

NHS choices Your health, your choices

Important information about swine flu **'How I manage stress'**

Read the latest official advice to help protect yourself, your family and others.



Before going on a stress management course, Arvind Devalia worked busy 10-hour days from his home office.

Watch [a video about the symptoms of stress and when to get help](#).

As a business coach and writer, he was completely focused on his career, believing that harder work would bring better results.

With his office being at home, there was never a clear break from the working day. He never switched off. He was always tempted, he says, to turn on his laptop and deal with work emails while eating or watching TV.

But after a while, his workaholic lifestyle caught up with him. Arvind began feeling the early signs of burnout.

"I was finding I wasn't being very effective," he says. "I felt I was putting a lot of hours in but not achieving much. I was getting very tired halfway through the day."

Low energy

In his coaching work he gave people one-to-one business advice. "I was worried my low energy was having an affect on the quality of my work," says Arvind from St Johns Wood, London.

"On a scale of one to 10, with 10 being excruciating, I would say my stress level was about seven or eight."

Although he was coping, Arvind felt he needed advice on how to better manage his time to improve his energy.

A friend suggested he get in touch with the Stress Management Society, which runs stress reduction programmes for individuals and organisations.

Arvind attended several workshops, where qualified therapists and management consultants showed him stress reduction techniques. "I hoped the course would help me organise myself better and stop feeling stressed," he says.

Desk stretches

The techniques he learned included deep breathing, yoga, time management, desk stretches and dietary and exercise advice.

For Arvind, the most useful techniques, which he now uses effectively, are deep breathing, stretching and meditation.

"I have a tendency to work at a fast pace," he says. "But now when I notice I'm doing this I'll make an effort to slow down and take a few minutes to calm down."

"I'll go into another room, sit or lie down, close my eyes and start deep breathing. I come back to my desk feeling refreshed."

"I now start my day with 15 minutes of meditation, using a technique called guided imagery or creative visualisation."

In this form of self-hypnosis, you imagine a happy place that is personal to you and focus your mind on being there for several minutes. The technique releases negative thoughts and is a natural way to relieve physical, mental and emotional stress.

Big difference

Arvind now makes sure he doesn't let his work carry over into his personal time. "When I close the door to my office, there is no going back in," he says.

"There's no more consulting my inbox after the working day is over. There's now a clear boundary between the office and the rest of the home."

He says applying a few simple techniques learned from the workshops have made a big difference to his stress level.

"It's not so much the big picture but the little tricks I picked up that have made all the difference," he says.

Last reviewed: 31/07/2008

Next review due: 31/07/2010

Comments