Vital Exhaustion Syndrome

by Malkanthi Leitan

Do you feel that you are working too hard? Does at day at work leave you feeling completely drained? Perhaps you feel that you have no energy or time left for enjoyment. If so, you are certainly not alone. There's no doubt that today most of us are working longer hours than we have in decades.

Overwork is one of the factors that can lead to *Vital Exhaustion Syndrome*. This condition, characterized by loss of vigour, irritability, excess fatigue and demoralization, can increase your chance of heart problems. Research shows that a decrease in the amount of *Slow Wave Sleep* (SWS) is most probably to blame for the blockages to the heart. Thus, if you are a busy worker, the importance of sound sleep cannot be denied.

Slow Wave Sleep is the deepest stage of non-REM (rapid eye movement) sleep and coincides with a surge of growth hormone into the system. SWS is believed to mark a time of restoration after the wear and tear of wakefulness. Unable to deal with the increased pressures of work, many victims of overwork go to sleep feeling anxious often due to an untimely release of excess adrenalin, leading to a relative absence of SWS. A series of physiological processes are set in motion. The heart rate can shoot up as can blood pressure and blood sugar. Normal sleep patterns are disturbed causing victims to wake up feeling as if they haven't slept a wink.

Overwork can wreak havoc on our health. Insomnia, headaches, constant fatigue, backache, abdominal pain, asthma, diabetes, eczema and psoriasis are just a few of the problems that can be attributed to overwork and stress and it can lead to more serious problems including heart disease.

You may have heard of the saying "a day's hard work never did anyone any harm", but a number of cases have come to light which seem to show a link between the pressures of work and premature death. Overwork can also lead to problems such as anxiety.

Sadly, there are many people who never manage to free themselves from the "work trap". According to a research conducted recently, workaholism is a condition that's

as difficult to treat as drug or alcohol addiction. Very often, workaholics use work to fill some emotional void in their lives.

Whether you are by nature a workaholic or whether you are compelled to spend most of your time working, it can have a devastating effect on your personal life. Relationships can easily break down if the bonds that support them are not strengthened by daily communication. After years of working all hours, many work addicts realize that while they have large disposable incomes and an array of material possessions there's no one around to share these fruits of labour. Loneliness can most often lead the addict to filling the void with yet more work or even turning to addictive substances.

For this type of problem, professional counselling is probably the only way out of the vicious cycle. However, we can all prevent work from taking over our lives. Outside interests and a circle of friends unconnected with work are vital for a balanced life.

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Make sure you do some form of exercise and set aside time for important relationships. If you have worries related to work don't bottle it up discuss it with a colleague or a friend. You could also improve your self-esteem by focussing on the positive aspects of your job and what you have accomplished. Structure your tasks into small, manageable ones and have a short break between each one.

In Japan, *Karoshi* or death from overwork is reported, to take the lives of an estimated 10,000 people each year. We live and work in a highly competitive climate but, surely, no job is worth dying for.