

Client: Media Jems Yellow News
Source: City AM
Date: 12/07/2018
Page: 19
Reach: 90351
Value: 3753.26

Don't just ignore it: Address your stress

Follow these easy tips to stop work and life pressures negatively affecting your health



Karen Meager and John McLachlan

FOR HUMANS, and most other animals, stress is not an inherently negative experience. In fact, it is an evolutionary trait with a very important function, and was originally instilled as a defence mechanism.

In the best of times, it can keep us from making very dangerous or silly decisions. But in the worst of times, it can hang over into other facets of life where it has no use – and when this occurs, it causes more harm than it does good.

Figures show that a huge 85 per cent of UK adults routinely feel the effects of stress, and when these symptoms are being experienced on a regular basis, there is a risk of it setting off a domino effect that causes damage. However, with the right counteractions, the negative effects of stress can be dampened.

RECOGNISE THE SYMPTOMS

It is becoming increasingly common for people to ignore the fact that stress is starting to have a detrimental impact on their lives.

Society is constantly demanding that we work harder for lower pay, and too many people feel that getting stressed by such circumstances indicates laziness, lack of motivation, or weakness. It can be particularly devastating to those who already experience low self-esteem, anxiety, or depression.

For any number of reasons, people tend to take steps to hide or ignore the stress they experience, which only ever makes things worse.

As the saying goes, the first step to recovery is recognising the problem.

GET HELP

Once a person has recognised that they are being negatively impacted by stress, it is essential that they take the next step and do something about it.

Unfortunately, it is common for people to doubt the potential benefits of taking action, which results in a great number continuing to ignore their problems, and inevitably aggravating them. But the truth is that simple measures can make a significant difference to stress reduction.

Of course, the usual advice of eating a good balanced diet, exercising regularly, and sleeping enough are all central, but on a more general basis, it is about taking care of yourself, and finding ways to make your life more enjoyable and fulfilling.

Consider exploring a new hobby you've always wanted to try, or going back to one you had abandoned but used to enjoy doing.

The objective should be to feel calm, happy, and as if your time is being put to good use.

FIGURE OUT THE CAUSE

Finding the exact cause of a problem is the best way of overcoming it, and this is an especially important step in combating stress.

Of course, this is never a simple step, as we are complex creatures with infinite emotional variables, so it may take a bit of reflection.

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that just because the cause hasn't yet been identified, there is nothing you can do to ease the symptoms of stress.

Begin taking the usual steps – such as exploring hobbies or spending more time with friends – while simultaneously taking some time each day to explore your feelings.

You may find that keeping a diary will help you reach an answer quicker. The sooner you reach a clear conclusion about the reason you feel stressed, the sooner you can start remedying the situation.

Stress is an increasingly prominent problem for people of all kinds, and it does not discriminate. But too often,

the issue is still swept under the carpet or downplayed, when it can have disastrous consequences.

Life is inherently stressful at times, but this is not to say that steps should not be taken to lessen the blow of these difficult times, and to ensure healthy and happy functioning.

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