

Survival Mechanisms to Deal with Stress

When we looked at how our body reacts to stress in Chapter 2, we saw that these reactions were designed to help us to escape from hostile circumstances and to survive danger. We also saw that in modern times most of our stress is not caused by life-threatening situations at all. For example, we are capable of raising our blood pressure by recalling an argument we had several years ago, anticipating how a difficult boss will respond to our request for an early holiday, or leaping to the defence of a friend who's being criticised. Given that our potential stressors have become so varied and numerous it is not surprising that we then find ourselves trying to protect ourselves from the results of our own stress. Unfortunately, many of the ways we try to do this not only do not help us manage the stress in a more effective way – they can actually make things worse.

Let's look at some examples:

Some survival mechanisms	Possible results	Relevance to my own coping strategies
1. Comfort e.g. An extra glass of wine, smoking, chocolate	Not a long-term solution, not good for our health	
2. Distraction e.g. Cinema, Netflix, social media	Problems are still there afterwards	
3. Shutting ourselves away and not wanting to see people	We are not spreading our stress around, but we are depriving ourselves of one of the most effective means of support – talking things through with people who care for us.	

<p>4. Suppressing our emotions as a means of retaining control</p>	<p>Increased feeling of isolation</p>	
<p>5. Establishing boundaries and setting limits</p>	<p>It is as if we close an inner door in our heart that in fact shuts us off both from our own capacity for caring and self-nurture as well as any feeling of empathy for other people. We may be trying to cope, but it is a short-term strategy that will not help us to understand and look after ourselves over time.</p>	