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Life&Style health

Is your office making you sick?

National Stress Awareness Day is on November 5. *Louise Pyne* explores how to lessen the impact of the daily grind

Working through stress: Meditation and even knitting (left) can help

UNHAPPY WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Feel sick at the thought of coming to work but plaster a smile on your face anyway? It won't surprise you to hear that 42 per cent of workers say they felt work anxiety was regarded as a sign of weakness (mind.org.uk).

A happy boss equals a happy working environment but, with managers constantly facing high expectations from those higher up, it's inevitable this pressure will have a domino effect.

Solution: If you're floundering, take control of the situation. Schedule a meeting with your boss and explain you need to discuss your workload and workflow. Make sure you have suggestions and come across as calm and professional. That way, you'll sound like you're in control, rather than stumped by the pressure.

THE DAILY COMMUTE

Does your crowded commute suck the life out of you? The daily grind can have a massive impact on wellbeing.

Statistics show commuters who travel between 61 and 90 minutes each way had lower happiness and higher anxiety levels than non-commuters. The average London commute is 74 minutes – which means wasting more than a year of your life getting to and from the workplace.

Solution: Create a chillout playlist on your smartphone or download a meditation app such as Headspace (free from iTunes) for some Zen time during rush hour. Developed by a former Buddhist monk, this app aims to make meditation accessible through a series of short, sharp exercises. Or get tooled up with brain-teasing puzzles like Sudoku (Metro's challenging Metroku is so tricky that readers write in boasting when they can do it), or fine-tune your knitting or language skills.

FEELING OVERWORKED

The rise of smartphones and tablets means we're on call 24/7. Unsurprisingly, obsessing over your to-do-list after hours takes its toll on health (cue sleepless nights and migraines) just as much as it does on personal relationships. No wonder so few of us think we've got our work/life balance right.

Solution: Rather than constantly checking your phone, schedule a specific time in the evening or weekend to go through emails. Set aside a couple of gadget-free nights a week for catch-ups with friends, a new course (photography?) or get into a fast-paced new TV series (we're hooked on Homeland) so you won't be tempted to think about work.

JOB INSECURITY

Fierce competition and a recession has resulted in an increased fear of getting fired. We're so worried we'll lose our jobs that we'd rather go to work when we're poorly than risk taking a sick day. And those odd times we do call in sick because of stress, 90 per cent of us make up a different reason for not showing up.

Solution: If you're scared your job is on the line, why not have a quiet word with HR? And take small steps to ensure you don't run yourself into an early grave. Make a vow to leave work on time at least three times a week and try to take a lunch break. If it's impossible to take the full hour, a 20-minute walk will do wonders.

For more information, visit the International Stress Management Association at isma.org.uk