

Stress, Health and Performance in the Workplace

Professor Angela Clow

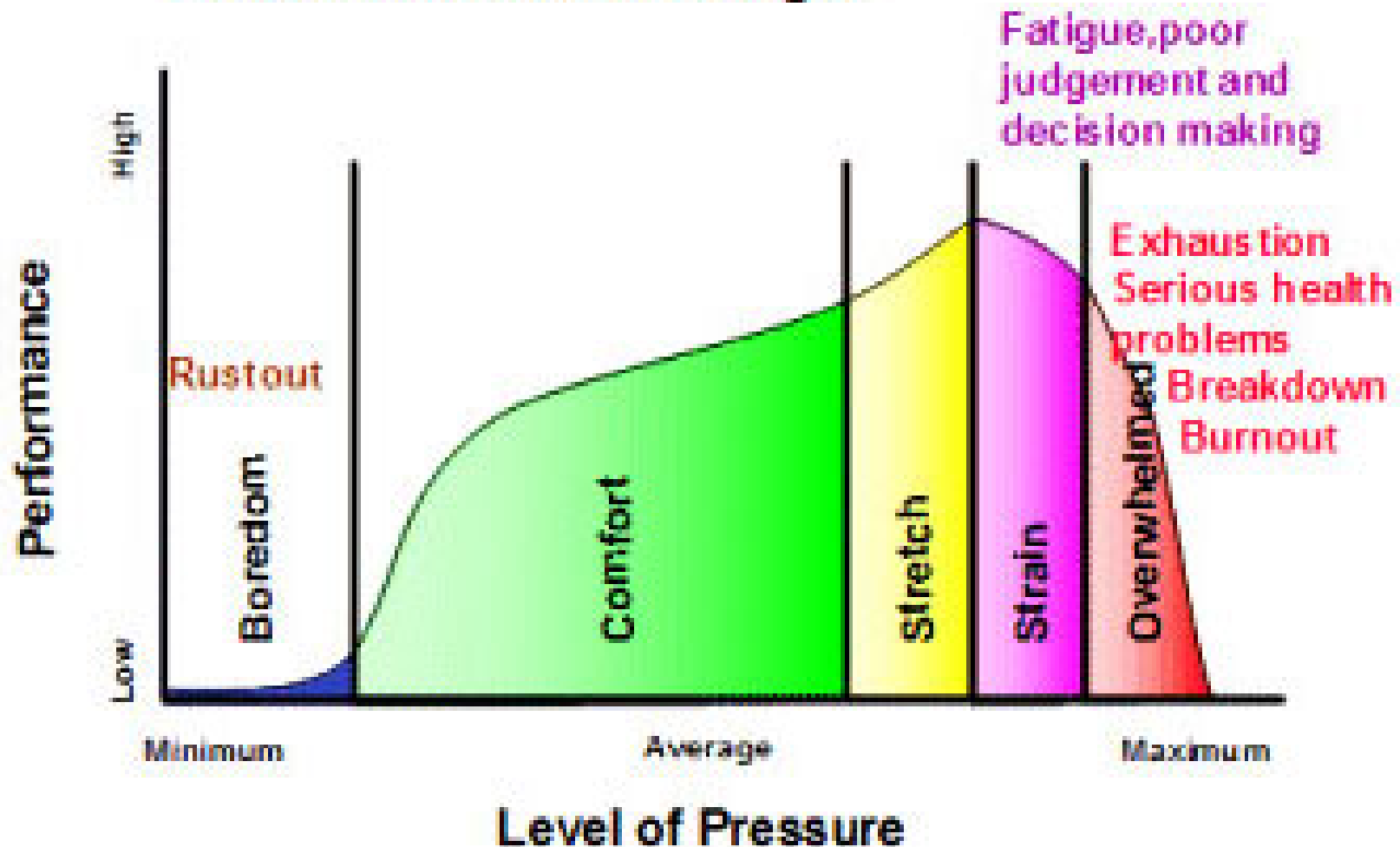
Department of Psychology University of
Westminster, London

Stress in the workplace

- About 1 in 5 people say they find their work either very or extremely stressful
- Over half a million people report experiencing work-related stress at a level they believe has actually made them ill
- Each case of stress-related ill-health leads to an average of 29 working days lost. A total of 13.4 million working days were lost to stress, depression and anxiety in 2001.
- Work-related stress costs society between £3.7- £3.8 billion per year (1995/6 prices)

A delicate balance between pressure and performance

Pressure Performance stages



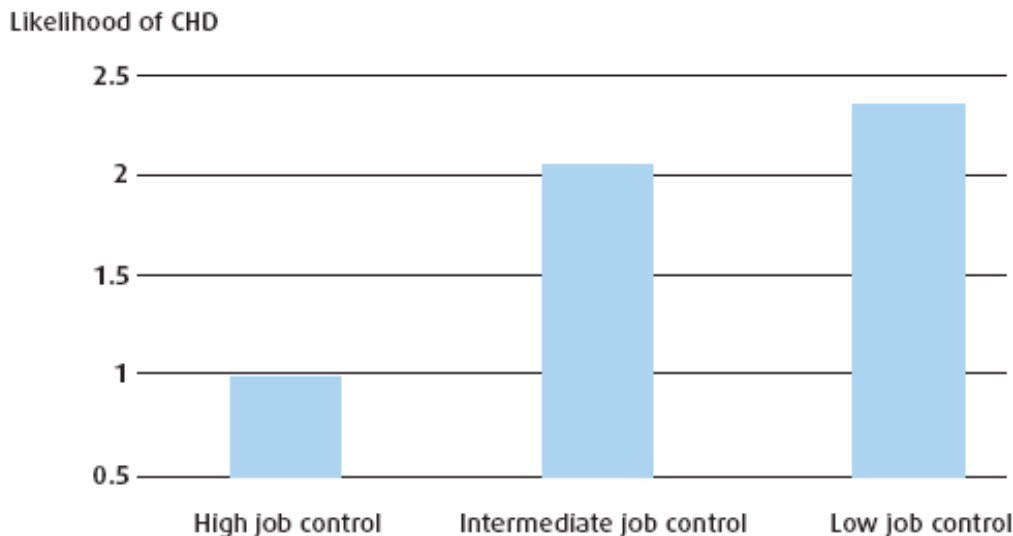
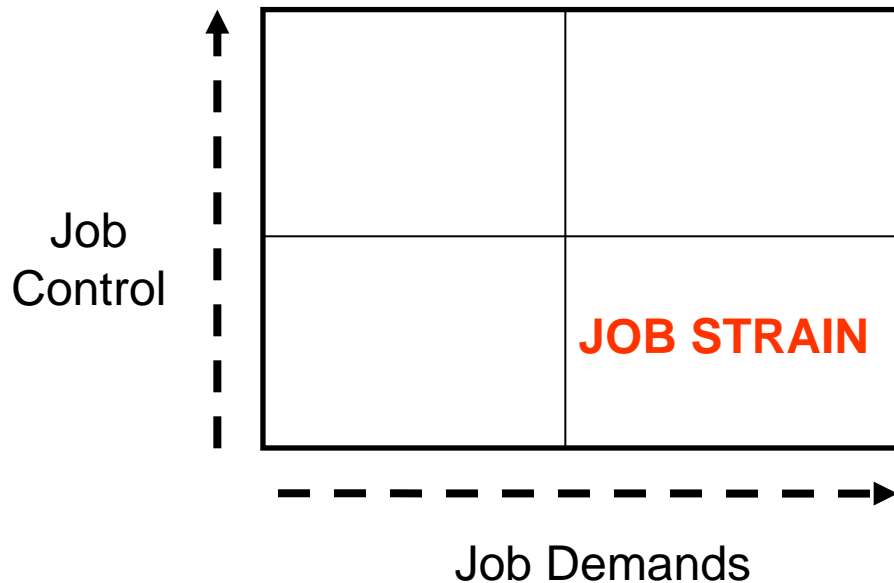
Models of work stress

- Karasek's job strain model
- Siegrist's effort reward imbalance
- Kivimaki's 'Justice at work'

These models are useful but have their limitations.

They need to be used in combination with a range of additional measures.

The Job Strain model of work stress

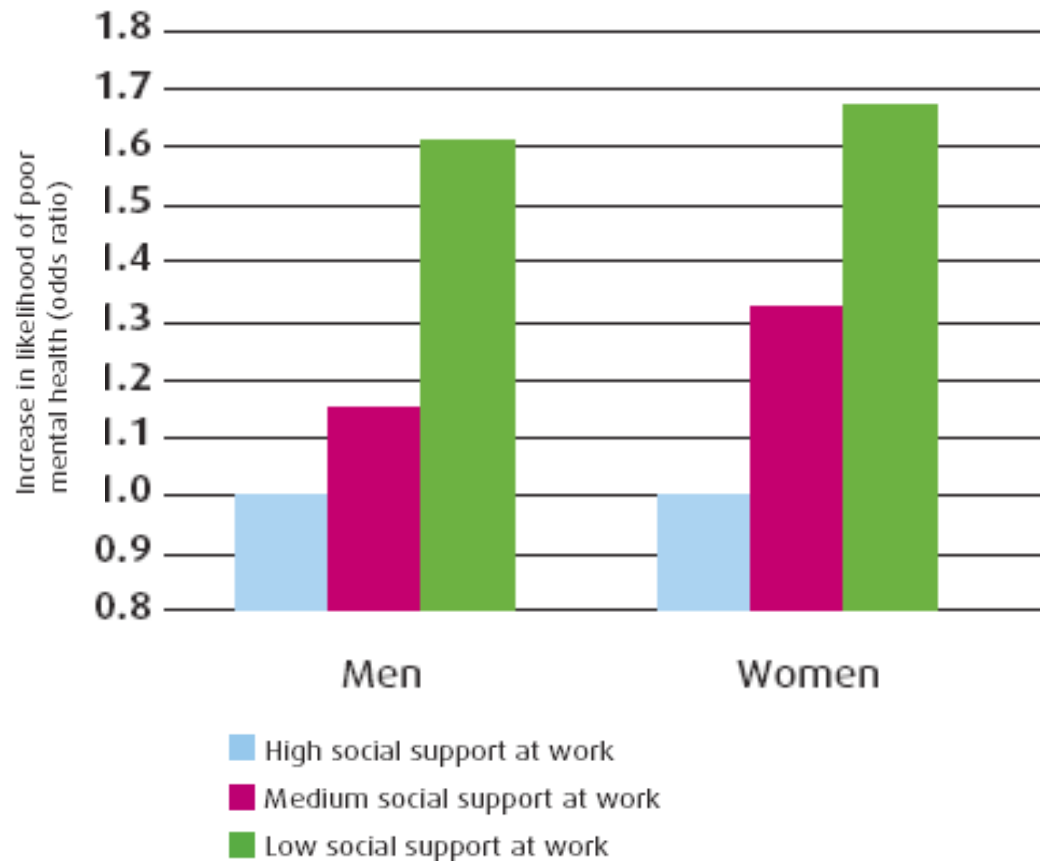


A large range of factors (both individual and organisational) operate to either exacerbate or attenuate job strain.

e.g. Social support, optimism, self-efficacy, justice at work, trust in leadership and managerial processes, adequate training, job reward, empowerment, customer relations, physical /environmental issues.

All these factors can be measured.

Job Strain buffered by social support in the workplace

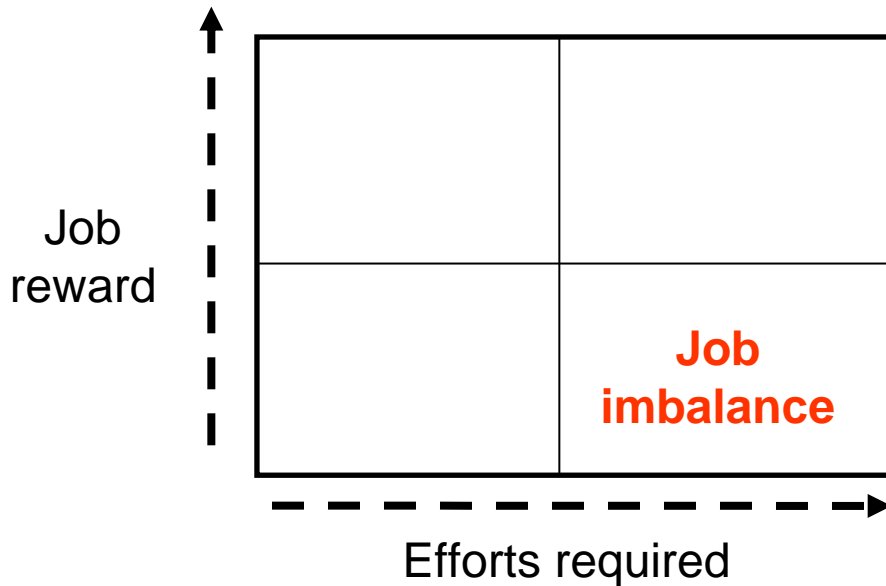


Workplace social support can be provided by:

Support plus clear and consistent information from managers.

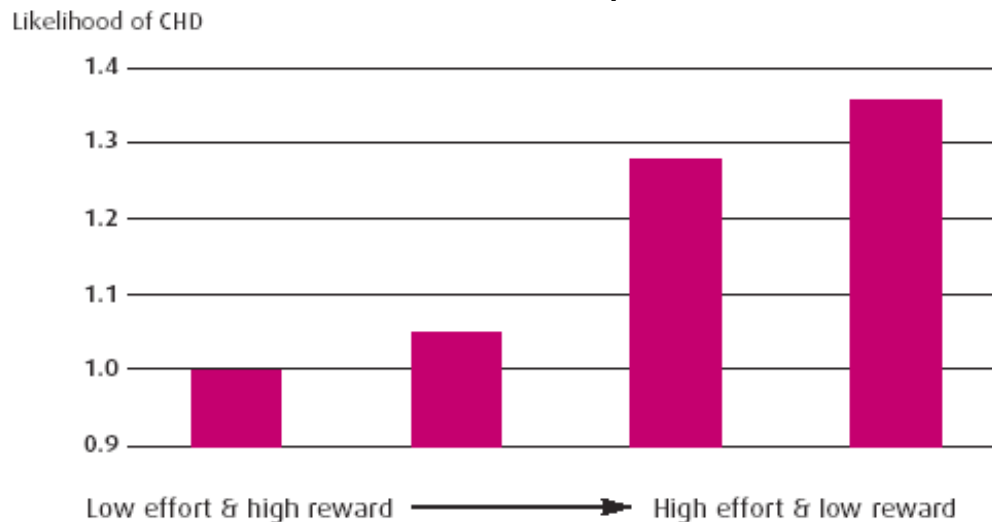
Work environments that facilitate mutual support between colleagues and do not tolerate antisocial behaviour.

Effort Reward Imbalance model



Reward can be provided by:

- Appreciation from others,
- Occupational status,
- Job satisfaction,
- Esteem,
- Security,
- Promotion,
- Opportunity,
- Money



‘Justice at Work’

High levels of justice at work is a buffer for work-related ill health.

‘Employees who experienced high levels of justice at work had a lower risk of CHD than those with a low or intermediate level of justice: hazard ratio= 0.65 (95% confidence interval, 0.47-0.89).’

Examples of questions:

Do you ever get criticised unfairly?

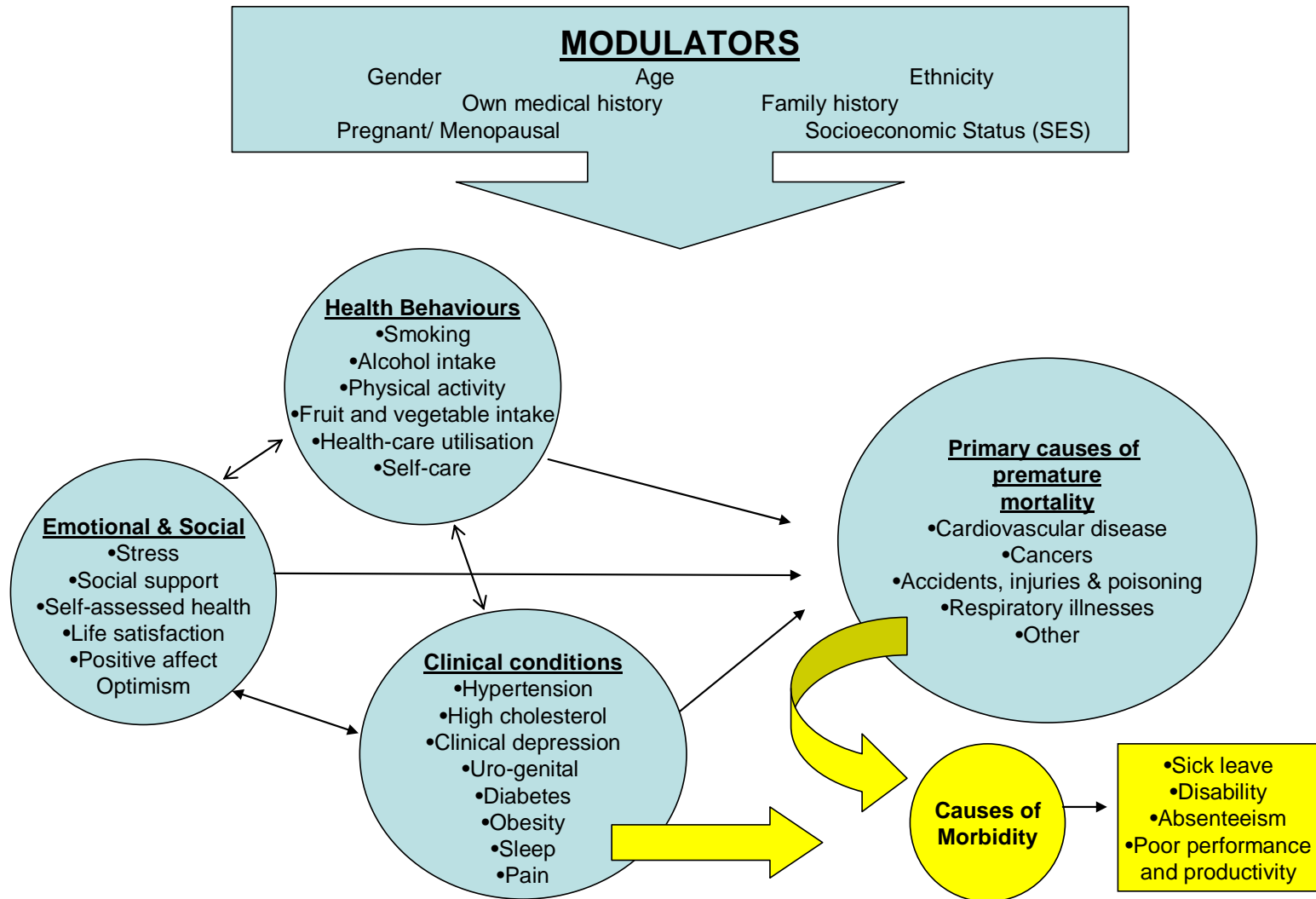
Do you get consistent information from your line manager?

Do you get sufficient information from your line manager?

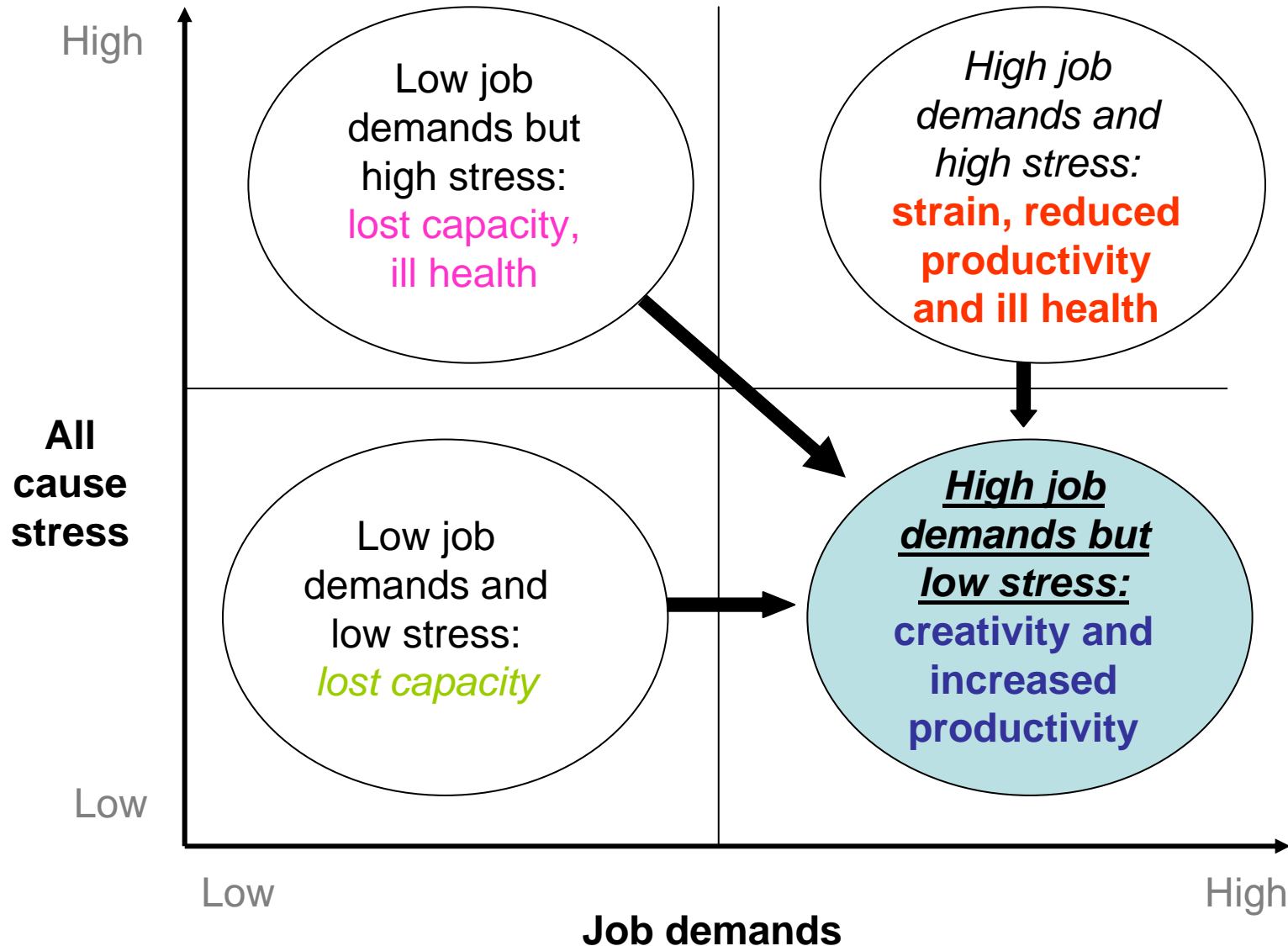
How often is your superior willing to listen to your problems?

Do you ever get praised for your work?

Stress, health and performance: a model of interacting factors



Job demands, stress and productivity



What are the mechanisms by which how you feel affects productivity and health?



Photo by Paul Reimann: recipient of BPA Medical Education Award and Medical World News Award

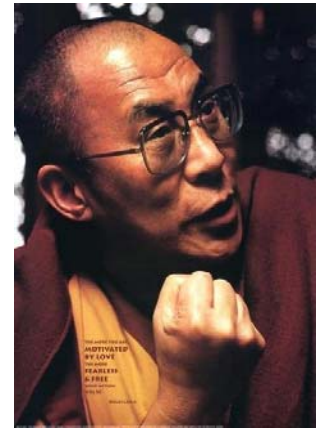
Positive well-being is not 'just' self gratification

3 aspects to finding happiness - a fine balance :

The pleasant life - positive emotion, gratification



The good life - absorption, engagement, 'flow'



The meaningful life – purpose, strength, virtue





Positive emotions help us perform better

'Broaden and Build'
hypothesis,
from *Fredrickson*

Interested,
excited,
joy,
strong,
enthusiastic,
alert,
active,
contentment,
love

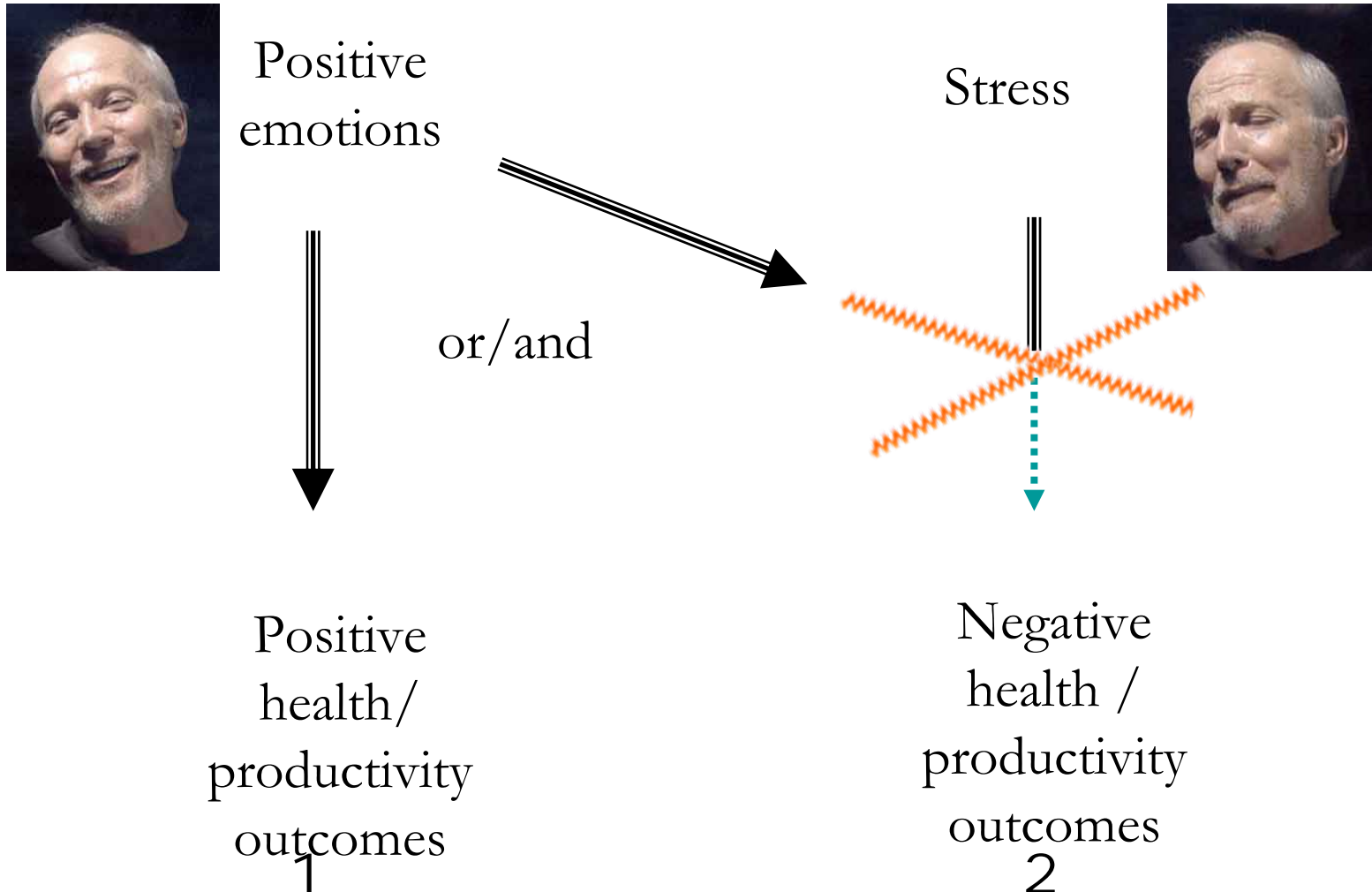
Positive emotions allow durable physical, social, intellectual and psychological resources to be drawn up – can transform the individual with more global outlooks, creativity and knowledge

Positive emotions also improve health and longevity

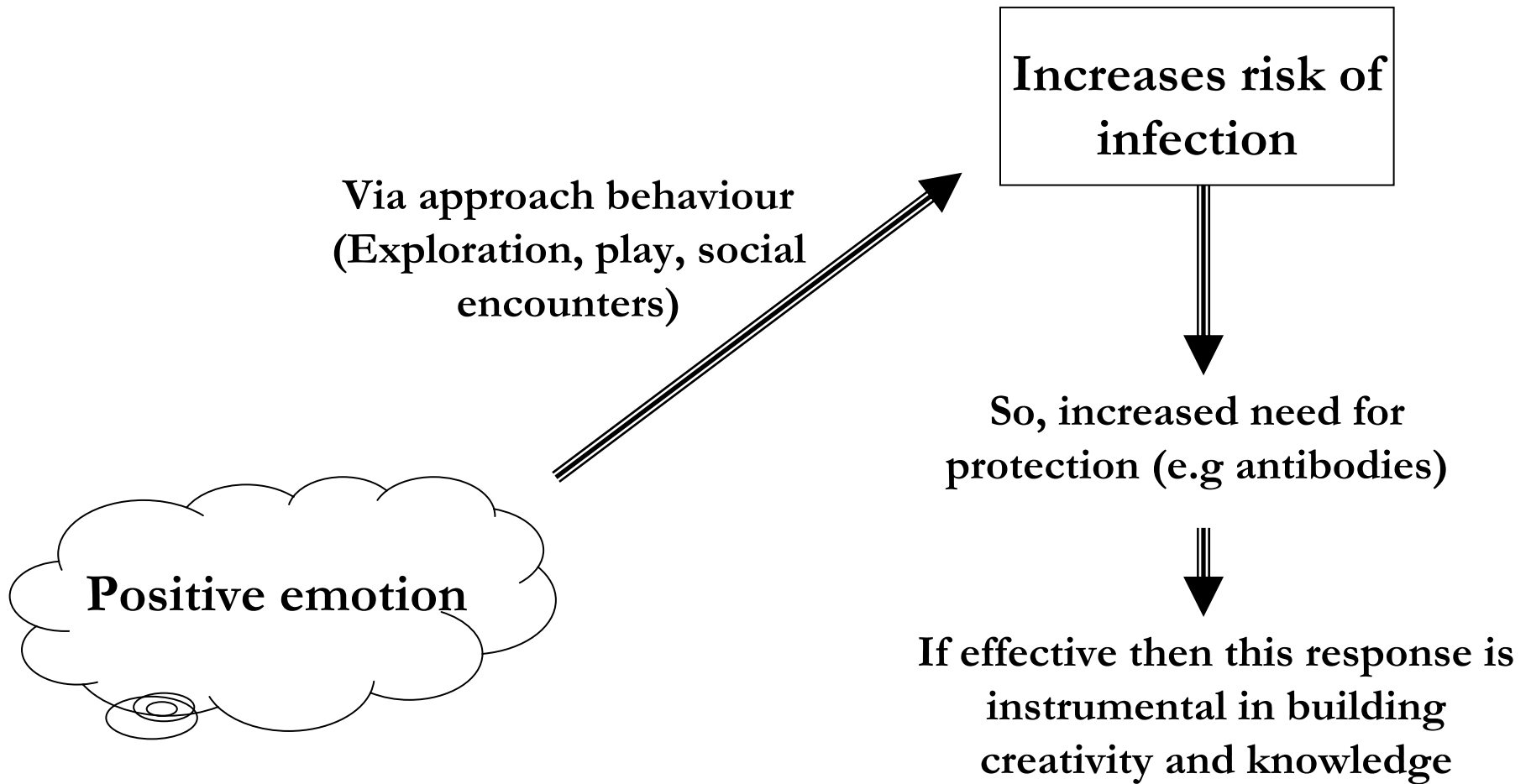
Evidence shows that people with trait positive emotion

- Live longer
- Have less coronary heart disease
- Are more likely to survive cancer
- Are less likely to succumb to a standard dose of virus

Possible direct or indirect mechanisms



Happiness and the immune system



What is stress anyway?

- Stress is a subjective response to a situation and occurs inside people - short term experiences of stress are adaptive but when they go on for a long time they are harmful.

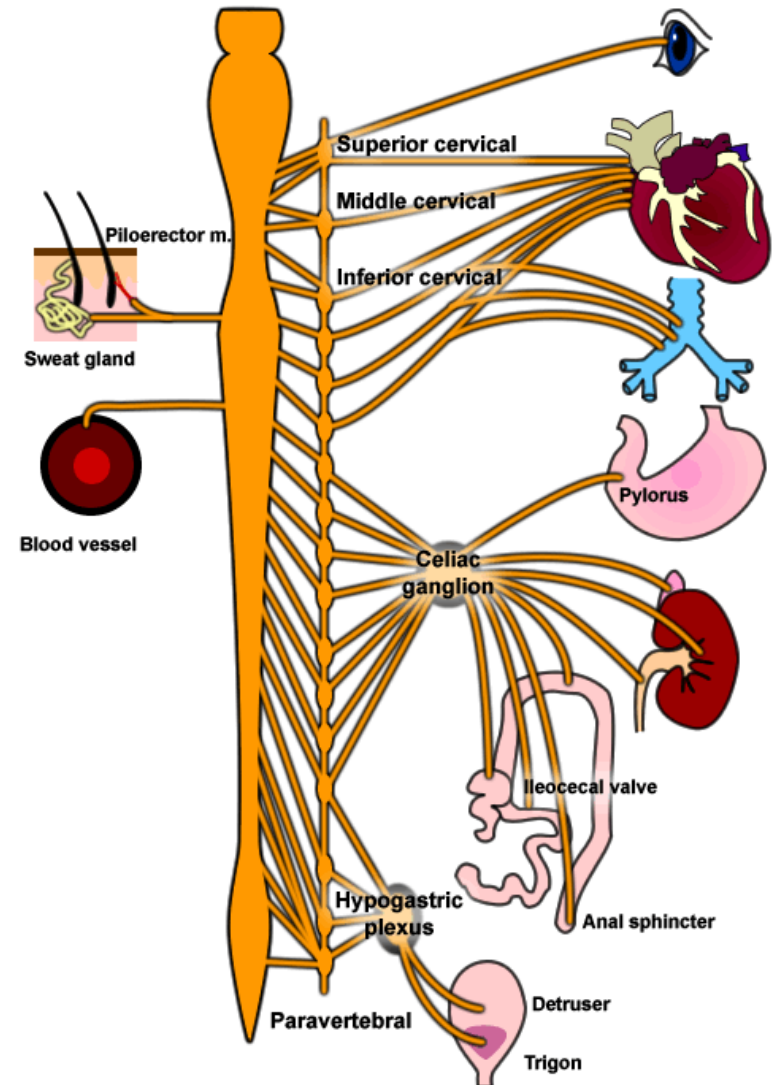
Stress can occur when people think the pressures on them are more than they can cope with (workplaces?)

Stress can lead to negative thoughts (e.g. lack of concentration, reductions in self esteem) and emotions (e.g. anxiety, anger) and is sometimes accompanied by changes in behaviour (e.g. sleep disturbance, irritability) and physical symptoms (e.g. upset stomach, tension headache etc)

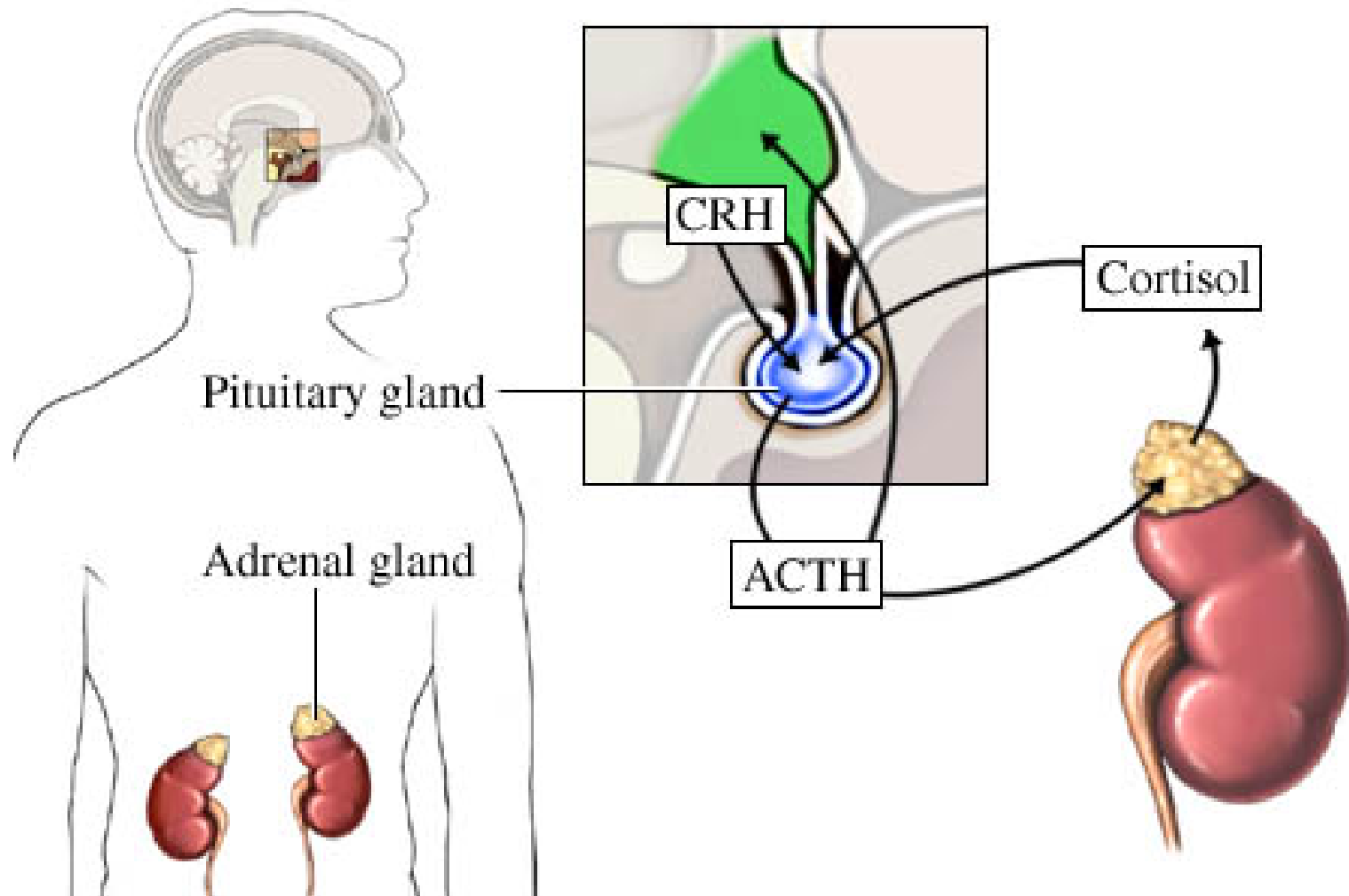
- Experiences of stress, if sustained over long periods, can have a powerful and widespread negative impact upon productivity, creativity, flourishing and health

Three systems link the brain with the body

- The nervous system - direct control of bodily organs by nerves
- The adrenal gland - secretes adrenaline
- The hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis - secretes cortisol

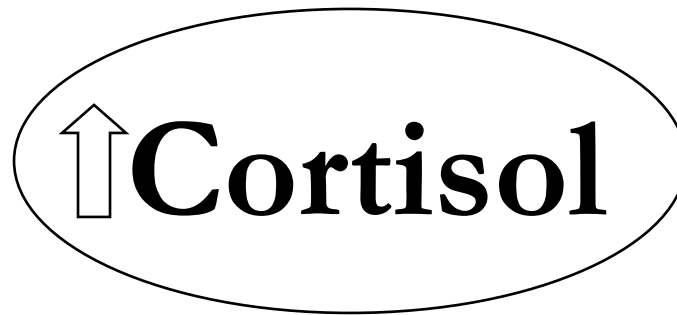


The hypothalamic pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis secretes cortisol



The problem is that in humans threat is usually psychological – not physical

Novelty



Lack of control

Unpredictable events

Anticipation

Threat to self esteem

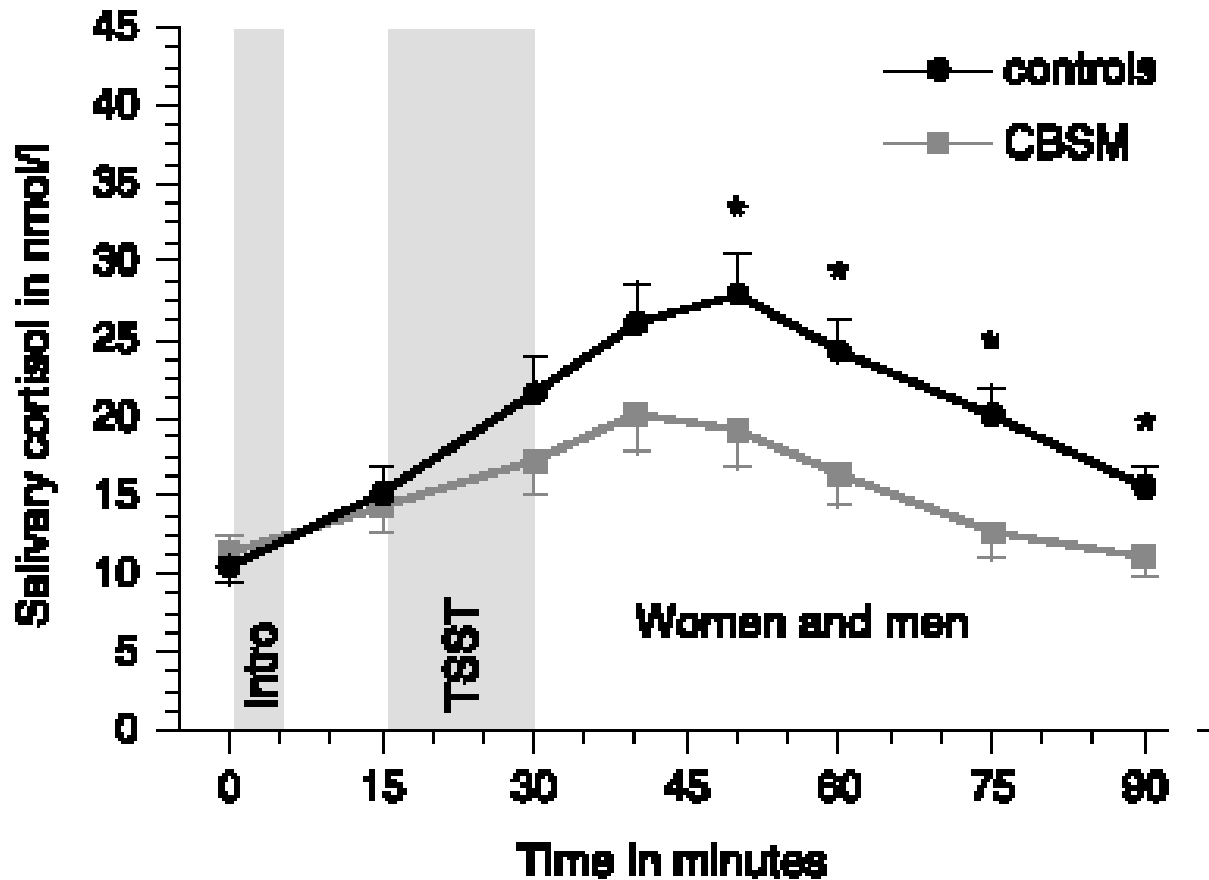
Physical illness

What does cortisol do?

Cortisol prepares the body to respond to an acute threat by increasing blood pressure, reducing inflammation and mobilising energy stores

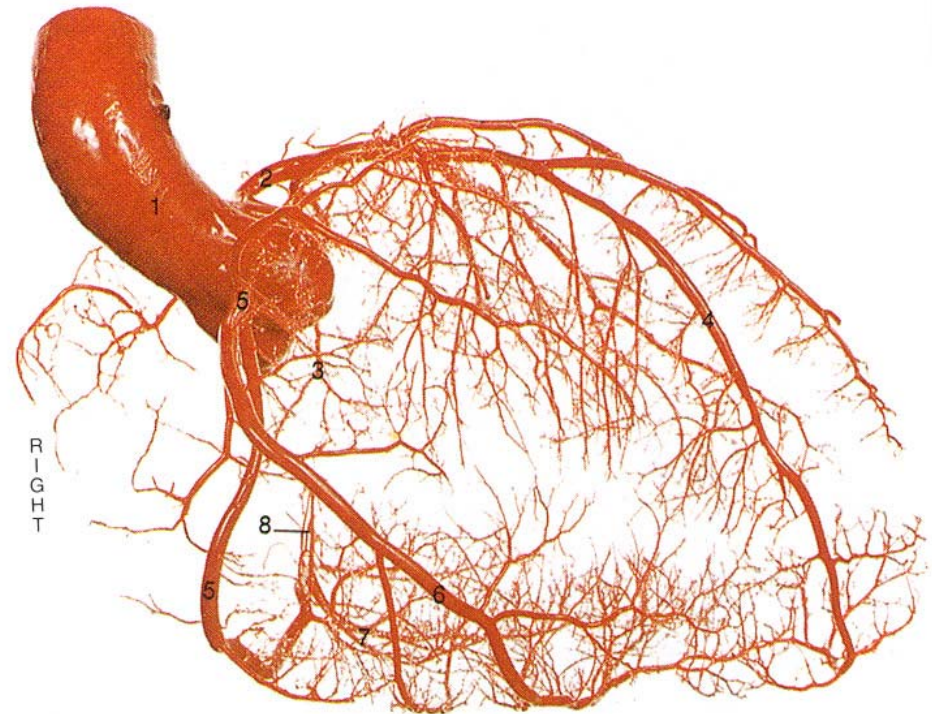
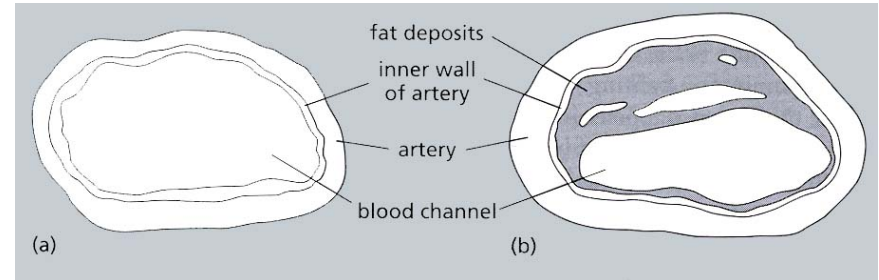
Cortisol has potent effects on multiple organ systems

Cognitive behavioural stress management can reduce stress responding



N=83 healthy students, 4 months of cognitive behavioural stress management

High overall levels of cortisol associated with poor physical health



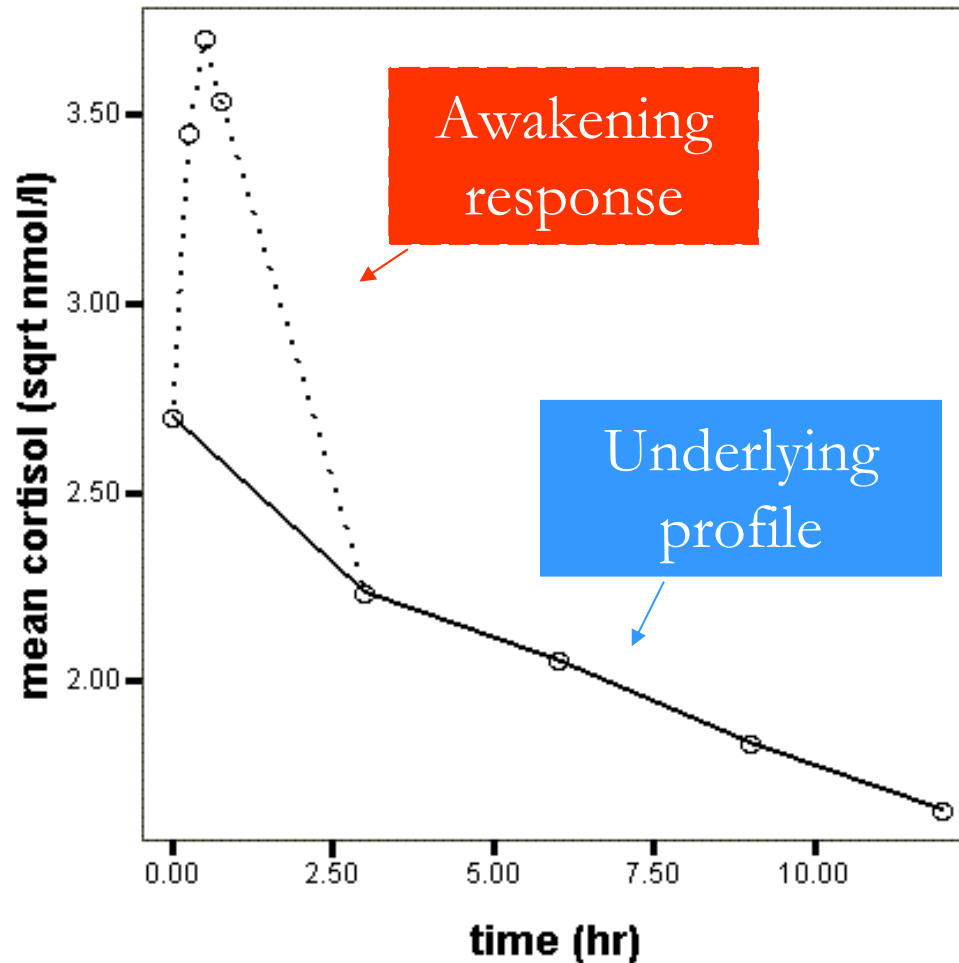
Stroke, depression, high blood pressure, angina, heart attack, allergy, diabetes, slow wound healing, osteoporosis, increased infections, accelerated cancer progression, accelerated HIV progression

Cortisol is much more than just a stress hormone

Cortisol tells the rest of our body when it is night and day



Healthy cortisol has a marked daily rhythm



The predictable
light/dark cycle

Unpredictable life
events or stressors

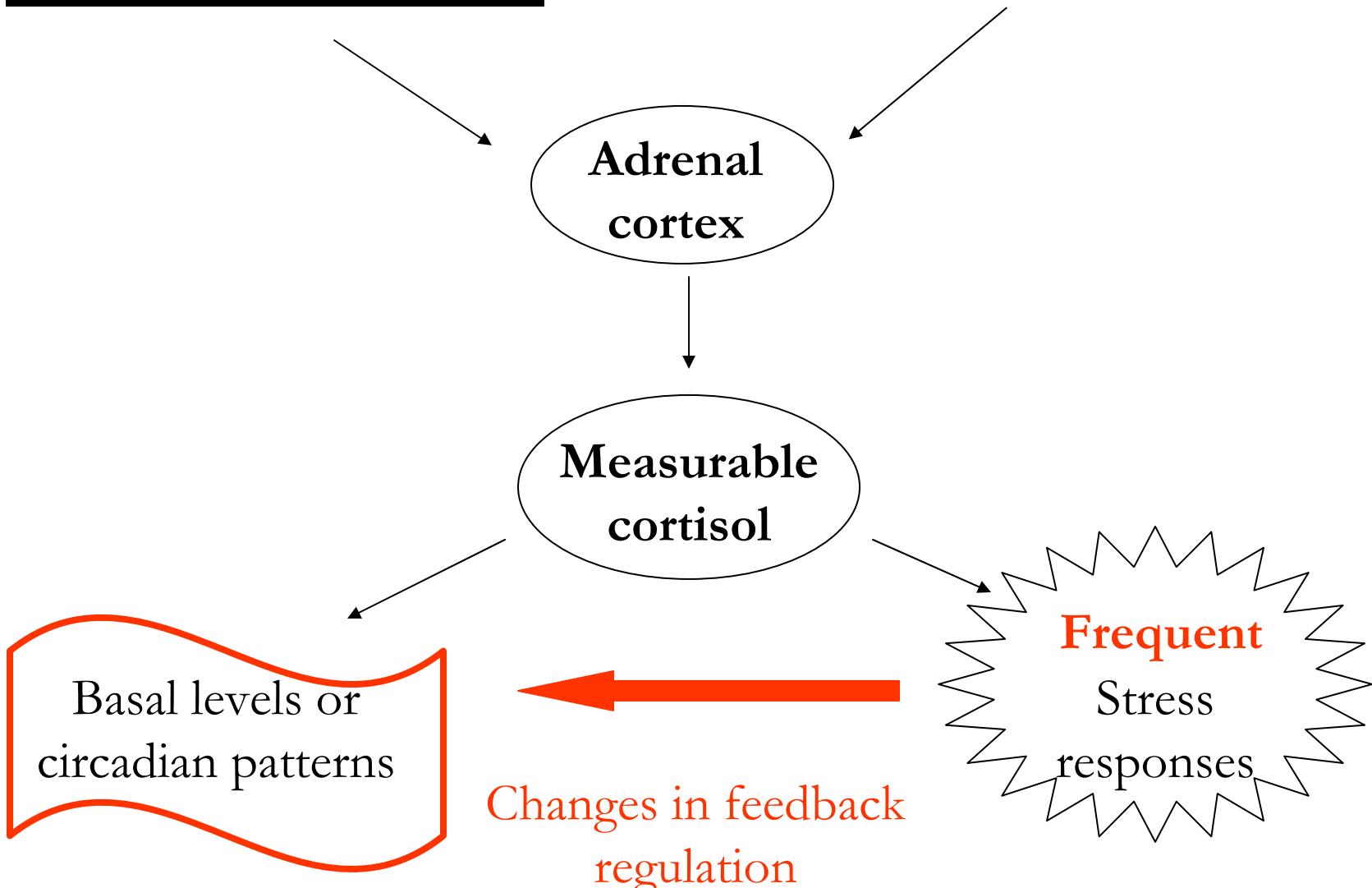
Adrenal
cortex

Measurable
cortisol

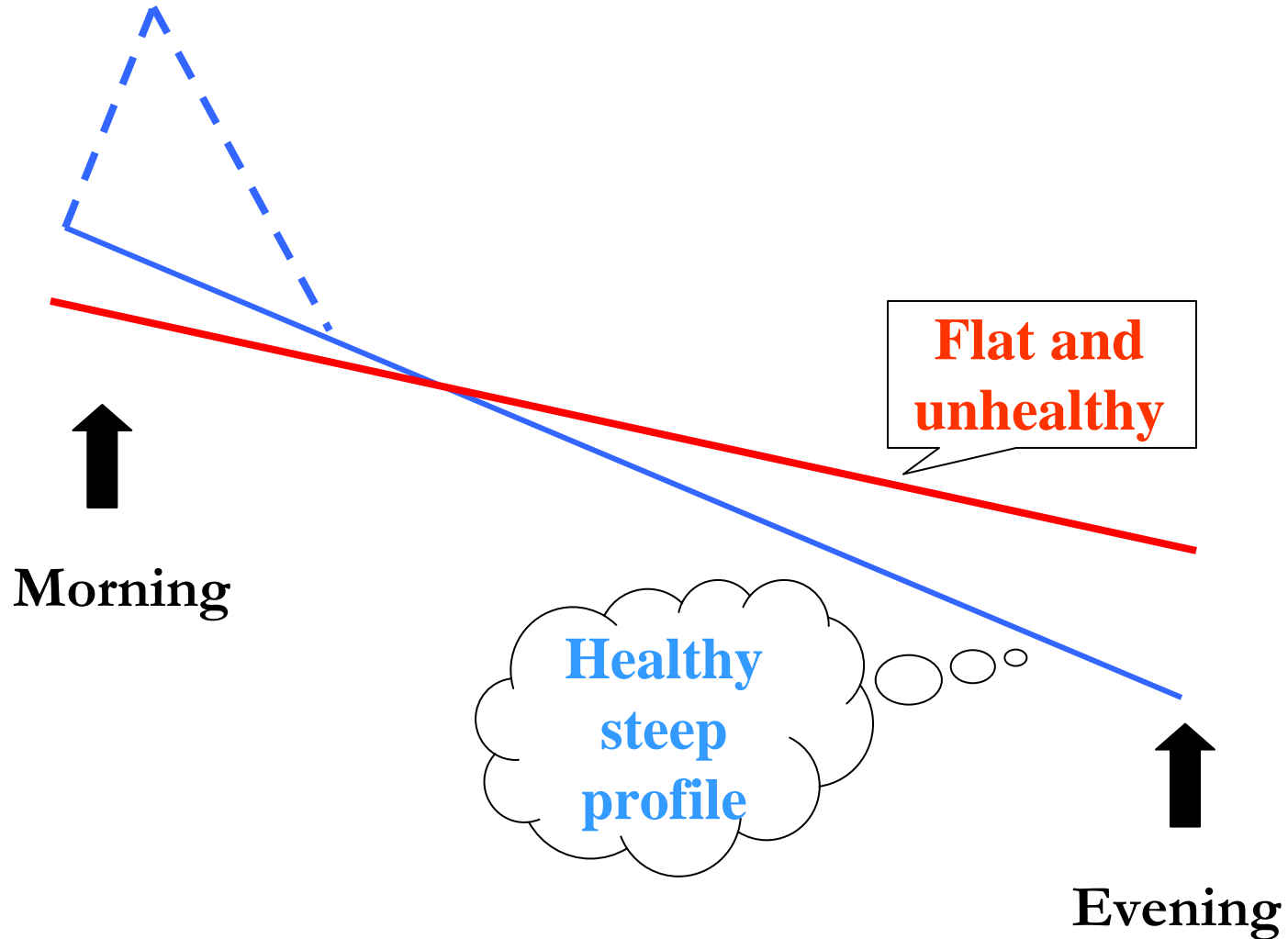
Basal levels or
circadian patterns

Frequent
Stress
responses

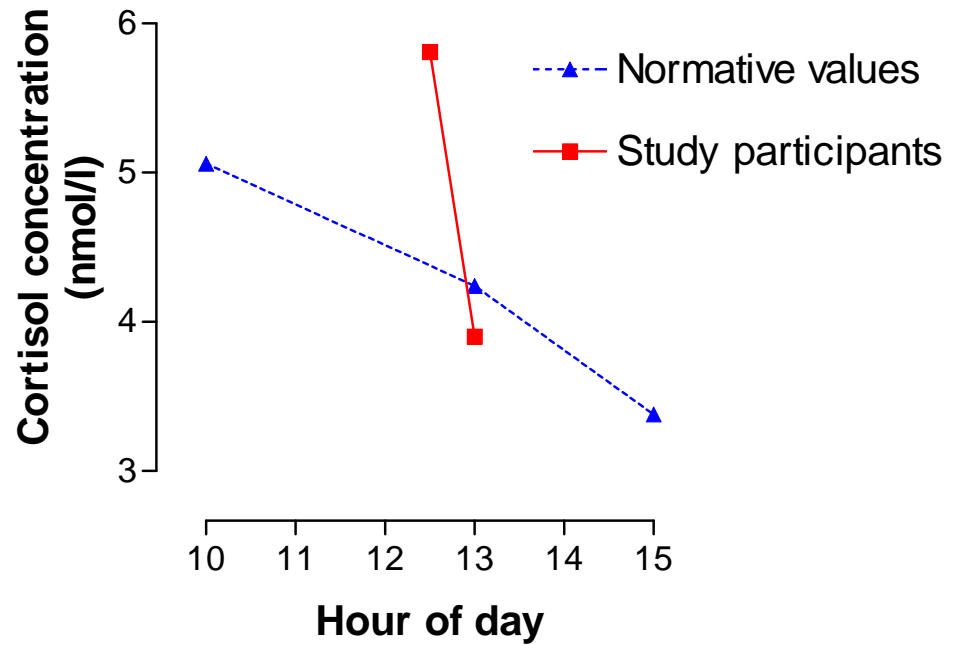
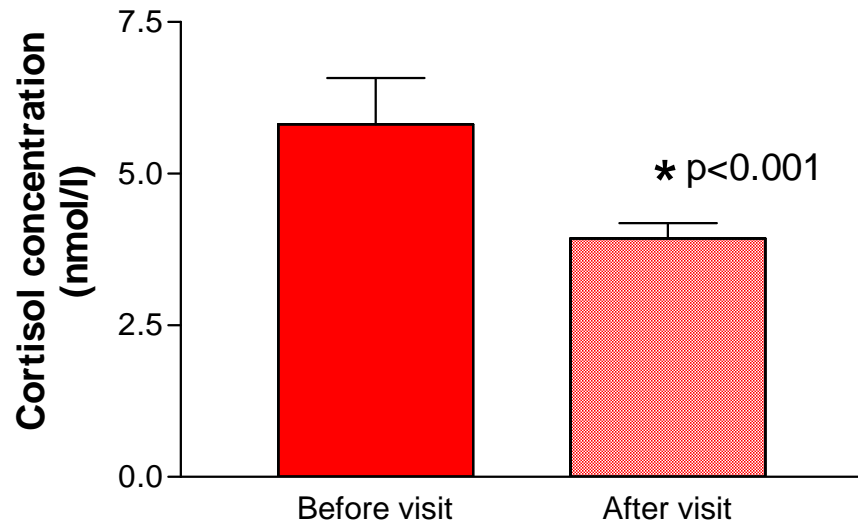
Changes in feedback
regulation



Cortisol day profiles



Cortisol response to 35 minute art gallery visit





AGONY

NOT ALL PAIN IS GAIN.

www.despair.com