



Episode 143: Is it 'Normal' Not to Cope

We often accept stress as normal so don't think about how to protect ourselves, or change what we're doing. However, stress — especially when elevated and chronic — is not normal. We need to be kinder to ourselves, and if you're struggling to cope and feeling stressed, that is actually a normal reaction to abnormal expectations and circumstances

In this episode, Rachel talks about stress, its adverse impact on our health, and the healthcare industry's problem with what is 'normal'. Instead of blaming yourself and letting stress run your life, you can respond with kindness and compassion. Take back control by watching out for warning signs and knowing what to do when you're burnt out.

Podcast links

[Physician Burnout - Who Will Save Us?](#) by Dr Dyke Drummond

[Are You Too Stressed to Be Productive? Or Not Stressed Enough?](#) on Harvard Business Review

Downloadable [Stress Curve Worksheet](#)

[THRIVE Weekly Planner](#)

Sign up for a [free self-coaching toolkit!](#)

Check out the [Permission to Thrive CPD membership](#) for doctors.

Find out more about the [Shapes Toolkit](#) training, talks, and workshops.

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Quote to remember:

‘Just remember that normal is not pretending that everything is okay. Normal is not being superhuman. Normal is reacting appropriately to the stress you're under. And normal is working in environments in which you are able to thrive, not just survive.’

What You Will Learn

It's challenging to manage stress and symptoms of burnout, especially when you're in the thick of it. Elevated and chronic stress takes a toll on the mind and body and it's not your fault if things become overwhelming. Despite the normal ways stress and burnout can affect you, you can manage it with kindness, compassion, and careful consideration for yourself.

Start by knowing where you are currently. Determine what's happening in terms of your performance and pressure. Reflect on previous experiences of high stress and your resulting performance. By doing this, you can identify early signs of too much stress. This practice can help you be more aware of where you are on the stress curve.

Know how you currently cope. Note your typical thoughts and actions during stress, even if they seem negative. Likewise, identify how you cope positively. Do the negative coping mechanisms outweigh and hinder your positive practices? Are your positive habits only quick fixes? Do you also have long-term solutions? These are just a few questions to ask yourself.

Challenge yourself to shift your negative habits and reinforce the positive practices. In addition, plan ahead for factors that may affect your stress levels. Preventing stress is just as valuable as managing it.

This process will take time. The important thing is to be more attentive and kinder to yourself. You won't be perfect, and that's okay. Keep reflecting and making improvements. There will be bad days, but you should not let those days stop you from rest and recovery from all the stress.



Activity: How to Cope with Stress

Q1. Download the Stress Curve Worksheet (link above). Based on your current stress level, where are you on this curve?

Q2. Based on your previous answer, explain why you are located there in the stress curve. Relate your work performance with the stress and pressure you're facing.

Q3. Reflect on times when you've felt very stressed. In the space below, list different situations or factors that contributed to your stress.

Q4. On the flip side, recall the times you operated at your peak performance. In the space below, identify different situations or factors that contributed to your good performance.



Q5. How do you currently cope with stress? List both your more negative and more positive coping mechanisms or practices.

Negative	Positive

Q6. What do you observe about your positive and negative coping mechanisms?

Q7. How can you avoid using your negative coping mechanisms too much? If there are too many, choose the most prevalent habit and brainstorm how you can shift it into something positive.

Q8. How can you do more of your positive coping mechanisms? What else can you add?



Q9. Prevention is the ideal way to manage stress. Based on your previous answers, specifically Q3, what can you do to ease the factors or situations that contribute to your stress?

Factors / Situations	What I can do

CPD time claimed:

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