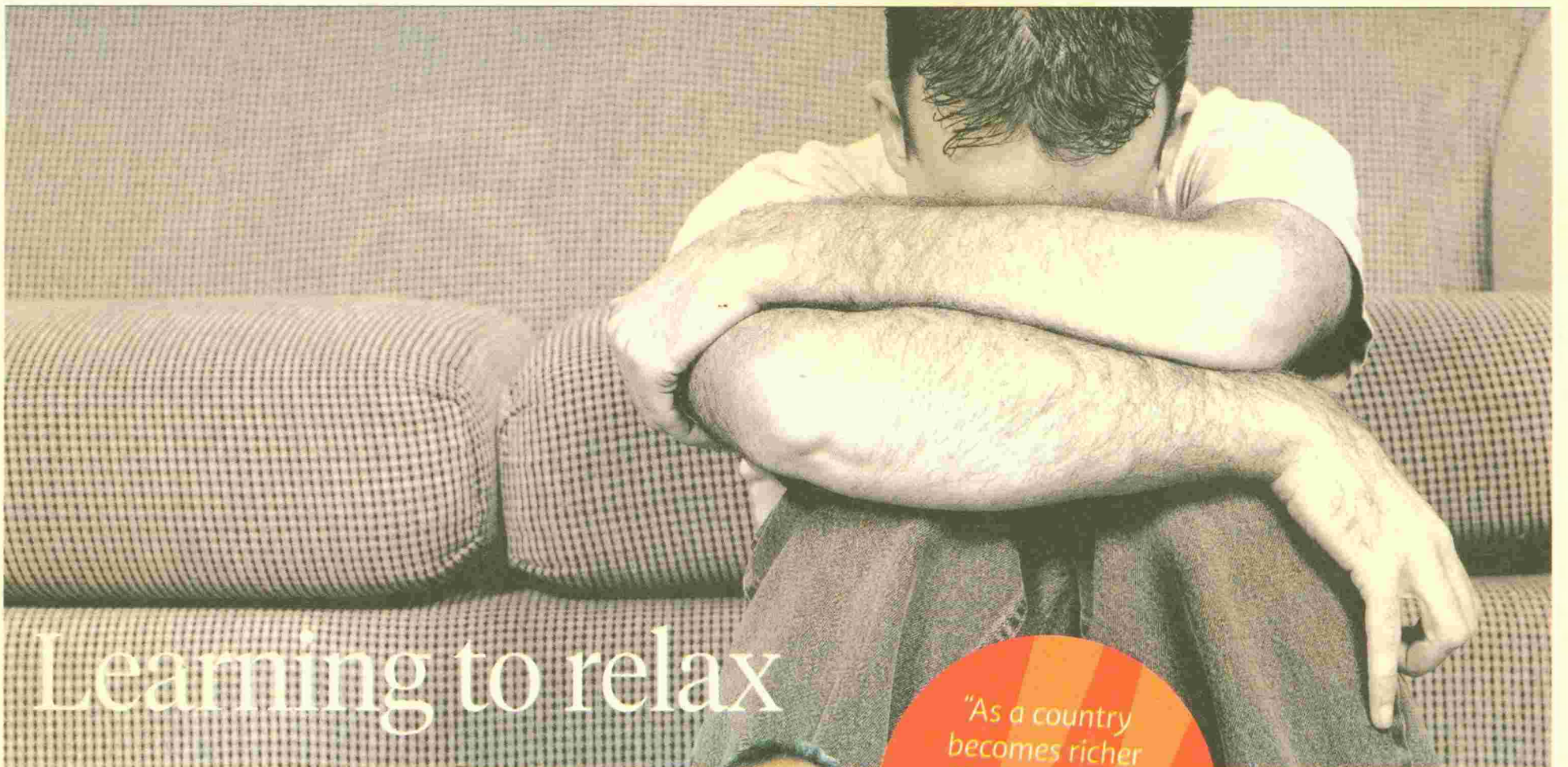


LIFE&TIMES HEALTH



Learning to relax

Depression and anxiety are the banes of modern living, but there are ways to bring stress to manageable levels, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

YOUR day begins badly. You're rushing to feed your family breakfast and get ready for work. A while later, stuck in traffic, you worry about making it to the morning meeting on time. Barely avoiding a head-on collision with another car, you reach the office for the meeting only to be bombarded with questions about why your work is incomplete.

You grab a 15-minute lunch break before rushing across town to see clients. When you get home, there's the children's homework to monitor and dinner to serve as well as trying to spend some quality time with the family.

Finally when you crawl into bed, you're too depressed to sleep, knowing that the next day, it will start all over again.

The two emotions identified above — depression and anxiety — are the "bread and butter" of psychiatry, says Dr Daniel Zainal Abdul Rahman (consultant psychiatrist and clinical hypnotherapist at Prince Court Medical Centre). "They are the morbid symptoms following chronic stress. Stress, however, is not always bad," he adds.

HANDLING STRESS

"Stress is demand made on us

because of some circumstance or the environment we find ourselves in. Because of that, the body has to prepare a suitable response," says Dr Daniel.

Stress is, firstly, a response for survival. When a person perceives that he is in danger of some sort, he will need to have some stress to fight the danger or run away from it. Secondly, stress can be a motivating factor. For instance, if a person is facing an examination, the stress he encounters will motivate him to study. In such cases, the person is experiencing optimal stress levels.

The stress we encounter today is low grade stress and may not be life-threatening. However when it is on-going, it's chronic stress. In other words, our inability to manage stress leads to many diseases (both physical and psychological).

"The list of consequences of chronic stress is endless: High blood pressure, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, thyroid issues, psoriasis and migraine. In some cases, people are so stressed that they grind their teeth," says Dr Daniel.

"It is predicted that more people will become depressed and it is estimated that by 2020, suicide will be the number two cause of death in the United States."

Furthermore, mood disorders and childhood depression are increasing. "What this means is that you're going to have a society of adults who may appear normal physically, but they are not at all productive.

"I've observed that as a country becomes richer financially (where they have what I like to call the 24/7 lifestyle), the mental health of its people often suffer. I also feel that women suffer added



"As a country becomes richer financially, the mental health of its people often suffer."

Dr Daniel Zainal Abdul Rahman

stress because of the multiple roles they have to play in society."

LEARNING TO MANAGE

"We need to learn to manage our stress better," says Dr Daniel. In addition to conventional psychiatric treatment, his approach underscores his belief that everything begins in the mind. "What a person thinks, will lead to what he believes and then, how he behaves. Take two guys who are about to jump out of a plane. One will think, 'Oh, great, I'm going to be flying with the birds and I'll feel free'. He will be exhilarated and enjoy the experience. The other guy will think 'Oh, great, we're jumping out of this. What if the parachute doesn't open in time? What if I die?'. He will, naturally, feel anxious."

As all forms of therapy serve the un-met emotional needs of a person, one of the first things Dr Daniel will ask his patients to do is to keep a journal. The purpose is to help the

Five things to do when you are stressed

1. Take a **deep breath** and **relax**
2. **Meditate** and **pray**
3. Do **aerobic exercises**
4. Eat **nutritious food**
5. Have a **good sleep**

patient examine his thoughts. "If I find that a lot of what he writes has words like 'what if', 'I should have' or 'I must', I'll ask him to consider how many of those things he's listed can he do without. I will also ask him to write down three things that he is grateful for every day before he sleeps."

REST AND RELAX

All these are part of Dr Daniel's practice of hypnotherapy. "Hypnotherapy allows me to help a person get into a reduced state of awareness. In that state, whatever information given to the patient will go into his unconscious mind. The unconscious mind influences physical activity."

What he suggests to his patients are tailored to suit them and must be personalised. "After all, what's the point of telling someone to imagine that he's by the sea listening to the waves hitting the shore when he's afraid of water?"

Dr Daniel also insists that his patients learn to relax. He tells them to meditate each day to help build up their buffers of resilience to stress. In addition, they must take regular aerobic exercise for between 30 and 40 minutes a day, four times a week. Nutrition and proper sleep will also help them to relax.

Finally, he will remind those he helps to keep in mind the first words of The Serenity Prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr: God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

COMMON TRAITS

EACH of us has a personality trait which can be characterised by our behaviour. Which one are you?

OBSESSIVE

Often, this person is organised and meticulous. While his bosses may love him, his interpersonal relationships are a mess. "It's always a case of my way, or no way," explains Dr Daniel. When things go wrong, his sense of failure is reinforced and his self-worth is negated. This person will externalise all problems and is not at all introspective.

DEPENDENCY PERSONALITY

This person's evaluation of himself is dependant on what others say of him.

BLACK OR WHITE THINKING

This person thinks of things in terms of absolutes: Things are either black or white, either A or Z. "They forget that in life there's always an in-between," says Dr Daniel.

SELECTIVE AWARENESS (ARBITRARY INTERFERENCE)

This person will choose to look at something only from one way. "Five good things and one bad thing may happen in a day but this person will choose to focus all his attention on the one bad thing."

Anxiety and depression inventory

Wondering if you're anxious or depressed? Here are two tests (based on Beck Depression Inventory and Beck Anxiety Inventory) that Dr Daniel Zainal Abdul Rahman uses to make a diagnosis.

| ANXIETY INVENTORY | | INFOGRAPHIC: NST | | | |
|-------------------------|------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|--|
| | Not At All | Mildly but it didn't bother me much | Moderately - it wasn't pleasant at times | Severely - it bothered me a lot | |
| Numbness or tingling | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Feeling hot | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Wobbliness in legs | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Unable to relax | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Fear of worst happening | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Dizzy or lightheaded | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Heart pounding/ racing | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Unsteady | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Terrified or afraid | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Nervous | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Feeling of choking | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Hands trembling | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Shaky / unsteady | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Fear of losing control | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Difficulty in breathing | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Fear of dying | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Scared | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Indigestion | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Faint / lightheaded | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Face flushed | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Hot/cold sweats | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Column Sum | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |

Scoring: Add the numbers in each column to get a total. Then, add the total for each column together to reach a grand total.

Interpretation: A grand total of between 0 and 21 indicates **very low anxiety**. However, too little "anxiety" could indicate that you are **detached**

from yourself, others, or your environment.

A grand total between of 22 and 35 indicates **moderate anxiety**. You may have some **conflict issues that need to be resolved**.

A grand total that **exceeds 36** is a **potential cause for concern** and may need proactive **treatment**.

Question 7

I don't feel disappointed in myself. (0)
I am disappointed in myself. (1)
I am disgusted with myself. (2)
I hate myself. (3)

Question 8

I don't feel I am any worse than anybody else. (0)
I am critical of myself for my weaknesses or mistakes. (1)
I blame myself all the time for my faults. (2)
I blame myself for everything bad that happens. (3)

Question 9

I don't have any thoughts of killing myself. (0)
I have thoughts of killing myself, but I would not carry them out. (1)
I would like to kill myself. (2)
I would kill myself if I had the chance. (3)

Question 10

I don't cry any more than usual. (0)
I cry more now than I used to. (1)
I cry all the time now. (2)
I used to be able to cry, but now I can't cry even though I want to. (3)

Question 11

I am no more irritated by things than I ever was. (0)
I am slightly more irritated now than usual. (1)
I am quite annoyed or irritated a good deal of the time. (2)
I feel irritated all the time. (3)

Question 12

I have not lost interest in other people. (0)
I am less interested in other people than I used to be. (1)
I have lost most of my interest in other people. (2)
I have lost all of my interest in other people. (3)

Question 13

I make decisions about as well as I ever could. (0)
I put off making decisions more than I used to. (1)
I have greater difficulty in making decisions more than I used to. (2)
I can't make decisions at all anymore. (3)

Question 14

I don't feel that I look any worse than I used to. (0)
I am worried that I am looking old or unattractive. (1)
I feel there are permanent changes in my appearance that make me look unattractive. (2)
I believe that I look ugly. (3)

Question 15

I can work about as well as before. (0)

It takes an extra effort to get started at doing something. (1)
I have to push myself very hard to do anything. (2)
I can't do any work at all. (3)

Question 16

I can sleep as well as usual. (0)
I don't sleep as well as I used to. (1)
I wake up 1-2 hours earlier than usual and find it hard to get back to sleep. (2)
I wake up several hours earlier than I used to and cannot get back to sleep. (3)

Question 17

I don't get more tired than usual. (0)
I get tired more easily than I used to. (1)
I get tired from doing almost anything. (2)
I am too tired to do anything. (3)

Question 18

My appetite is no worse than usual. (0)
My appetite is not as good as it used to be. (1)
My appetite is much worse now. (2)
I have no appetite at all anymore. (3)

Question 19

I haven't lost much weight, if any, lately. (0)
I have lost more than five pounds. (1)
I have lost more than 10 pounds. (2)
I have lost more than 15 pounds. (3)

Question 20

I am no more worried about my health than usual. (0)
I am worried about physical problems like aches, pains, upset stomach, or constipation. (1)
I am very worried about physical problems and it's hard to think of much else. (2)
I am so worried about my physical problems that I cannot think of anything else. (3)

Question 21

I have not noticed any recent change in my interest in sex. (0)
I am less interested in sex than I used to be. (1)
I have almost no interest in sex. (2)
I have lost interest in sex completely. (3)

Scoring: Now that you have completed the questionnaire, add up the score for each of the 21 questions by counting the number to the right of each question you marked.

Interpretation:
1-10: these ups and downs are considered normal.
11-16: mild mood disturbance.
17-20: borderline clinical depression.
21-30: moderate depression.
31-40: severe depression.
over 40: extreme depression.

DEPRESSION INVENTORY

Question 1

I do not feel sad. (0)
I feel sad. (1)
I am sad all the time and I can't snap out of it. (2)
I am so sad and unhappy that I can't stand it. (3)

Question 2

I am not particularly discouraged about the future. (0)
I feel discouraged about the future. (1)
I feel I have nothing to look forward to. (2)
I feel the future is hopeless and that things cannot improve. (3)

Question 3

I do not feel like a failure. (0)
I feel I have failed more than the average person. (1)
As I look back on my life, all I can see is a lot of failures. (2)

I feel I am a complete failure as a person. (3)

Question 4

I get as much satisfaction out of things as I used to. (0)
I don't enjoy things the way I used to. (1)
I don't get real satisfaction out of anything anymore. (2)
I am dissatisfied or bored with everything. (3)

Question 5

I don't feel particularly guilty. (0)
I feel guilty a good part of the time. (1)
I feel quite guilty most of the time. (2)
I feel guilty all of the time. (3)

Question 6

I don't feel I am being punished. (0)
I feel I may be punished. (1)
I expect to be punished. (2)
I feel I am being punished. (3)



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