

Human Function Curve

The diagram shows two axes: the horizontal axis represents “arousal” – a clinical term that can be interpreted to mean stress; the vertical axis represents “performance” or “activity”. The terms performance and activity are interchangeable in the case of the model depicted in the Human Function Curve diagram

When there is no arousal, there will be no performance/activity. We need a certain amount of “arousal” to achieve anything. When there are very low levels of arousal, we are likely to experience **boredom**.

This is so until we reach a comfortable level of arousal that means that we experience a “**healthy tension**” – where we are undertaking activities. Where we wish to increase our activity, levels of arousal increase in order that we can do so. Activity increases as arousal levels increase, and **life is balanced**:

- We feel well
- We are relaxed
- We are in control
- We have a balance between work, rest and play
- We are seen to be healthy and able to meet challenges

This is so until such time as we reach our “**Optimum Stress**” level. Any additional arousal we exert in order to increase levels of activity leads into the next sector of the diagram.

We reach a “**Fatigue Point**” that is illustrated on the curve. This point, as with all the various points illustrated in the diagram varies from person to person. We may well continue to achieve more activity/increase our performance beyond the Fatigue Point, however, this often results in a **feeling of having too much to do**. As illustrated in the diagram, this area is where there is **too much stress**. However, in this area of “acceptable fatigue”:

- Good sleep will restore
- Relaxation will restore
- Delegation or saying no will restore

Over many years, I have asked my patients in Week 2 of my tinnitus clinics where they consider themselves to be in terms of the diagram, and the vast majority answer that they are beyond (to the right of) the **Optimum Stress** point on the horizontal axis. They have very often associated where they are in terms of this model with increases in the level of distress their tinnitus causes them.

At some point beyond the **Fatigue Point**, the curve begins to be less steep eventually flattening out at the apex or top of the curve. As this happens, although our intention might be to further increase our activity (**Intended Performance**), we reach the end of the **Too much stress** sector, and any additional arousal we expend, rather than resulting in increased performance/activity, actually results in a decrease of **Actual performance**. This is where we see the curve descending in the diagram.

As the performance curve descends, we can expect to experience feelings of **Exhaustion** where there is likely to be any of the following:

- Unwillingness or inability to relax
- Unwillingness or inability to take exercise or care for self
- Minor illnesses
- Sleeping problems
- Bad temper or irritability
- Inability to see things in their true proportion

Performance worsens, and if no remedial action is undertaken, physical signs of ill health are likely to be experienced and **medical advice should be sought through your own doctor.**

Self-help remedial actions that can be undertaken include the following:

- Say NO – sometimes, it may be pressures from family and/or work that lead to too much stress; sometimes, it might be expectations that you have of yourself that may not be completely realistic
- Have a break – give yourself some time to take a break away from the pressures. This might be literally an hour in a day or a few days away, or a holiday
- Accept it – don't allow it to frustrate you. When the pressures are coming from something over which you have no control, rather than "fight" against it, accept it and move on
- Keep fit and eat well – look after yourself physically. Regular exercise whether it's in a gym or walks in the fresh air and a good diet are very important parts of managing stress
- Enjoy yourself – do something that you really enjoy. If we have been stressed over a significant period of time, we tend to forget what it's like to "enjoy" life!
- Use relaxation – there are so many excellent methods and techniques of relaxation out there. Where you have already begun using the Tinnitus E-Programme, you will have already been using the breathing exercise at least 3 times daily during Week 1. Week 2 starts you off with a 30 minute recorded relaxation exercise to be used daily in addition to the breathing exercise. In the subsequent weeks of the programme, relaxation and stress management aspects are developed further