

GET BETTER AT DEALING WITH STRESS

Lil Niddrie, Denplan Trainer qualified practitioner of hypnotherapy, Emotional Freedom Technique and Neuro Linguistic Programming, discusses how to combat stress in the workplace.

Almost everyone will experience stressful situations at one time or another, but it is important for dental nurses to understand the effects of stress in the workplace and how they, and the whole practice team, can avoid feeling overloaded in day-to-day life.

A little bit of stress in our lives can often help us to function more efficiently. In fact, without any stress we are at risk of becoming bored and demotivated. Too much stress however can be very bad for our health. So what is stress, how it is brought on and how can it be reduced?

The term stress is used to describe the feelings people have when things seem too much, when they are overloaded and feel that they can't meet all the demands placed upon them. Shocking findings from the Samaritans indicate that stress in the workplace is frequently cited as the number one issue affecting employee productivity and, in 2005/2006, work-related stress, depression and anxiety cost Great Britain in excess of £530 million (1).

Also, everyone experiences stress in different ways and therefore it is difficult to always recognise the symptoms.

Stress can cause:

Changes in behaviour, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finding it hard to sleep; • change your eating habits; • smoke or drink more; • avoid friends and family 	Physical symptoms, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tiredness; • indigestion and nausea; • headaches; • aching muscles • palpitations
Mental symptoms, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being more indecisive • finding it hard to concentrate • suffering loss of memory • feeling inadequate • low self esteem 	Emotional symptoms, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • irritability or anger; • anxiousness • feeling numb; • being hypersensitive • feeling drained and listless

It is important therefore that all dental nurses, both in the NHS and private, follow these top tips to get a sense of balance back into their lives and practices.

Where to start

Stage 1: Make time to relax

Ultimately, it is up to you to learn how to relax physically when at home, especially if you are experiencing the symptoms of stress. This can be much more difficult than people realise, as many find themselves obsessing about work on their time off. It is therefore imperative to find a method of relaxation that works for you and to do this at a time when you are less likely to be disturbed. Again, people relax in very different ways, so if you try a number of methods, you will find what works for you, which can be as simple as taking time to read a book or watch the TV. However, try not to associate stress relief with having a glass of wine or equivalent, as this can often have the reverse effects.

Stage 2: Make the most of your holidays

Resist the temptation to fill your holidays with all your outstanding chores. Although it can feel like you are reducing your load by getting all those little jobs out of the way, you must find time to relax properly and unwind. Some dental nurses will even forgo their holidays due to work demands, especially when there is pressure on their practice to fulfil UDA targets. It is vitally important however, that you plan something that you can look forward to and that will help you return to work relaxed and refreshed.

Stage 3: Reserve time for hobbies and interests

A hobby or activity that absorbs you completely can help you switch off from the stresses of everyday life. Whether this is going for a walk, listening to music or reading, it must be something they enjoy, which is not work related.

Stage 4: Make time for friends

Spending time in good company can help you forget niggles and worries for a while. But talking about the area of your work or personal life that is causing you stress can be easier said than done. Many people feel embarrassed to talk about their problems or feelings, or feel that they do not want to burden anyone else. However speaking to someone you trust, either inside or outside work can be truly therapeutic. Also, make sure you are there for your colleagues if they come to you with any problem. Just as you may feel more comfortable speaking to friends, your colleagues may feel that you are more approachable and come to you for advice. Also, getting someone else's perspective can open up options you had not thought of before. Hiding your feelings only delays the problem for later and the stress will continue to build up.

Stage 5: Take regular exercise

Health experts recommend exercising at least three times a week. Exercise can not only improve your physical fitness, but can also increase your mental stamina. This is particularly important when you are seeing many patients a day, as those people who book later appointments should still have the full benefit of a relaxed, fresh and alert nurse.

Stage 6: Improve your posture

Try to remember to move about during the day sitting for long periods of time in a distorted position can severely affect a dental nurse's performance. The resulting problems that can occur as a result of poor posture include weakened muscles, stiff hips, tight hamstrings and calves and tense neck and shoulder muscles (2). All of these factors can also contribute to your feelings of stress. Simply by ensuring you are sitting correctly and improving your posture you can reduce this unnecessary strain on your joints and subsequently reduce your stress.

Stage 7: Eat a balanced diet

Avoiding excess in your diet and reserving a clear time each day to relax and enjoy food can help reduce the effects of stress. This may seem like an impossible task to many dental nurses, but finding just 30 minutes for lunch should be feasible for even the busiest people. How you spend your lunchtime is completely up to you, as everyone has different ways of releasing tension, but you must take time to sit and eat.

Stage 8: Get work in focus

Make sure you are clear about your goals at work. Feeling a lack of direction, or that you are being pushed in a direction you are not happy with, can be stressful. Equally as important is to know your team's limitations. If you expect too much of yourself or your colleagues, or pile onto their workloads, you will always feel disappointed and frustrated. If you are more realistic with your daily goals and celebrate your successes when you can, you will have a far more satisfied team, and both they and you will feel less stressed. It also helps to remember that your team are entitled to holiday and breaks during the day, so make sure they take them too!

Support and Guidance

Never be afraid to speak to your practice manager or principle if you are feeling overloaded and stressed. It is part of their job to ensure that all their employees feel happy and motivated and they will never know or understand how you feel unless you tell them. It is in their best interest to help you as if it goes on for too long, you may have to take time away from work with stress-related illness.

It is important to remember that you can also get help and support in dealing with stress management in the form of tailor-made training days. These can be specific to your practice's needs and can even count towards verifiable Continuing Professional Development (CPD) when undertaken in accordance with GDC requirements. Denplan training, for example, is developed and delivered by professional trainers and can also be held in a specific location to provide the opportunity for staff in similar roles to meet and learn together.

Conclusions

Stress and stress-related illness is on the rise and is an incredibly serious issue. Reducing stress in the workplace can both improve the health of the entire practice team and benefit the practice as a business. Following this advice can not only create a happier and more motivated workforce, but it can also greatly increase productivity, and reduce the amount of time off due to stress-related illness. What's more, the positive atmosphere conveyed by the team will be picked up by patients and prospective patients.

Key Points

- The importance of stress, stress-related illness and the rise of work-related stress.
- How everyone on the dental team has the ability to reduce their stress at work and manage it more effectively
- Simple and small steps can make all the difference when combating stress in the workplace
- Training and advice is available for the whole practice team on stress management
- Effectively managing stress in the workplace can lead to a more motivated and productive team.

1 - Brennan, P. (2007) Stressed out. A study of public experience at work. A report for Samaritans. London: nfpSynergy

2 - Palmer KT, Walsh K, et al. Back pain in Britain: comparison of two prevalence surveys at an interval of 10 years BMJ 2000;320:1577-1578.

Notes to Editors:

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