicating such as drinking too much alcohol and so forth?

Dealing with high levels of stress is not easy but understanding what is causing it and focusing on your own helpful coping strategies is a great way to minimise those stressful feelings that cause us mental, physical or emotional strain or tension.

Over the last 3 years I have shared a number of resilience and wellbeing techniques we can proactively and positively use at work and at home all of which can be found on the NFDC Mental Health hub.

And, well, it's not over yet so watch this space....

In my next article for stress awareness month, I'll share another resilience and wellbeing technique – Spheres of influence.

**David Price**  
Vector Equilibrium  
 [www.v-eq.com](http://www.v-eq.com)

