

WORKLIFE

The background of the entire page is a reproduction of the painting 'The Scream' by Edvard Munch. It depicts a figure in a dark, swirling, turbulent sea, with a bridge and other figures visible in the background. The central figure has a pale, yellowish face with wide, staring eyes and an open mouth, conveying a sense of intense emotional distress or mental anguish.

WFH Burnout

Do you have it?
How to get rid of it.

Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid

How short & long term exposure to
fear is causing worldwide harm

Think of the Children!

But, who's thinking of the carers?

Mind Your Sociopath

The Greatest Threat to
your company's culture

Are You Getting Any?

Foods you can eat for
a good night's sleep

If It Bleeds, It Leads

How the media uses
fear and negativity

THE FEAR FACTOR

Exploring the Psychology of Fear

from THE CEO

There's no way around it, fear is an ugly and harmful thing. Fear can be all-encompassing and turn reasonable and intelligent people mad. In fact, it's at the heart of every mental health problem.

2020 has proven to be an unusual year. It's been marred by the spectre of COVID-19 and the constant fear that has been generated for many people. We know from a psychological point of view that staying in a space of fear for a long time can, eventually, lead to low levels of trauma. That's why this eMag, is dedicated to fear, and what we must watch out for to keep ourselves, our teams and our loved ones, relatively sane.

Mental Health and Resilience are more crucial than ever for individuals and businesses. At the Workplace Mental Health Institute, our response to fear is to meet it head-on with education.

Over the course of 2020, we've expanded our offerings to support businesses through these particularly difficult times. For example, the courses - 'Staying Strong Through Challenging Times', 'Building Resilient Teams' and 'Leading Through Challenging Times' - have all been designed and delivered over the last six months. And, we've reformatted all of our existing courses for online and virtual classroom delivery as well as the usual face-to-face delivery. We are proud to say that feedback scores from these online courses remain just as high as with our more traditional delivery methods.

By the way, I hope you are keeping well. It may be up and down, but I'd like to you to understand, please, that wherever you are at, whether it is a space fear or frustration, anger or acceptance, or something else entirely, these are all normal responses to an abnormal situation. Make sure you are patient and kind with yourself, and with others. Remember to appreciate diversity - people are having very different experiences of this year. Let's look after each other, so we can last the distance.

The Christmas and New Year period is going to be interesting and challenging time for many this year. In the lead up to Christmas, and as we head into a new year, your staff will need your support. You will also need to take care of yourself. Make sure to read the article on Work from Home Burnout in this edition of WorkLife.

On behalf of everyone here at the WMHI, I'd like to wish you peace and a renewed sense of energy for 2021.

Take care, reach out, ask for help when you need it. Don't be afraid. It's going to be OK.

Remember, we have each other's back.

Have a mentally healthy day.



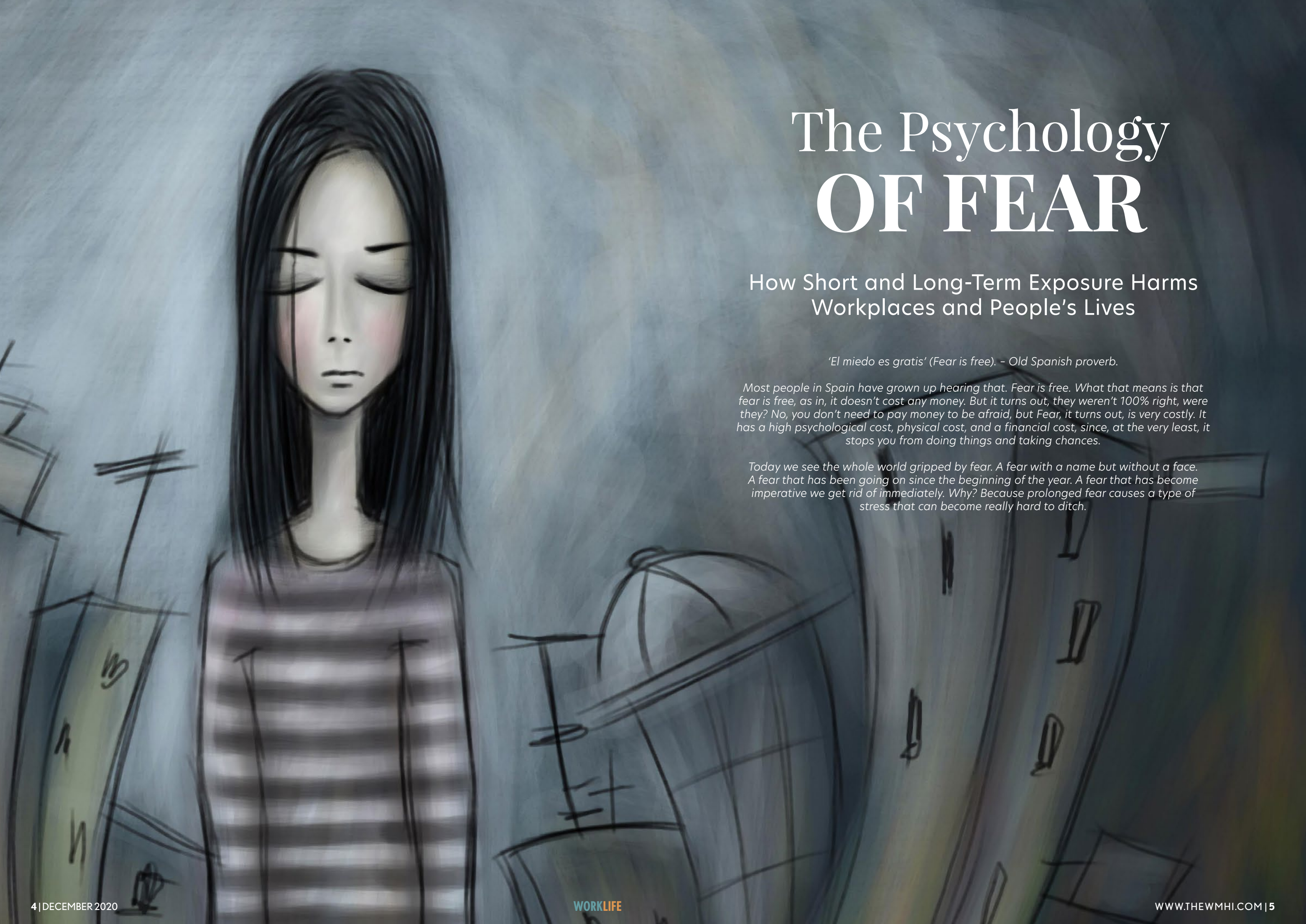
Peter Diaz

CEO, Workplace Mental Health Institute



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The Psychology OF FEAR

How Short and Long-Term Exposure Harms Workplaces and People's Lives

'El miedo es gratis' (Fear is free). – Old Spanish proverb.

Most people in Spain have grown up hearing that. Fear is free. What that means is that fear is free, as in, it doesn't cost any money. But it turns out, they weren't 100% right, were they? No, you don't need to pay money to be afraid, but Fear, it turns out, is very costly. It has a high psychological cost, physical cost, and a financial cost, since, at the very least, it stops you from doing things and taking chances.

Today we see the whole world gripped by fear. A fear with a name but without a face. A fear that has been going on since the beginning of the year. A fear that has become imperative we get rid of immediately. Why? Because prolonged fear causes a type of stress that can become really hard to ditch.



THE ROLE OF FEAR

In psychology we see fear as a basic and ever-present emotion. A certain amount of fear is normal, even good for us. It helps us to survive, by having an inbuilt, rapid mechanism to detect danger, and therefore allow us to take action to prevent harm. It is the foundation of our fight or flight response.

THE PROBLEM WITH FEAR

The problem is that if our fear response goes into hyperdrive, it can cause harm itself. It can paralyse us and stop us from taking actions that would be beneficial to our wellbeing. It begins to control us rather than serve us.

When fear is prolonged, the potential for serious mental distress in the form of mental disorder is greatly increased.

In mental health, we know that all mental illnesses are founded in, or at the very least, accompanied by, a large amount of fear. This means that when someone you love experiences mental health distress, of any kind and severity, you can be fairly certain that at some level, fear is involved. Fear may be lurking just under the surface, or it may permeate every aspect of their life and their decision making. But, how specifically?

HOW FEAR IMPACTS US

Decision Making - A fearful person cannot make good decisions, the decisions that they normally would make, because fear impairs and interrupts good cognitive function. For example, the research shows that when we are stressed, we are less likely to choose good healthy foods. So much for dieting when you're afraid of being disliked! Another common response to fear is to delay making any decision, because we are too worried about what the consequences might be if we make the wrong one!

Risk Averse Bias - Importantly, fear also creates a bias in the way we interpret information. It leads us to focus too heavily on the risks, rather than making an objective analysis of all the facts of a situation. We can easily appreciate this in sufferers of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). OCD is a disorder where the person becomes fearful of dying, either of unseen microorganisms like bacteria, viruses or germs, or from physical accident, injury or misadventure. People with OCD are not able to make objective analyses of situations and have to be helped, through therapy, to change their association with fear of pathogens. In a work context, in organisations where there is fear, you see groups become risk averse, which is not helpful for growth and development, and sometimes causes the exact result that the executives were afraid of, and trying to avoid.

Problem Solving - It's also well known that fear disrupts our capacity for problem solving. We become tunnel visioned on our main concern, rather than expanding our thinking to discover and consider a wide range of solutions. In fact, often people tend to oversimplify the problem and the solution to the problem. The solution is often emotional, rather than logical, and does not stand up to scrutiny.

Undermining success - Fear not only impairs our capacity to solve problems and to make good, effective decisions, it also boycotts our chances for success in life. For example, ever heard of the term 'fear of failure'? Well, we now understand this differently. We now know that often, people that say that they are afraid of failure, when they dig in deeper and explore it, they are also fearful of succeeding. How is that possible? How can anyone be afraid of succeeding? Simple, think of your life right now, as it is. If you were 100% successful and achieved amazing dreams and goals, how many of the people that are around you now, would still like you then? Or would they be envious? For most people, if they were to significantly improve their life, fear would need to take a back seat.

Can you see why fear would not always be useful in a work context?

HINDSIGHT 2020

Today, as a collective, we are experiencing a new kind of fear, which is unique in a sense. This is a fear that is being drummed up, encouraged by governments, some scientists, and the media. Though it may not be the intention, we are reminded to be fearful of others, and fearful for our safety. These reminders to be afraid are conveyed in somewhat subtle ways by the masks we must wear in many places, the visual signs we see alerting us to social distance, the announcements and conversations we hear, and in many other indirect ways. There doesn't seem to be a reprieve from these (sometimes) subtle, yet constant reminders.

Whether it is warranted or not, is not the question here. The fact remains that we know that fear causes stress, and that long term stress causes an untold number of physical and psychological illnesses.

According to the American Institute of Stress, 120000 people die every year as a direct result of workplace stress. Chronic stress is also linked to the 6 leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, respiratory deaths, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver and suicide

The idea that fear causes physical damage is not new knowledge. In fact, there's a lovely Sufi story that illustrates the harm fear brings:

"A caravan leader in the middle of the desert crossed the plague cloud on his way. - Where are you going like that, asked the chief? - To Baghdad! I have a thousand lives to take, the plague replied without stopping! A few weeks later, the leader of the caravan again crossed the cloud of plague. - 'Hey!', said the head of the caravan, 'I'm back from Baghdad! It was not a thousand but ten thousand people that you took away!' - 'I only killed a thousand people as I

was ordered', retorted the plague! 'The others were scared to death!'"

Being literally scared to death may sound a bit extreme, but it brings us to an interesting phenomenon that was discovered in the 1800's, called 'Voodoo Death'.

“VOODOO” DEATH

Voodoo death is a sudden, unexplained death resulting from spells, sorcery, or curse. From a psychological perspective we may explain it as resulting from belief in the power of those spells, sorcery or curses.

In his article 'Voodoo Death', Walter Bradford Cannon shares numerous examples from traditional cultures, where there have been instances of death observed in these conditions:

- In the Tupinambas Indians of South America, there have been cases observed of fright induced death, following the prediction or condemnation by a chief or medicine man with the reputation of having supernatural power.
- In Brown's New Zealand and its Aborigines, there is an account of a Maori woman. who, having eaten some fruit, was told that it had been taken from a tabooed place. She exclaimed that the sanctity of the chief had been profaned, and that his spirit would kill her. This incident occurred in the afternoon; the next day about 12 o'clock she was dead.
- Australian University Professors have observed that from time to time the natives of the Australian bush do die as a result of a bone being pointed at them, and that such death may not be associated with any of the ordinary lethal injuries.

In today's terms we may not call it 'Voodoo Death' anymore, but we have studied the science, and we now have good evidence for what we now call Somatoform Disorders, and the Nocebo Effect. We can categorically say that fear can, and does injure, harm and, in the most extreme cases, kill. It can be directly, as in the case of the examples above, or indirectly, as in the case of people believing themselves sick and dying of iatrogenesis or side effects of treatment.

THE NOCEBO EFFECT

Almost everyone has heard of the placebo effect. We see the placebo effect when people have a positive improvement in response to a substance, idea, thought or situation, simply because they believe it to be 'true' but without it actually having any active ingredient or proof. Their mind, the unconscious part, has taken control of the body and made it respond 'as if' the substance or idea is a matter of fact

The placebo effect is the most studied effect in the history of science since it's used as the standard to produce relatively safe medicines. What most people don't know so well is its close cousin – the nocebo effect. That's where a person believes something benign is actually malignant to them. In this case, the person starts feeling all the symptoms and often displaying the signs of the particular ailment they believe they have, although they don't have it. For example, ever googled some kind of strange illness and then you start feeling some of the symptoms explained? How did that happen? Well, you tapped into your nocebo. Of course, most people stop just in time of making themselves actually sick, or do they?

HEADING INTO 2021

Think of this interesting and dangerous situation during the Coronavirus situation: the media actively selling fear, the government promoting fear to get people to follow their directions, the doctors panicking trying to understand a new threat and an increased influx of new patients, and the patients themselves in a state of panic. This is a situation of compounded fear. Fear at every level. What do you think will be the results of this heightened level of fear? From purely a psychological perspective, that's a PERFECT STORM for ill health in the form of somatoform disorders, mental disorders, iatrogenic deaths and suicide.

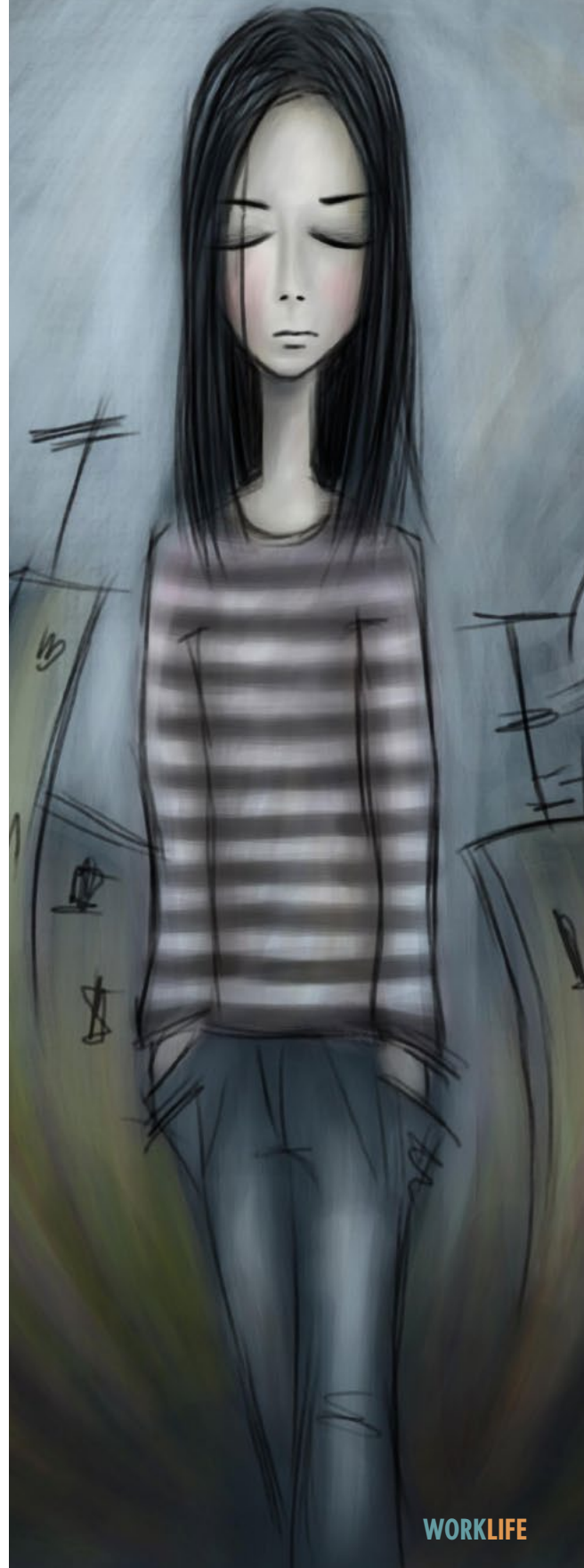
So, it is vital we learn to identify when fear is building in us and learn how to handle it as quickly as possible. It can save our lives and that of our loved ones.

6 Things You Can Do That Will Immediately Neutralise The Fear In You

1. **STOP**, or severely limit, watching the news. It's a horror movie!
2. **STOP** believing unreliable sources that have a vested interest in selling you fear AND have lied to you in the past (politicians, media, etc) when in doubt, 'follow the money'.
3. **STOP** ruminating – it means stop entertaining negative, fear inducing, thoughts. Get busy with another, better thought or activity. I.e watch a comedy, go and play, etc
4. **START** exercising – it releases yummy endorphins and makes you happy. Start with some kind of easy exercise
5. **START** spending time every day to notice all the things you do have that we usually take for granted (ie clean water out of a tap, hot showers, some of your loved ones ;), the warm and comfy bed you get into at night, etc)
6. **START** eating healthy. What we eat does make a difference. The wrong kind of food, or the wrong amounts, can tax our system and produce chemical anxiety. I.e coffee, capsicums, iceberg lettuce, oranges, etc. Every body is different so it is a matter of paying attention to what your body says and experimenting. ■

*"We have
nothing to fear
but fear itself."*

Franklin D Roosevelt



WORKLIFE

ARE YOU STAYING STRONG THROUGH CORONAVIRUS?

By Peter Diaz

My grandmother, as a child, went through the Spanish Flu and was sick from it. She recovered and lived life fully. But I grew up hearing the stories of this pandemic that, in my mind, only happened to ancient people in the olden times and could not occur in our cushy, modern society. I was wrong. Here we are.

The current Coronavirus pandemic has seen an incredible spike in fear, uncertainty, panic, and anxiety in individuals and workplaces around the globe.

To face the coming challenges in the workplace, and the world at large, it is critical that employees respond to the challenges presented with a stable, grounded, and clear presence of mind.

It is essential for the sustainability and future of the business, and equally for the health and wellbeing of each individual employee, that organizations align the very best mental health expertise and most potent and positive paradigms, so that staff can proactively deal with whatever occurs in the coming weeks and months.

Here, at the Workplace Mental Health Institute, we asked ourselves how we could respond to this emerging need constructively. I have to say that it took us completely by surprise. Luckily, the Institute has a strong psychology faculty that went to work quickly to prepare something useful for workers and management alike. What the faculty came up with is a brand new online course made explicitly for these trying times. This a powerful and timely course.

Staying Strong through the Coronavirus is a crisis specific, online training course, designed specifically in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. Designed to assist employees to manage the fear, uncertainty, and stress created by the current situation, so they can stay resilient, and look after their own mental health and wellbeing while remaining adaptable and operating in the most effective and productive ways possible throughout the crisis and its aftermath.

So far the course has been completed by people in Australia, Beijing, Hong Kong, Singapore and China, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive:

"I learned how to adapt in real life, with increased resilience"

"Thank you for this valuable opportunity. I learned how to cope with a crisis situation"

"This is excellent, and very much appreciated"

Check it out here <https://wplms.wmhi.com.au/course/staying-strong-through-coronavirus/>

Please, share it with your networks and community broadly. It may not be for you, but it may just be what someone you know needs.



WORKPLACE MENTAL
HEALTH INSTITUTE
Peak Performance Research & Programs™

Caring For The Carers

Mental Health And Wellbeing Tips For Health Professionals (and everyone else too!)



Sarah is a caring 36-year-old nurse working long hours at the local hospital. Sarah is also a wife and a mother to two gorgeous kids. Yet, Sarah is at her wit's end. You could say that 'her candle has burned at both ends'. Sarah is exhausted. Physically, emotionally, psychologically. She feels burnout. She remembers fondly the time she started her nursing studies. She loved the idea of becoming a nurse. These days she shudders at the thought of having to get off the bed to go to work. See, the shifts are just too long, the demand too great and her life seems an endless procession of chores, even with the help of her husband and the grandparents. But what could Sarah do?

Sad as it is, Sarah's plight is far too common.

Here at the WMHI, we work with organisations from a whole range of different industries. From the public sector, through to private corporations and not for profits, and with people in engineering, finance, education, construction, mining, defence, IT, you name it!

In recent times, we've seen much more attention paid to the work of health professionals and those in caring roles. Along with that, we've also seen an increased awareness of the importance of the mental health and mental wellbeing of those health professionals themselves. Afterall, they are people too, and in order to be best able to serve and support their patients, they need to be well themselves.

We were recently asked about mental health and wellbeing for staff in the health & medical industry. Below is our response to three questions we were asked. I think you'll find many of the ideas can be translated across to any industry. What do you think?

Why is it so important for a workplace in the medical sector to be aware of the mental wellbeing of their staff, as well as their patients?

- Staff in the health and medical sector, and caring professions in general, are well known to be at higher risks of stress, burnout, and mental health issues themselves.
- Part of this is due to the nature of their work, where staff are often dealing with people in highly emotional contexts and also because of the long hours and shift work. Most people came to the sector because they care about people, and want to help, but without the right working conditions, skills and tools, they can often end up suffering 'compassion fatigue' where they simply become tired of caring. For some people this means, they become less effective at their jobs, no longer able to give the patient the emotional support, nor the bedside manner, that benefits the patient so well. For others, this can lead to frustration, angry outbursts, conflict within teams, and even an end to their employment in a particular role (either by choice or following an incident) and, at the more extreme end of the scale, suicide.
- Another contributor to the increased stress amongst medical staff is that as a customer facing role, they are also many times subject to those people in the general public who may take out their fears, frustrations and anger on service providers. In the worst cases, this can escalate to outright aggression and abuse, where the medical staff are required to maintain their emotional maturity, stay calm and handle each situation appropriately and respectfully. That can be a tall order for someone who is already stressed.

- These two elements combine with what is often a very busy working environment, with a high volume in terms of workload, time sensitive job tasks, and high stakes work, coupled with many legal obligations and consequences.

Do you have any advice for workplaces in the health industry, about a few ways that they can prioritise mental health for their practitioners?

1. Make mental health and mental wellbeing a part of the conversation and make people mental health aware from Day 1 of working in your clinic or practice. E.g., make it part of your induction training, share tips for staying calm under pressure, managing stress, and building resilience in your meetings or newsletters, put posters around the office.
2. Don't wait for people to be stressed or develop mental health problems before doing something about it. Have conversations early, provide training in personal resilience, managing stress and compassion fatigue, and mental health.
3. Make sure the leader practices what they preach, use a strengths-based approach when interacting with their practitioners at all times.
4. Make sure the job demands are doable within the timeframes provided. Don't ask one person to do the work of three people with no extra time (or pay!) provided.
5. Make sure people have time during the day to get out of the practice, and get fresh air, sunshine, a bite to eat, stretch their legs and have a change of scenery. It does wonders for productivity as well as mental health.
6. Make an Employee Assistance Program or independent counselling available for staff and their family members, should they need a safe, private and confidential space to get further support.

What would your top 3 tips be for health practitioners to prioritise their mental health?

Yes! We have more than three tips:

1. Remember WHY you got into this profession and WHAT you love about it. Write it down and put it somewhere you can see often.
2. Practice your Self Care activities daily - encompassing the basics like good nutrition, movement, sleep, enjoyable hobbies, and also more advanced strategies like making daily gratitude lists, mindfulness or meditation practice,
3. Notice ways of talking to yourself that make you feel good, and ways you talk to yourself that make you feel bad. Then do more of the first and less of the second.
4. Every time you have a success, get a thank you, or positive feedback from a patient, capture it. Put it on a pinboard somewhere, or keep it in a file you can go to whenever you are feeling overwhelmed, disillusioned, or have had a difficult patient/procedure/day.
5. Make sure to keep talking. Debriefing with colleagues, friends or family members (while ensuring confidentiality is maintained) can be vital for maintaining a healthy perspective. And if you need to get more professional, objective help, reach out early. The sooner you get support, the quicker and easier it is to get back on track. ■

The Single Greatest Threat to Your Company's Culture

by Scott Bywater

Peter Drucker uttered perhaps the most powerful words in business... "Culture eats strategy for breakfast"

In essence, it means no matter how solid your strategic plan is, you'll be held back if members of your team don't share a strong culture - which is critical for both business success and mental health.

The dictionary definition of culture is: "the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society..."

And we must protect the culture of our organisations like a bulldog protects its home.

However it's easy for a culture to get destroyed.

I know. I was in two cults in my youth. I've dealt with a sociopath in business. So...I've seen how the 1% can ruin it for the 99%.

I've Seen How the 1% Can Ruin it for the 99%

And contrary to popular belief, it's not stupid people who get involved in cults. I've seen CEO's of large organisations and smart entrepreneurs drinking the kool-aid.

The reality is all cults have a very positive promise - usually some form of Utopia. You feel good. You meet people. And you get what is referred to as 'love bombed'...

That's how they hook you in.

Then it slowly starts to unravel...

Little by little, they start to criticise you, show you how incompetent you are, explain how you just don't match up... no matter what you do.

The end result: you're always on high alert. You never want to do anything wrong. You lower your standards. Your boundaries get eroded, and you lose your sense of self. And here's the thing: cults and sociopaths operate in a similar way.

I remember working closely with a sociopath years after my cult experience. Something didn't feel right, and one day I was walking along the beach when it suddenly struck me...

"I'm in a cult. A cult of one"

Make no mistake about it. Cults and sociopaths can be dangerous. And truth is, statistically, sociopaths are far more likely to make it to the top of organisations.

Imagine What Happens When a Sociopath Infiltrates a Pharmaceutical Company, the Media, a Bank, a State, a Country?

They can cause carnage to the mental health of everyone involved.

So how do you keep psychopaths out of your organisation?

Make no mistake about it, it's not that hard for them to get in. According to Dr. Martha Stout, a Harvard University psychologist who wrote the book "The Sociopath Next Door"... 1 in every 25 people in America is a sociopath.

Now I imagine those numbers are similar worldwide, which means if you hire 25 people you're almost certain to find one person who doesn't have a conscience in the mix.

Therefore the best 'insurance' you can have is getting good at spotting sociopaths.

HOW TO SPOT A SOCIOPATH

It's easier said than done as they are very well disguised, however the key is to look out for either superficial charm that goes hand in hand with confidence and arrogance...

Or someone who perpetually causes chaos and then sits back, plays innocent and blames others for overreacting (making you feel like an oversensitive nutcase)...

Or someone who lies and then turns it back around to you for being paranoid and overanalyzing everything.

Or someone who whispers poison and gossip into everyone's ears, making people suspicious of others.

Yes, they can divide and conquer your organisation... while making themselves look like a rose and leaving you feeling completely gaslighted.

There's plenty of other warning signs. Look them up online. Investigate. It's important to be aware of them because think about this for a minute:

What happens if you hire a sociopath as your accountant? Or as your CEO? Or as your personal assistant?

Someone With No Morals Can Literally Infiltrate Your Organisation, and Destroy Your Teams' Mental Health

Be particularly careful when hiring for senior roles and executive positions, as sociopaths can be extremely charismatic - and love power and control.

The old adage applies here: Hire slow, fire fast...

Because it's the 80/20 rule on steroids... 20% of problem hires cause 80% of the problems. 4% cause 66% of the problems. 0.8% cause 52.8% of the problems.

Except I believe it's weighted even more heavily than that. Throughout history, we know while tyrants like Hitler only make up a very small percentage of the population - they cause the vast amounts of problems in our world.

So be cautious. Do your due diligence. And set up clear boundaries so you don't let a "Hitler" infiltrate into your organisation. ■

Scott Bywater

Scott Bywater is a proven marketing authority and world-class copywriter who helps businesses scale by solving complex growth problems. To find out more about how he can help your business, visit scottbywater.com.au



Meditation

an antidote to stress

By Dr. Narjes Gorjizadeh, PhD

I was working as a research scientist in a high-ranked research institute, in the job that I liked, and I had always wanted. But, to my frustration, I was highly stressed, and even worse, I didn't know how to cope with the stress. When it started affecting my health, my productivity, and my sleep, it forced me to go on a search to find a solution, and I found meditation.

Today many professionals, from athletes and Hollywood stars to CEOs and scientists, are incorporating meditation in their daily routine to improve their performance and focus, and reduce stress. Leading companies around the world, including Google, Apple, Rolls Royce, Yahoo, Nike, and P&G are also adopting meditation programs to help their employees reduce stress at work and increase their productivity. But what IS meditation? And how does it help?

Needless to say that in today's hectic world, stress and anxiety seem to be a worldwide epidemic. The fast pace of life in our modern lifestyle is affecting the quality of our life, making us more stressed-out than ever before.

That's where meditation can help. Meditation is a simple and effective technique that everyone can use to lower stress and remain calm in day-to-day activities as well as during life challenges. It's an ancient technique that has been around for thousands of years, and its effectiveness is strongly backed by science in the past few decades. Meditation is a kind of mental exercise that trains the mind to remain focused. It is an effective way to relieve stress.

I learned about the mind-body connection and that there are simple and useful techniques to manage the mind. After I adopted meditation, it had a profound effect on my life. I became happier and healthier, I could think more clearly, and I became more productive in my own life and also at the work I was doing. Meditation has been an integral part of my life ever since.

Studies show that meditation changes the very structure of our brain. Research led by Dr. Sara Lazar, a neuroscientist at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, revealed that meditation increases grey matter in the areas of the brain responsible for the regulation of emotion, compassion, coordination, learning, and memory. Also, meditation decreases grey matter in the area of the brain that controls the release of stress hormones.

This change in the structure of the brain leads to many benefits, including improved focus, increased creativity, enhanced memory, increased compassion, and reduced stress and anxiety. Meditation also lowers blood pressure, strengthens the immune system, improves sleep, and more.

As I said in the beginning, I have first-hand experience of the detrimental effect of long-term stress and the positive effects of meditation to ease that. I vouch for it. The effect it has had on my life has been so profound that it has inspired me to teach the same techniques that transformed my life with others, so that they can benefit too.

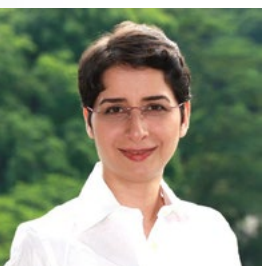
If you want to stay calm and peaceful in this world of constant activity and reduce stress, meditation is definitely worth giving a try. A few minutes of quiet time for yourself each day to focus your mind will go a long way. One last thing, it is vital to learn to meditate from a good teacher who can help you understand the depth of this simple technique so you can benefit the most out of this scientific practice. ■

“A few minutes of quiet time for yourself each day to focus your mind will go a long way.”

WORKLIFE

Dr. Narjes Gorjizadeh

Dr. Narjes Gorjizadeh, Ph.D., is a research scientist and a certified teacher of meditation and mindfulness. She has trained with internationally renowned master Vikas Malkani, at the SoulCentre Academy in Singapore. For more details, please contact admin@thewmhi.com





How The Media's Use of Fear And Negativity Affects Your Health

“If it bleeds, it leads.” If you’re unfamiliar with this phrase, it might surprise you to know the source from where it comes; the news media. For many years this singular, salacious phrase has been used as a sort of ‘secret code’ among the people who create our daily news. What it means is that negative news is, in effect, more important than positive, and therefore should be aired first, or ‘lead’ the news cycle.

To better understand why this phrase became popular, it’s important to keep in mind that media organizations, including TV, newspapers, and magazines, are businesses first and foremost. It’s their job to attract viewers and readers because sponsors pay more money for larger audiences. If

negative news stories are more popular than positive (and there is vast research showing they are) it only makes good business sense for negative stories to take precedence over positive stories.

That being said, the next question that must be asked is this; why do we, as a society, gravitate to negative news stories rather than positive? Taking that a step further, we also must ask how a constant diet of negative news is affecting society on a psychological, physical, and social level. Lastly, if you run a business of your own, the question of how all this negative news affects your employees and their productivity becomes much more important.

Why Are News Stories So Often Negative?

Pick up any newspaper or watch any TV news program and the vast majority of the news you’ll see will be negative. That’s especially true at the beginning of a TV news show or on the front page of a newspaper or magazine. That’s where the ‘lead’ stories will be, and the vast majority are overwhelmingly bleak. But why is this so? Why do journalists and the media concentrate on the negative and push positive news to the back of the newspaper or a quick segment at the end of their program?

The reason why is quite telling; we as a society demand it. For decades we have shown, with our viewership and readership, that we prefer negative news to positive. Now, to be sure, when asked about their preference, most people will say that they prefer positive news. But, as this study suggests, the direct opposite is true. Negative news stories attract more viewers, and negative headlines in newspapers and magazines sell more copies. It’s simple economics.

Why Is Society Attracted to Negative News?

The reason why we as a society are more interested in negative news than positive, at its core, is that negative news can (possibly) impact our lives. This was more true decades ago when, for example, a fire in a city or town could literally affect the people living there. Today it’s less true, of course, but the basic psychological processes are still in place.

Good news might be more pleasant and agreeable but it likely won’t affect us one way or another. Bad news could affect us, personally or financially, and thus we’re more likely to watch or read it to make sure that we’ll be ‘OK’.

What Effect Does Constantly Watching Negative News Have On Us as a Society?

As we’ve seen, media organizations use negativity and fear as bait, if you will, to lure us into watching their programs and reading their newspapers and magazines. The question of whether this is ethical remains to be seen, but the fact is that it does exact a toll on our mental and physical wellness. Indeed, if fed a constant diet of negative news, our thinking can become quite distorted. Negative news activates three cognitive biases. They include;

1. A Negativity Bias. This is our tendency as a society to focus on negative news more than positive. This in turn causes media outlets to deliver us more negative news, feeding the cycle and creating a ‘Catch-22’ type situation.
2. An Availability Bias. This is a tendency to overestimate the frequency and significance of negative news stories. The more we see negative news the more easily we can bring examples of them into our minds, and we start to believe that most of what goes on in the world is negative.
3. A Confirmation Bias. The most damaging tendency, we begin looking for information that confirms that the world is a negative place. The confirmation bias makes it much more difficult for an individual to hear, or be changed by, different and/or more positive perspectives.

These biases, in effect, keep us in a constant state of negativity, which can be psychologically traumatizing over the long-term and physically draining as well. Over time, all 3 of these biases begin to work in concert and change the way we think, see the world and absorb new knowledge. And, again, the confirmation bias can become extremely damaging as we begin to shut out positive influences and/or reject any news that doesn’t fit our new, negative outlook.



Society and the news media have a very complex relationship. As with all relationships, there will always be both positive and negative aspects that must be faced and dealt with. ”

What Can Be Done To Break the Negative News Cycle?

Here's a fact; even though the vast majority of news we're seeing and hearing is negative, the world isn't coming to an end. Many good things, and good people, are out there, creating good things and making a positive impact on our world. Just because it's not featured in the news media doesn't mean it's not happening.

That being said, a good question to ask is; how do we break the negative news cycle and replace our old biases with new objectivity and impartiality? Here are a few actionable ways to do just that:

1. The easiest method is to simply reduce your news consumption. Many of us these days have our smartphones set to alert us when bad news happens, or have a habit of watching the news at a particular hour each day. Turning those alerts off and breaking that news habit will go far to reducing the hold negative news has on our collective psyche.
2. Engage in activities that are positive, relaxing, and fun. Life can be extremely enjoyable if you put your mind to it. Play a game. Build a Lego set. Throw around a frisbee or football. Too juvenile? Engage in some witty banter with a colleague or play a game of chess. Anything that makes you smile and relaxes you will work.

3. Take a news 'fast'. The truth is, not watching the news for a day, a week or even a month won't impact your actual life in the slightest. On the other hand, it could have a significant, and positive, impact on your outlook, your objectivity, and your positivity.
4. Discuss the news with a trusted friend or colleague. Trying to digest negative news on your own can be exhausting and, as we've seen, damaging. Whenever you have the chance, discuss what you're seeing and reading with a friend or colleague so that you can get different viewpoints and positive input.
5. Question your belief system. Always remember that the news media is biased and that you shouldn't take what they're saying at 100% face value. Do your research, ask for the opinions of others, seek other sources of news, and get the facts before you set your opinion in stone.

Society and the news media have a very complex relationship. As with all relationships, there will always be both positive and negative aspects that must be faced and dealt with. While the news media's motto might be "If it bleeds, it leads", that in no way means that you, as a viewer or reader, need to bleed with them. ■

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Allowing Fear To Reconnect Us To Ourselves And The World

by Gert Olefs



In this pandemic we are forced to reconnect with ourselves and to rediscover who and what really matter in life. The lockdown gives us more time to go deeper and undertake the most exciting journey of all; the Star Trek within, to boldly go where we have never gone before, inside ourselves. This is the time to exercise our inner freedom to its fullest.

Undertaking this journey within can bring us in close connection with the WHY of our lives. It will also facilitate meeting and communicating with our most important person ever; our person in the mirror. Understanding why we are here and having deeply honest conversations with the man or woman in the mirror, is amongst the most rewarding experiences possible. The outcome will often be a strong sense of purpose, a deep feeling of meaning, a profound sense of belonging and finally, inner peace.

Essential ingredients on this inner journey, next to the honesty which I already mentioned, are courage (not the absence of fear but the overcoming of fear), connection and gratitude.

As we see once more during this pandemic, fear is a very negative force. It blocks us from exploring life. It digs up dark emotions and can easily derail into hatred and violence. Fear is a catalyst for the blaming game or what I call the "index finger complex". We tend to point our index finger towards others: the authorities, the government, the politicians, the police, the medical staff, our bosses, our employers, our spouses or life, our children, our "I-do-not-know-who-or-what". It rarely points towards ourselves and yet it is there that lies the fundamental reason and responsibility for whatever emotions and behaviours we have.

This exceptional time is as big an opportunity as we will ever get to explore our deeper selves. It is a time to find within ourselves our hidden treasure trove full of talents which we did not necessarily know we had.

I am sure that many of the healthcare workers around the world did not realise the extent to which they had within themselves the courage, compassion, strength and dedication to take care of the sick, even when that means putting their own well-being at risk. Yet they do so, day after day. It is the tiny, yet dangerous, virus that brought these treasures to the surface.

Worldwide there are many actions of compassion and connectedness. The example that probably stands out the most because of its simplicity, its effectiveness and its

sheer beauty is the story of the 100 year old British WW2 veteran who walked with his rollator on his terrace to raise money to support the National Health Service in his country. He wanted to raise 1000 pounds; he raised more than 30 million!!

There will come a day for most of us, in our old age, that we will make up the balance of our lives. It is for this reason that our woman or our man in the mirror today asks us this penetrating question: *"will you be able to live with yourself then, knowing that you could and should have acted today, but that you did not because you were held back by fear or by those nasty little voices in your head which tell you that you are not good, not smart, not strong, not worthy enough?"*

I can assure you that when you will look in the eyes of your old woman or man in the mirror and answer with sincere honesty: *"Yes, I can live with myself because I truly did what I could for the world"*, you will be rewarded beyond measure. For it is then that you will hear the magic words from your woman or your man in the mirror:

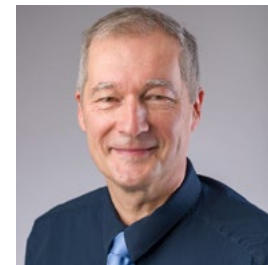
"I am so proud of you because when you were all alone with your dream and full of fear and trepidation, you started walking anyway. I am so proud of you because when it was hard and difficult you kept walking."

It is then that you will feel at peace with yourself and one with all of the world.

*"Will **you** be able to live with yourself, then?"*

Gert Olefs

Gert Olefs is Founder of World Peace 2035, Co-founder of White Green Blue...Sustainable You, and Author of "Mirror Talks", weekly on Facebook live. For more details contact admin@thewmhi.com



The Real Dangers of Work-From-Home Burnout and How To Properly Tackle Them

Work-from-home (WFH) burnout is a real, serious, and increasingly common risk for remote workers across the globe. Learn the signs of WFH burnout, how to combat it, and where employers/virtual managers and employees can reach out for help.



The world is grappling with the novel coronavirus pandemic that continues to take a toll on nearly all aspects of people's lives. The vast majority of the workforce across the globe has willy-nilly adapted to a new work environment -- the new "normal" in the context of the pandemic. But working from home has also opened a Pandora's box of workaholic tendencies, anxieties and fears, proneness to overworking and burnout, and potential mental health problems.

While the virus itself may pose a risk to our physical health, the impact of the whole unnerving situation on our mental health is anything but negligible, and this is especially true for remote workers whose home has now been transformed into their office. Between working harder and longer hours from home and juggling family responsibilities, people who have been working remotely due to government-imposed restrictions are facing an increased risk of WFH/ lockdown burnout, with potentially long-term repercussions.

Different Remote Workers in Different Industries, All Overworked and Burned Out

What used to exclusively be their own oasis of relaxation where they'd spent quality time with their loved ones and to unwind, has also become their work environment for several months now. In a recent BBC News video, three professionals working remotely in different industries share their WFH experiences in terms of feeling the signs of burnout and overworked during lockdown in the UK.

"When I used to work at the gym I'd finish my work at the gym and then get home and rest but this just feels like there's no end".

Ana, a young personal trainer living in the UK, has been intensely working from home since March. Stuck at home, she started posting more educational content and live streaming workouts on Instagram, which quickly increased the number of clients from different countries. To provide her services online to clients in different parts of the world, such as the US and Australia, she's been working almost round the clock. "I'm constantly working", confesses Ana. From 30 sessions per week, Ana now manages 50-60 sessions per week.

"Because I lost all the gig income, I had to really buckle down".

For David Altweger, a middle-aged musician and owner of an independent record label, the pandemic has had a devastating impact on his gig income. Running a record label online requires a lot of hard work and longer hours, so it's

no wonder that David's workload significantly increased. He starts his day at 5 a.m. with a strong coffee. David's workday is around 16 hours, as he's got to handle every aspect of his business himself, including design work, office work, and, with his distributor closed due to lockdown, even CD deliveries, which are quite time-consuming, taking him at least 2 hours a day.

"Sometimes I feel like Covid Father Christmas delivering music to people's door", confesses David. His Moka pot is his "secret weapon", but at the end of the day, he feels "completely knackered".

"Lockdown has brought out the workaholic in me"

Abbey, a young art director working remotely for an ad agency in the UK has been feeling the pressure to stay productive and has been experiencing the effects of overworking due to fear of losing her job too. "I'm doing ten times more because there's so much uncertainty around jobs and everything", laments Abbey, for whom "the need to keep working" at all costs is so strong and deeply embedded that she oftentimes refuses to tend to her physiological needs for food.

She finds it difficult to take a break just to have lunch because she **"doesn't know how to switch off"**. A major contributor to her inability to switch off is the fact that work and relaxation take place in the same environment i.e her home. Separating the two is as difficult for Abbey as it is for other remote workers around the globe.

In America, where over 30 million people have filed unemployment claims since March, the pressure to stay productive and be even more productive than prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, has contributed to a dramatic rise in the number of overworked people working from their homes. According to a Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) poll, 45% of US adults say that this whole situation associated with the pandemic has had a negative impact on their mental health.

"I find myself working all the time, even when I should be getting ready for bed"

41-year-old New Jersey resident and mother-of-two Alana Acosta-Lahullier is overworked and feels burned out to the bone. Alana says she feels "an obligation to get everything done right", even if doing so is detrimental to her mental health and well-being. Between her full-time job, working remotely for an electrical contractor, parenting, and helping with the schooling of her daughter and son, who has ADHD on the autism spectrum, she's "constantly on the verge of a panic attack".



Panic-Working Is a Manic Defense

Even Gianpiero Petriglieri, a psychiatrist, MD, and associate professor of organisational behavior at the Business School for the World (INSEAD) admitted in late March that “by the time I went to bed at 3 a.m., I was exhausted, edgy, and miserable” due to “panic-working” from home.

The obsession with staying productive at all costs is considered a “manic defense” by psychoanalysts. Panic-working gives us a false sense of security and the illusion of being in control. It numbs us in the short term but this defense comes at a high price - feeling disconnected from reality, our experiences, and other people, and completely burned out.

Fighting Fire with Fire: A Vicious Cycle

Remote workers are oftentimes pushing themselves too hard as a way of coping with their anxieties and fears caused by the pandemic and the recession. But overworking in an effort to stay productive does not serve them well; in fact, it’s akin to self-sabotage because it eventually leads to burnout, more anxiety, depression, and other repercussions on their mental and overall health.

Both employers/virtual managers and remote workers need to be aware of the increased risk of burnout associated with working from home, recognize the (early) signs, and effectively combat it as early as possible.

Working Harder and Longer Has Become the Norm

Transition to a work-from-home culture has been challenging for managers across the globe. Finding new ways to ensure that their remote teams stay productive is one of their main priorities. However, instead of worrying about their teams’ underperformance, virtual managers should be on the lookout for overperformance, which has been found to be productivity’s enemy rather than its ally.

According to a 2017 working paper published by researchers at Harvard Business School, task selection is a common way through which workers manage their increased workload. More specifically, they tend to complete easier tasks, a behavior labeled as Task Completion Bias (TCB). Although TCB has been found to improve short-term productivity, it negatively impacts long-term performance measured by revenue and speed alike. Workers who do not exhibit this behavior tend to be significantly more productive than those who exhibit TCB.

Research shows that the vast majority of remote workers are more productive than their in-office counterparts. They work harder and longer hours than ever before for different reasons, including the fact that employers apply increasingly more pressure for efficiency purposes, but also for financial rewards, and out of fear. Remote workers fear many things -- they fear for the health and safety of themselves and their loved ones; the economic fallout and uncertainty of the future; they fear for losing their livelihood/financial security and no longer being able to provide for themselves and their family, and more.

But the reality is that overworking makes a remote worker more prone to WFH burnout.

The Warning Signs of WFH Burnout

Work-from-home or lockdown burnout refers to a state of exhaustion on physical, emotional, and mental levels caused by prolonged and excessive stress associated with panic-working/overworking from home and disruption to the work-life balance.

Although burnout is still not classified as a medical disorder, the World Health Organisation (WHO) included it in ICD-11 last year as an occupational phenomenon and is defined as “a syndrome” that results from chronic and unsuccessfully managed workplace stress.

What to watch out for:

- Chronic fatigue/exhaustion and apathy
- Depression and/anxiety worsening over time
- Constantly elevated stress levels and reduced energy levels
- Feeling overwhelmed and mentally drained all the time
- Inability to focus and forgetfulness/memory issues
- Lack of motivation, feelings of negativism toward one’s job
- Declining performance, avoiding work or inability to switch off
- Chest pain, shortness of breath and/or heart palpitations
- Irritability, anger, and sleep disorders (e.g. insomnia)
- Dizziness and headaches/migraines
- Loss of/reduced appetite and/or gastrointestinal issues

Early recognition of these signs via virtual channels such as chat apps and video calls is of the utmost importance. It’s worth noting that a worker who is affected by WFH/ lockdown burnout does not necessarily have to exhibit all of the above signs, because it manifests differently in different people.

Burnout can also weaken a remote worker’s immune system, which in turn may increase the risk of getting sick.

Tips To Combat Lockdown Burnout

- Establish clear boundaries that separate work from personal life to prevent work-life balance disruption
- Set office hours and create a schedule designating work, free and family time to regain control

- Avoid the tendency of being the perfect worker, which adds extra pressure
- Take time off to unwind and discover a new hobby
- Maintain social interactions/connections to avoid social isolation and detachment
- Don’t suffer in silence -Talk to your team, virtual manager and reach out for help

Reach Out For Professional Help From Therapists

It’s absolutely crucial for virtual managers to learn to recognize the telltale signs of work-from-home burnout as early as possible in order to minimize its long-term impact on remote workers’ mental well-being as well as to properly address it in a timely and efficient fashion. The Workplace Mental Health Institute (WMHI) is here to help virtual managers across the globe with a suite of tailored, top-tier and results-driven telehealth training courses and services, counseling, and coaching sessions on mental health, well-being, and resilience of employees working remotely due to the Covid pandemic.

If you’re an employee working from home and you’ve been feeling the effects of burnout and overworked during lockdown, it’s in your best interest to take some time off to decompress and to speak with a qualified therapist.

In case your job offers free counseling sessions through an employee assistance program (EAP), then do yourself a huge favor and take full advantage of it for the sake of your mental health and well-being in these uncertain and difficult times.



Keep your cool

This is the time of year is typically one of the busiest for many organisations and workforces, with many people rushing to squeeze in as many task minute tasks into their 2020 as possible, and lining up their projects for 2021.

And then, just as we think we're going to get everything wrapped up in time for our end of year break (even if it is only a few days), we get smashed with a sweltering day that has all of us moaning in our sweaty work dress, Boss suit, uniform, or protective work wear.

And I'm not just talking about the Southern hemisphere here either! I've been in some workplaces where to combat the chilly winter weather outside, someone (a colleague or a loved one - and we all know who they are!) has cranked up the heating hotter than a hamsters fart in a sock.

In an office environment, climate can be controlled to some extent, but even then the ideal temperature is disputed by scholars. For many years it was thought that office thermostats should be set at 71.5°F (22°C) for optimal productivity. Many of the studies that reached this conclusion were conducted in the United Kingdom and an argument could be presented that workforces from other global regions could work optimally in higher or lower temperatures.

Not considering other factors such as shade, shape of the room, humidity, and ventilation (which would all impact on the effectiveness of this temperature being used as a default), individual differences such as work role, percentage of body fat, and sex also influence the temperature at which productivity is optimal.

The Handbook of Clinical Neurology (2018) published "Obesity and thermoregulation" by researcher JR Speakman. Results indicated that whilst obesity was a protective factor against cold, it impedes heat loss and makes obese people susceptible to heat stress more than lean individuals.

For workers in more manual roles, productivity was found to drop by around 4% for each degree above 27°C (80°F). Researchers from the University of Chicago (2018) examined data from more than 70,000 factory workers in India, and concluded these findings for more manual production over automated processes. Their findings also found that whilst climate control helped to mitigate the decrease in productivity, absenteeism was significantly higher on hotter days. For the safety of workers in Australia, Workplace Health and Safety guidelines govern work-rest cycles for different types of roles for each range of temperatures and humidity.

One example of gender differences is seen in a study by Tom Chang and Agne Kajackaite of 543 German college students who were made to take tests of mathematical and verbal ability in temperatures that ranged from 16°C to 31°C. As the temperature increased the test results of female subjects improved, whilst those of male subjects decreased with above average heat ("Battle for the thermostat: Gender and the effect of temperature on cognitive performance" PLoS ONE 14(5), 2019). Female workers tend to feel cold faster than males when the thermostat has been turned down, and this has been shown to effect accuracy in a study that examined typing pools.

Given all of the variables that moderate the ideal working temperature it seems clear that individual strategies would assist personal productivity. Here are some ideas to keep productivity optimal during a heat wave.

- **Don't Mess With the Air Conditioning**
Remember, too many variables. Maintain a constant 24°C all year (for indoor environments) to enable employees to make personal adjustments.
- **Cool drinks - not chilled**
Provide your team with the opportunity to drink cool water, but be certain that it isn't icy. Very cold drinks have the impact of temporarily lowering the core body temperature, which results in an attempt by the body to 'warm up'. This is a process called thermoregulation. Caution must be used to avoid extreme changes in body temperature.
- **Convection cooling**
The simplicity of desk fans is often overlooked. Paired with a small spray bottle of water to mist the face, a fan is a very effective method of cooling using convection and evaporation.
- **Water-dense snacks**
Vegetable and fruit snacks on platters in the fridge offer a cooling refreshment for which your team will be so grateful it may even boost productivity! Ideal options include cucumber, celery, pineapple, watermelon, cherries, grapes, pears and mangoes. Green leafy vegetables and zucchini are also good options. Fresh coconut water is a good cooling and hydrating drink, and requires less effort from the body to metabolise the sugars than energy drinks or sugary soft drinks. The menthol in mint can be helpful in cooling the body, so if you are OK with the taste use it in water, add it to salads, and ask for tzatziki and sweet chilli in your kebab (the chilli is also cooling, ironically).
- **Real clothes for real results**
Protective clothing aside, let's loosen up - literally. Loose clothing in natural fibres will prevent body heat from being trapped between the skin and a layer of polyester. Even natural fibres will find it hard to breath if they are sandwiched between the body and a lined vest, and a lined jacket, and a tie... and a belt.... Need I go on? You don't need to endorse radical change in a corporate environment, but be sufficiently flexible to put the human need for comfort ahead of the 'look' on those particularly steamy days.
- **Hot shoe shuffle**
Our feet are great thermoregulators. If our feet are submerged in cool water for a few minutes it can provide good relief from the heat, especially if peppermint oil is added to the water. At least permit staff to kick off their shoes under their desks to air their (hopefully not too smelly) feet.

Keep Smiling and Stay Cool everyone! ■

15 Signs That You Might Be In An Abusive Relationship

Relationships take many forms. We are in relationships with our significant other, our families, friends, our doctor, government, workplace and more. How can you tell if the relationship you are in is abusive? Here are 15 signs to look out for so you can protect yourself.



If you recognise these signs and you are concerned you may be in an abusive relationship, don't panic. Awareness is the first step to change, so congratulations, that takes guts.

What next? Take action and talk to someone whose opinion you respect and who speaks frankly. If you can, talk to a good professional, ie psychologist, counsellor, social worker. Get these respected individuals to ask you exploratory questions. Research how to set reasonable boundaries and how to be assertive.

What if you realise you have been acting in an abusive way? Again, congratulations. It takes a big person to acknowledge they've been causing harm. Please, talk to someone that can help you explore your reactions and how to change them.

We wish you well in your journey.

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Dealing With Trauma, PTSD, Grief, And Loss In The Workplace In The Age Of COVID

With millions of people either in lockdown of varying degrees, or having recently been in a quarantine/lockdown situation, talk of the emotional and physical effects of the Coronavirus pandemic is everywhere. The fact is, many people have been traumatized over the last year, both physically and emotionally, and, for some, spiritually as well. This pandemic has been incredibly harsh on people everywhere. Indeed, people are hurting (and dying) around the globe.

Millions have been out of work for months and don't know how they're going to pay rent and other bills. Hundreds of thousands of small businesses have closed, and unemployment is at a historic high. The times right now are, in a word, stressful. Much more stressful than normal, which brings us to the crux of this article.

As we've all been dealing with the pandemic, the amount of trauma, PTSD, grief, and loss has steadily risen. Unfortunately, many of us may feel the strain, but don't realize that what we're actually experiencing are common symptoms of trauma.

To help, we've put together this article with answers to your most common questions about PTSD, trauma, and how the response to COVID can (and is) causing them. That way, if you are suffering, you can seek help for yourself or a loved one.

What Is Trauma and What Can Trauma Include?

While most people have heard the word trauma, it's a medical term that's sometimes misunderstood. Trauma comes from the Greek word for 'wound' and, for hundreds of years, referred to a physical injury that someone had sustained. (More than likely a soldier in the Greek army.) Over the last few decades, however, the meaning behind the word trauma changed. It was now used to describe any physically or highly emotionally distressing event.

Recently, though, the definition of trauma changed yet again. Today, trauma is described as the psychological or emotional response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event. In other words, it isn't the traumatic event itself, but the response to that event that is the trauma.

An even better definition of trauma is this; Trauma is when you have an out-of-control, frightening experience that disconnects you from your sense of resourcefulness, safety, coping, or ability to love.

It is a situation that is, or feels, out of your control, which is the crucial point. When a person feels that their safety is threatened, and they feel helpless and hopeless about it, it can cause emotional trauma, especially if it threatens their sense of self or who they are (their identity).

Trauma Is In The Eye Of the Beholder

What's very interesting about trauma is that an event can be traumatic for one person, but there may be no trauma for another. That's because different things can be perceived as traumatic by different people. A car accident is a great example. If you're involved in a car accident, it could be experienced as a very traumatic event. However for someone else, even in the same accident, they may not be traumatized by it at all.

Today, rather than assuming something is traumatic, experts talk about "potentially traumatic events." These include accidents, assaults, bullying, abuse and even natural disasters. Some people might experience a traumatic reaction to this occurrence, while others might be completely fine.

The good news is, that while the average adult will experience at least one potentially traumatic event (PTE) in their life, only 5 to 10% will have a traumatic response to that experience. Further, 50% of the people who do have a traumatic response will recover within a year.

Is the COVID-19 Pandemic Considered a Traumatic Event?

In many ways, yes, the pandemic, and resultant responses to it, have been traumatic for millions of people around the world. Some may not agree, but a look at the facts shows that, indeed, the pandemic and lockdown have been a very traumatic time for many people.

Consider these situations with reference to the definition of trauma:

- Many people have had their physical safety threatened, in the form of threats to their health, economic security and personal safety.
- Many have been forced out of work, a threat to their sense of self-worth and identity.
- Many have been forcibly isolated, disconnected from their sources of coping, through measures like stay at home orders, quarantine and travel restrictions and difficulties.
- Personal conflicts have risen sharply during the pandemic as millions have been forced to stay home full time.
- Millions have experienced a loss of control over their lives.

So, yes, in every sense of the word, this pandemic has been a traumatic event for many. And, as happens when people

are under trauma, some will experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD.

Is a Post Traumatic Stress Response to the Pandemic Normal?

Yes, very much so. You need to keep in mind that, just as your body heals itself, your mind and brain heal themselves also. Having a PTSD response to trauma is seen by experts as the psyche's way of dealing with a traumatic event. If you or a loved one is experiencing PTSD, the best thing you can do is seek help from a professional counselor. They can help you deal with these 100% normal feelings and emotions.

What Are The Symptoms Of PTSD?

If you believe that you, a family member, or colleague, has PTSD, you will likely see a few symptoms. Keep in mind that these are normal responses to trauma. (It's very similar to grief and loss, which we will see in just a moment.) The symptoms of PTSD include:

- Hypervigilance- This is when you are extra alert, jumpy, or on edge.
- Emotional Numbness- This is when you feel disconnected from people and emotions
- Re-Experiencing Trauma Repeatedly- If you or a loved one are having flashbacks or repeated (but similar) nightmares.



Trauma, Grief, And Loss Cause Very Similar Reactions

Interestingly, humans' reactions to grief and loss are very similar to the reaction they have to trauma. Many times, it causes an existential inquiry into what their life is all about, including questions like: Who am I? What am I here on this planet for, really? What is the true meaning of my life? Am I happy and doing what I really want to do with my life? These types of questions are also good and normal and should be asked. The key, though, is to get some help from someone who can support you as you explore these deep existential questions. At least get some advice. Speaking of which...

What Signs of Trauma, Grief or Loss might I Observe in a Colleague or Loved One?

The range of responses to a traumatic event is varied, it's true. Some people will react minimally, others significantly, and some not at all. That being said, here are some of the most common reactions to a lockdown like the one we've all just experienced:

- Seeming over-reactions to a situation.
- People may question things more frequently and openly
- A range of strong emotions from fear and anger, through to sadness, grief, loss, blame, guilt, confusion, hopelessness, and so on.

- Extremely strained relationships - with colleagues, friends or family members.
- A lack of the usual coping mechanisms - things like movies, lunch with friends, working out, fresh air, hugs, lovemaking, etc.

How Can You Support Colleagues At Work Who Have Suffered Trauma?

Supporting colleagues and employees at work who have suffered (or are suffering) from a potentially traumatic event isn't difficult but does take diligence and understanding. Below are some of the best ways to cope, help, and advise anyone who's suffered during the pandemic:

- Realize that many people have been through a traumatic time and have had different traumatic experiences. This is especially important if you yourself have not struggled or been impacted negatively. Never minimize or downplay anyone's experiences. (Remember, trauma is in the eye of the beholder.)
- If you see someone overreacting to something that in reality seems like a small issue, know that this too is normal. It's most likely not your fault at all, but knowing how to respond is crucial.
- Realize that the details of their trauma, in most cases, are immaterial.
- Make a concerted effort to see that your employees and colleagues are not further physically or emotionally abused on the job. (This is called retraumatization.)

- Put transparency and trust on a very high level. Lots of communication is needed.
- Treat people fairly and provide dignified choices when necessary.
- Keep potential 'trigger' situations down to a minimum when possible. Ask people what works and doesn't work for them.
- Make sure the physical space in your office or workplace is well-managed, open, and well-lit.
- Be prepared, at least for the time being, to be flexible with your company's less critical policies where you can (like dress code or times of work, depending on your industry).
- Be open to suggestions that may help someone cope, like rearranging a desk.

Also, keep in mind that some people may be experiencing no negative feelings or emotions from the pandemic and lockdown. You might even find some that are feeling positive and strong. The key is to treat every employee and colleague respectfully and, no matter what they're experiencing, don't discount their feelings, experiences, and/or situation.

Working From Home And The Disconnection Factor

One significant change during the pandemic is that millions of people are working from home for the first time. Now, keep in mind that working from home (WFH) and

disconnection are two very different things. Millions work from home successfully and don't go through the same trauma that many have experienced during the pandemic. Indeed, isolation has been shown to be beneficial if and when it is voluntary. That being said, WFH has been pushed on millions of people who are learning to cope with it as best they can. In other words, some may struggle with it while others may not.

At the end of the day, the fact is that humans are social animals. We need, and love, to be around people. (Even introverts.)

When we are physically and/or emotionally disconnected from people, bad things can (and often do) happen.

That's why so many have struggled (and are still struggling) during this COVID situation. And that's why, in everything you do, respect and kindness should guide you.

That would be a great message to close on today, actually. Everyone is struggling so, no matter what you do at work and/or home, be kind to your family, friends, and neighbors. If they're struggling, being kind to them is the best thing you can do to help. Of course, if you yourself are struggling, getting help is important. Trust us, you're not alone, and there's no shame in asking. Be kind to yourself. ■

Foods to help you sleep



Poor sleep quality and duration has a widely researched negative impact on both physical and mental wellbeing. Beyond the valuable effects of deep sleep on emotional balance and memory, studies have shown that a lack of quality sleep can also increase the risk of obesity, cardiovascular disease and hypertension.

A variety of amino acids, enzymes, nutrients, and hormones work together to promote good sleep and regulate the sleep cycle. Some of the more widely known of these include tryptophan, melatonin, magnesium, serotonin, potassium and zinc (among others).

Although lots of foods contain low levels of these sleep-promoting compounds, only some have high concentrations that could potentially affect a person's sleep cycle.

ALMONDS

Almonds contain high doses of melatonin, a hormone that helps regulate the sleeping and waking cycle. A 30gm serving of whole almonds also contains 77 milligrams (mg) of magnesium and 76 mg of calcium, two minerals that may help promote muscle relaxation and sleep. Almonds are high in good fats and low in sugar and saturated fats.

WARM MILK

Warm milk contains four compounds that promote quality sleep: tryptophan, calcium, vitamin D, and melatonin. However, the psychological influence may be just as useful. Like a cup of tea, having a warm cup of milk before bed can be a relaxing nightly ritual.

KIWIFRUIT

Some research has looked at the link between kiwi consumption and sleep. Eating two kiwifruits an hour before bedtime for 4 weeks improved total sleep time and sleep quality, and also took less time to fall asleep in research subjects.

CHAMOMILE TEA

Insomnia has traditionally been treated with the herb chamomile. Studies have led researchers to conclude that a flavonoid compound called apigenin is responsible for chamomile's sleep-inducing properties. Apigenin seems to activate GABA A receptors, a process that helps stimulate sleep.

Although research has found only weak evidence that chamomile may improve sleep quality, the behavioural ritual of having a warm cup of tea can help a person mentally prepare for bed.

TART CHERRIES

Cherries are rich in four different sleep-regulating compounds: melatonin, tryptophan, potassium, and serotonin. Researchers speculate that antioxidants called polyphenols in tart cherries may also influence sleep regulation. Further, research has shown that the anti-inflammatory properties of cherries may reduce pain from muscle fatigue, allowing for faster recovery after exercise.

FATTY FISH

Fatty fish such as tuna, salmon and sardines may help improve sleep because they are a good source of vitamin D

and omega-3 fatty acids, which help to regulate serotonin. Serotonin is largely responsible for establishing a fixed sleeping and waking cycle.

Participants in a 2014 study who ate 300 g of Atlantic salmon three times a week for 6 months were able to fall asleep faster than those who ate chicken, beef, or pork with the same nutritional value, and had better cognitive function during the day.

LETTUCE

Claims exist that lettuce has a mild sedative-hypnotic effect, which researchers believe are due to the plant's n-butanol fraction, specifically in a compound called lactucin. In a 2013 laboratory study, mice that received n-butanol experienced an increase in sleep duration and a decrease in the time taken to fall asleep. Later (2017) researchers concluded that lettuce not only increased sleep duration in mice but that it also protected cells from damage caused by sleep disturbances.

OTHER NATURAL REMEDIES

Some lifestyle and diet choices can also help improve sleep and a person's sleep cycle. These include:

- avoiding heartburn-inducing meals, such as spicy or rich foods
- avoiding foods and drinks that contain caffeine close to bedtime
- choosing foods with a low glycemic index
- avoiding skipping meals
- staying hydrated
- exercising regularly
- finishing eating more than 2-3 hours before bedtime

Most potentially sleep-promoting foods are nutritious and unlikely to cause harm, so they should be safe for anyone without allergies to enjoy in moderation. Herbal remedies such as St Johns Wort, and Valerian, are often recommended to improve the quality and duration of sleep – it is always a good idea to check with your physician before commencing a supplementation program to ensure that there are no interactions with prescribed medication.



Seven Reasons to **LOVE** Your Pet

*If you've ever thought about getting a pet,
now may be the best time!*

1. Pets improve your mood

Interacting with a pet promotes a positive mood, according to numerous studies, and also increases your levels of oxytocin – the love hormone!

2. Pets can improve your social life

If you've ever walked a dog, you've probably noticed that they are pretty good at opening interactions with other people. Compared to walking alone, you'll notice a lot of conversations with strangers when you walk a dog, even a cat, and especially less common pets, like a goat.

3. Dogs improve your immune system

Studies have shown that owning a dog boosts the immune system and increases your levels of immunoglobulin A. Dogs expose us to microbes that we might otherwise avoid in our clean indoor environment. Even cats – especially cats who spend part of their time outside – can raise the levels of different bacterial species in your home.

4. Pets make babies healthier, too

Babies living in a pet-owning household are less likely to get sick than babies who live in pet-free households. The microbes that pets carry in from the outdoors seem to prime babies' immune systems and help them fight off illness from other bacteria and viruses. There is no evidence, however, to support the idea that pets sharing a home with an infant will reduce the development of animal allergies.

5. Walking a dog improves your physical fitness

A dog motivates you to exercise, and makes it significantly more likely that you meet the usual recommendation of 150 minutes of exercise per week. Dog owners may get more exercise than the rest of us. And people who regularly walk their dogs walk faster and for longer than others. Scientists have even coined the term "Lassie Effect" to describe this finding.

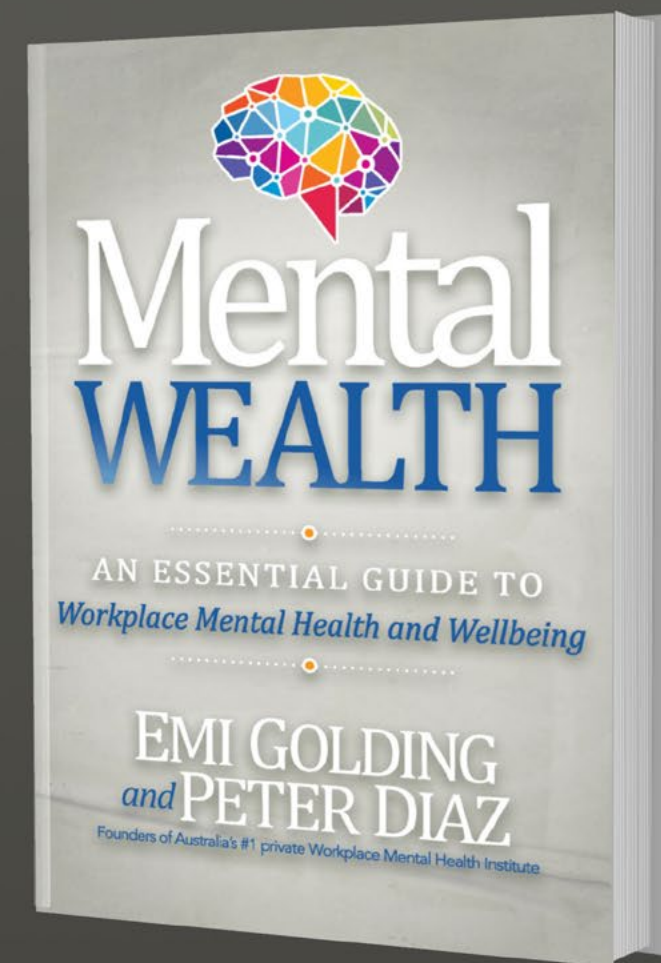
6. Cats and dogs lower your risk of heart disease

Researchers found that owning a cat lowers your risk of heart disease, as does owning and walking a dog. A study from the 1980s reported that cat and dog owners were more likely to be alive a year after a heart attack than people without pets, although this statistical relationship weakens as the pet owner enters an elderly stage of life.

7. Dogs can improve your emotional well-being

Having a dog may improve your emotional health since dogs seem to empathize with people. They sense and respond to people's emotions. Dogs can help people with post-traumatic stress disorder to handle their anxiety or anger, which makes them highly suitable for training as a service animal. There is evidence that dogs do their best to provide sympathy and comfort when you're sad, or share your joy when you're happy. ■

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