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BrainShaw® – Applied Neuroscience Consultancy

Your Brain Under Pressure

Six neuroscience-informed insights for demanding professional lives

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Our brains are extraordinary, but they are not designed to operate at maximum intensity indefinitely.

In professions where the demands of judgement, concentration, responsibility and emotional regulation are high, understanding how the brain responds to pressure can change how we approach both performance and wellbeing.

1. Your attention is a limited resource.

Our brains cannot give everything equal attention. Constant interruptions, competing priorities and frequent task-switching can increase cognitive demands, leaving fewer resources available for deeper thinking.

Try this: Protect dedicated periods for focused work. Not every task deserves immediate attention.

2. Emotions are part of good judgement.

Emotions are active before cognition and therefore rational thinking. They influence what we notice, how we interpret situations and the decisions we make.

Try this: Notice how your emotional mind state may be influencing a decision, particularly when the stakes are high.

3. Recovery is part of performance.

Sustained demands without sufficient opportunities for recovery can undermine cognitive functioning and wellbeing. Recovery is not simply what happens after work; it is an important part of maintaining our capacity to work effectively.

Try this: Build short, meaningful recovery opportunities into the working day.

4. Different brains respond differently.

We each bring different experiences, cognitive strengths, emotional responses and ways of processing information. Recognising this diversity can lead to more effective working relationships and healthier professional environments.

Try this: Be curious about what enables you and others to think and work at your best.

5. Understanding creates greater agency.

Our brains remain capable of learning and adapting throughout life. Through greater awareness, new experiences and sustained practice, we can develop more effective behavioural responses to challenging situations.

Try this: Identify one habitual response to pressure that you would like to change. Begin with one small, repeatable action.

6. Nourish your brain – it's working for you around the clock.

Your brain uses approximately 20% of your body's resting energy, so looking after it is an investment in how you think, feel and perform. Regular physical activity supports blood flow, mood and cognitive health, while a balanced diet rich in vegetables, fruit, wholegrains, healthy fats and oily fish, low consumption of plain chocolate and red wine, provides nutrients important for brain function. Quality sleep, good hydration and regular movement also play vital roles in maintaining brain health.

Try this: Build small, sustainable habits into your day. Take a brisk walk between meetings, swap highly processed snacks for nuts or fruit, stay hydrated and protect your sleep. Your brain benefits from what you do consistently, not just occasionally.

A final thought

"Brain health isn't something we should only think about when things go wrong. It is an asset we build and protect every day, through how we think, work, connect, move, eat and recover."

Brain Capital is not just about cognitive performance today, but protecting our capacity to think, adapt and contribute throughout life.

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