BODYMINDBRAIN

Stress and Recovery *Deep Dive*

Sample report

> **About this sample.** This report is based on a fictional composite client. It shows the structure of a Deep Dive report and how the areas of assessment are brought together into a single formulation.

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Deep Dive Report
and Recommendations

This Deep Dive is based on the understanding that performance, stress and recovery are closely connected. The demands of work and life will inevitably place us under stress, but what matters is how we respond to those demands, how well we recover afterwards, and what we carry forward into the next demand.

The aim is not to eliminate stress, but to understand the relationship between stress, regulation and recovery in your own life, so that you can maintain your capacity to function well as demands change.

The Deep Dive takes a clinically informed, systems approach, bringing together your experience, patterns of stress and recovery, physiological responses, and the beliefs and behaviours that shape how you meet the demands of your life.



THE FRAMEWORK

First things first: definitions

Recovery and regulation are closely connected, but they are not the same process.

The first process is described here in full, with an account of what it restores, how long that restoration can take, and why it depends on more than the absence of demand during the working week and beyond.

This paragraph sets out the range of activities that contribute to that process in everyday life, from sleep and physical activity to time [redacted] of these supports a different part of the system.

INCLUDED IN THE FULL REPORT

The second process is then defined, with a description of how it allows us to respond to changing demands, how it differs from simply becoming calmer, and what it looks like when it is working well across a typical day, from first thing in the morning to the evening.

A short assessment here explains how the two processes influence one another, and why a shortfall in one makes the other harder to access as demands continue.

The section closes by describing how what we need from recovery varies according to what we have been experiencing, and the part played by awareness in noticing changes in our physical and psychological state.

THE FRAMEWORK

Under-recovery and its vicious cycle

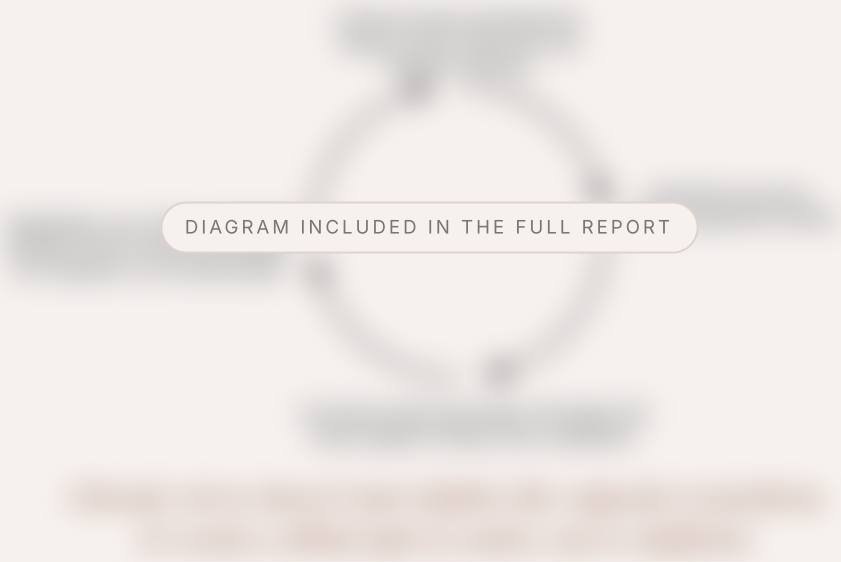
When recovery is repeatedly insufficient, the effects of stress can accumulate. Energy, physical comfort, emotional steadiness and cognitive capacity may gradually diminish, while the demands of everyday life continue.

This paragraph explains how the body adapts to sustained demand, how that adaptation helps us to keep functioning in difficult conditions, and why the same strength can lead us to accept a level of strain or depletion that we would once have recognised as uncomfortable and taken as a sign to slow down.

The physiological process behind that adaptation is then described in some detail, including how internal stability is maintained by [illegible] by returning to a fixed point, what happens to that process when [illegible] is prolonged, and how the body's starting point for the next demand gradually moves as a result of what it has been asked to cope with.

The section closes by describing how a changed baseline can come to feel normal, and how this can show up in everyday life in energy, concentration, physical tension and the ability to switch off, while work and other responsibilities carry on as usual.

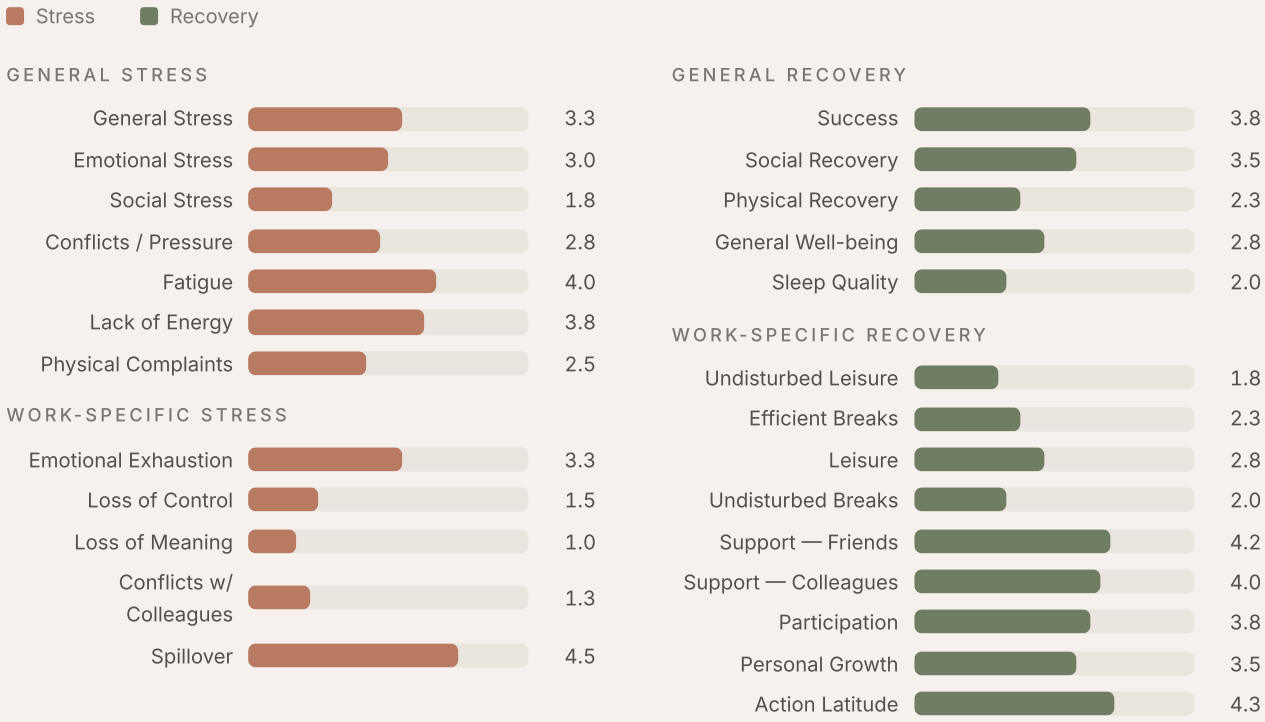
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PART ONE

Your Stress and Recovery Questionnaire results

The questionnaire completed before the first session gives a snapshot of the overall balance of stress and recovery across work and private life. Stress scores above 3.5 and recovery scores below 2.5 are highlighted.



Main stressors (above 3.5)

Spillover · Fatigue · Lack of Energy

[illegible]

Main recovery deficits (below 2.5)

Undisturbed Leisure · Sleep Quality · Undisturbed Breaks · Physical Recovery · Efficient Breaks

[illegible]

PART TWO

Additional information from the Deep Dive meeting

The Deep Dive meeting explores each domain of stress and recovery in turn. The questionnaire shows where the pressure sits; the meeting shows how it is experienced, what drives it, and how the domains affect one another.



Emotional and mental strain & recovery opportunities in the day

CLIENT-SPECIFIC CONTENT

> CONNECTION
>
> Because the most demanding thinking happens at the end of the day, problems are still open when work stops, and this feeds directly into the sleep pattern described below.

Relational friction and social recovery

You described your relationships at home and work as warm and supportive, with a small group of close friends you see regularly. The friction you described was less with individuals than with the position you hold: being the person others bring problems to, and finding it difficult to say that something will have to wait until tomorrow. You said you value being approachable and would not want the team to feel they could not come to you, and that this makes it harder to set limits on your availability without feeling you are let

CLIENT-SPECIFIC CONTENT

Outside work, you said that time with friends is restorative when it happens, but that it is often the first thing cancelled when the week becomes demanding. You described a recent evening out that you nearly cancelled and were glad afterwards you had kept. You said your partner has noticed that you are often physically present in the evening but still thinking about work, and that this has become a more frequent topic of conversation at home.

> CONNECTION
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> Your social support scores were a clear strength. This suggests that relationships are a recovery resource you could draw on more deliberately, rather than a main source of strain.

Energy, fatigue and nervous system state & recovery

You described feeling flat and heavy through the afternoon, then more alert in the evening once the house was quiet. You said this second wind often leads you back to the laptop, because it feels like the first time in the day you can think clearly.

You often fall asleep quickly but wake in the early hours with your mind returning to work. On those nights you described lying awake rehearsing conversations or working through a decision, and finding it hard to settle again for an hour or more.

You described tension through your jaw and upper back, and said you rarely notice it until the end of the day. You also mentioned occasional headaches towards the end of the week, which tend to ease by Sunday.

You said you feel restored on walking perhaps two mornings in seven, and that caffeine is doing more of the work in the morning than

CLIENT-SPECIFIC CONTENT

your energy as reliable while you are busy and dropping quickly once you stop.

You said that exercise has become irregular over the past year. When you do exercise, you notice a clear improvement in your sleep that night and in your mood the following day.

We also completed a RSCT score test, and your result was 14 seconds. This provides an additional physiological indicator to consider alongside your reported experience of stress reactions, particularly the evening alertness and early waking.

When reflecting on the last time you felt genuinely recovered, you described a walking holiday, where days were physically full but mentally uncomplicated, and you slept deeply every night.

> CONNECTION
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> Feeling tired but wired in the evening, alongside low sleep quality, suggests that the activation of the working day is still present at night, and is reducing the recovery that sleep would otherwise provide.

Control, autonomy and influence & meaning, progress and momentum

You described a high degree of freedom in how you organise your work, and a strong sense that the work is worthwhile. You said the team has grown faster than its structures, and that you have absorbed many of the gaps yourself, often because it is quicker than explaining what needs to be done. You described this as a choice you have made repeatedly, rather than one that was asked of you, and said you can see that it has

CLIENT-SPECIFIC CONTENT

You said that progress in the work is a strong source of motivation, and that the moments when a project comes together are among the most satisfying parts of your role. You noted that you rarely pause to register these moments before moving on to the next problem, and that the sense of achievement tends to be brief.

> CONNECTION
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> High action latitude and meaning act as protective factors. The pressure appears to come less from a lack of control than from how much you have taken responsibility for.

Beliefs about performance, achievement and recovery

You said that you see your role as being the one who holds things together, and that it feels uncomfortable to leave a problem with someone else overnight. You described a sense that if something goes wrong that you could have prevented, it will reflect on you more than on anyone else.

Rest feels more acceptable once everything is finished, which in practice is rarely. You said that you can rest on holiday because work is genuinely out of reach, but that at home there is always something that could be done, and that relaxing

CLIENT-SPECIFIC CONTENT

You said that you understand recovery supports better thinking and decision making, and that you would give this advice to anyone in your team. You acknowledged that applying it to yourself feels different, and that the belief that you should be available is currently stronger than the belief that recovery would make you more effective.

> CONNECTION
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> A belief that rest is earned once everything is finished connects directly with the low undisturbed leisure scores: on most days, that point does not arrive.

PART THREE

Formulation: your current stress–recovery pattern

The formulation brings the questionnaire and the meeting together into a single picture: how the main factors interact, and how the pattern keeps itself going.

The relationship between responsibility and availability

As the team has grown, you have become the point through which most problems pass. You described remaining available to others throughout the day, which leaves your own most demanding work until the end of it, when your energy is already lower and the day has been fragmented by interruptions.

This seems to be shaped by a strong sense of responsibility for the team, and by the belief that leaving something unresolved overnight CLIENT-SPECIFIC CONTENT your preference for being approachable, which is a genuine strength in your role, makes it difficult to set limits on availability without feeling that you are withdrawing support.

As demand rises, these characteristics become part of the stress response itself. The more pressure there is, the more available you become, and the less time remains for the focused work and the recovery that would allow you to meet that pressure with your clearest thinking.

The physical experience: tired but wired

You described an afternoon dip followed by a second wind in the evening, tension in the jaw and upper back that goes unnoticed until late, and waking in the early hours with work on your mind. Energy feels reliable while you are busy and drops quickly when you stop.

Taken alongside your BAI-7 score CLIENT-SPECIFIC CONTENT this suggests a pattern in which activation builds through the day without being discharged, and remains present into the evening and night. The second wind in the evening may feel like clarity, but it is also a sign that the body has not yet shifted towards recovery.

When the week catches up with you

You said that weekends often begin with a day of feeling unwell or flat, and that by the time you feel restored it is time to start again. Recovery is therefore being postponed to the weekend rather than happening across the week.

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The irregular exercise, the cancelled evenings and the messages answered after hours all point in the same direction: the forms of recovery that are most effective for you are the ones most easily given up when the week becomes demanding.

How the pattern may reinforce itself over time

Taken together, this suggests a cycle in which **responsibility, late-day demand, evening activation and interrupted sleep reinforce one another**. Each night of incomplete recovery leaves less capacity for the next day, which makes it more likely that the most demanding work is again left until last.

The weekend crash suggests the body is catching up on recovery that the week does not allow, and that this is being experienced as illness rather than as a signal about the pattern. Over time, a lower baseline may come to feel normal, which makes the pattern harder to notice from the inside.

The opportunity for rebalancing

The aim is not to eliminate stress or prevent mobilisation. The capacity to rise to a challenge and engage fully with what needs to be done is an important part of functioning well. The work is less about adding more things to do and more about recognising your own state, protecting what already works, and adapting your approach when circumstances make that harder to maintain.

In particular, this means moving some of the demanding thinking earlier in the day, while your energy is higher and before the day has been fragmented by requests from others.

It also means creating a clearer end point to the working day that your body as well as your diary recognises, so that the activation of the day has a chance to settle before the evening begins.

Equally important is spreading recovery [CLIENT-SPECIFIC CONTENT] It does not all fall to the weekend, and protecting the forms of recovery you already know work for you, particularly exercise and time with friends.

Over time, the opportunity is to notice the effects of prioritising recovery as a felt experience, and to allow that evidence to strengthen your belief in recovery as part of effective leadership rather than something that competes with it.

PART FOUR

Where to focus

Each report closes with a small number of focus areas drawn directly from the formulation, with specific practices to experiment with in daily life.

1 Recognising when the working day has ended in your body

During the Deep Dive, you described noticing tension in your jaw and upper back only at the end of the day. By that point, activation may already have been building for several hours. There are likely to be earlier, quieter signals that are easier to miss but give you more room to respond.

The first step is to observe this process as it unfolds. At three set points in the afternoon, take a brief moment to notice:

CLIENT-SPECIFIC CONTENT

How physically activated do I feel? Tension? Pressure? What is happening to my breathing? Has my attention narrowed to the next problem?

Before logging off, repeat the same check and note the difference between how your diary says the day has ended and how your body feels.

Over time, this can help you identify the point at which engaged focus becomes accumulated activation, while there is still time in the day to respond to it.

2 Moving demanding work earlier

The pattern we identified is that your own most demanding work is left until the end of the day, after you have been available to others. This means the hardest thinking happens when your energy is lowest and leaves problems open as the evening begins.

Experiment with protecting one block before midday, three days a week, for the decisions that would otherwise wait until the last hour. During this block:

Set your status to unavailable. Let the team know when you will next be available. Keep a list of questions that arrive, to answer later instead.

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Pay particular attention to the impulse to respond during the block. It may itself be a sign of the belief that being unavailable is letting people down, and is worth noticing rather than acting on.

Notice whether moving this work earlier affects how the last hour of the day feels, and how many problems remain open when you log off.

3

EXAMPLE SHOWN IN FULL

A wind-down that protects sleep

Your sleep is being affected at both ends of the night: open problems are still active when you go to bed, and the same problems return in the early hours. The aim is to give unfinished work somewhere to go before the evening begins, so your mind is not asked to hold it overnight.

Before logging off, take five minutes to write down:

- each problem that is still open
- the next action for each one, and when you will return to it
- the first task for tomorrow

Then close the laptop and put it out of sight. Follow this with the same short transition each evening, such as a walk, changing clothes or cooking, and notice which of these genuinely shifts your body and attention rather than simply filling time while the work state continues.

In the hour before bed, spend two or three minutes on slow breathing through the nose with a longer out-breath. If you wake in the early hours with work on your mind, add the thought to a notepad by the bed and return to the breathing.

Over the next two weeks, notice whether early waking becomes less frequent, and how you feel the following morning.

4

Recovery across the week, not only at weekends

Your questionnaire scores showed that undisturbed leisure (7.8), sleep quality (3.9), undisturbed breaks (3.9), physical recovery (3.3) and efficient breaks (3.3) were all below the recovery thresholds. At the same time, your social support scores were among your strongest (Friends 4.2, colleagues 4.0), and action latitude (4.3) and success (3.8) were clear strengths.

This tells us that you already have meaningful recovery resources available. The gap appears less in what is available to you than in how consistently it is protected when the week becomes demanding.

When you reflected on the last [CLIENT-SPECIFIC CONTENT] week, you described a walking holiday. It may be helpful to explore what was different during that time: physical activity, being out of reach, and days that were not defined by being completed.

Choose one midweek evening in the coming fortnight and protect it for either physical activity or time with friends. Treat this as an experiment rather than another commitment, and decide in advance that it will not be cancelled for work.

Notice the effect the following day on your energy, your mood and how you approach the work. Allowing this evidence to accumulate over time may help to strengthen your trust in recovery as part of effective performance.

Recommended further sessions

The Deep Dive is complete in itself. Should you choose to continue, these are the areas I would recommend exploring next, based on the pattern identified above.

Nervous system states

Recognising different states of mobilisation and recovery, and the signals that indicate when your body is becoming activated, settling or depleted.

Beliefs and behaviours around recovery

The beliefs, rules and permissions that shape your relationship with work, rest, recovery and productivity.

Body–brain communication and regulation

How psychological and emotional demands are communicated through the body, including breathing, movement, attention and energy, and how conscious influence can affect these processes.

Working day, structure and rhythm

How the structure and culture of work affect regulation and recovery: transitions, meeting patterns, breaks, boundaries and a working rhythm that allows both mobilisation and recovery.