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Young and overworked:
Young Malaysians in general believe they are being overworked, and that it is having a detrimental effect on their health.

The effects of over-working

MALAYSIAN Medical Association president Dr N.K.S. Tharmaseelan said the effects of over-working are actually similar to the fight-or-flight response our body creates in dangerous situations.

Our bodies are hard-wired to protect us against threats from predators and other dangers by producing adrenaline and cortisol (the "stress hormone"), which increases our heart rate, enhances our brain's use of glucose, and boosts our energy, among other things.

But despite such threats being rare in modern life, work stress nevertheless produces the same reaction. And the fact

that work stress tends to last longer than being occasionally chased by a tiger, the negative effects are obvious. The body is in an unnaturally constant state of upheaval.

Throw in our modern culture of caffeine consumption, and you have even more problems.

Tharmaseelan said work stress is often exacerbated by caffeine, which magnifies the effect of that upheaval, causing sleeplessness at night, and sleepiness during the day. Long-term effects of over-working include cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders and psychological problems.

Quantity vs. quality

IN some jobs, 12-hour work days are the norm. But in others, working three hours could leave you dangerously over-worked.

According to University Malaya Medical Centre consultant psychiatrist Dr Stephen Thevanathan Jambunathan, that's what people need to realise in order to draw the line on what constitutes "over-working".

"It depends on yourself, really," said Stephen. "In my line of work, for example, I deal with personal problems and stresses (of his patients) for an hour, it could take me a day to recover the drained energy."



STRESS less

1. Take care of yourself

We Malaysians are known for a particularly unhealthy way of life, so this is the first point we'd like to stress (pun intended). Eat right, sleep well, drink lots of water and always, always fit in some exercise time.

2. Organise and prioritise!

Understand your role in the company, know what your most important roles are, and schedule your day accordingly – that's the advice of business psychologist Dr Sharon Melnick on Forbes.com. If you don't prioritise and organise your daily duties, you'll create a cycle of unproductivity and stress. If you need help organising, try mobile apps like Teux Deux or Evernote, or go to BulletJournal.com for some great ideas on organising your journal effectively.

3. Take a deep breath

If you're feeling overwhelmed even after all your

Untimely deaths

STORIES about young people being worked to death – literally – have been making headlines around the world. Here are some of the more high profile cases over the past two years:

Moritz Erhardt, 21

Although some reports say his death could have been caused by medication he was taking to control his epilepsy, it is hard to ignore the fact that the bank intern was said to have worked for 72 hours before his death last month. The German student was found dead in a shower cubicle in his London flat.

Pan Jie, 25

Pan's death from acute cerebral meningitis in 2011 caused an uproar in China after her social media posts showed she had been constantly overworked. A debate ensued on whether companies are working employees so hard their health becomes secondary.

Lee Chang Tat, 29

In April 2012, the houseman was found dead in a restroom in Kajang Hospital. He had been working on call for five consecutive days and his body was found next to a syringe. It was believed he overdosed on a drug he had injected himself with to fight off fatigue.

Li Yuan, 24

Earlier in May, Li, an employee at Ogilvy & Mather China in Beijing, suffered a heart attack after working until 11pm every night for a month, and he actually yelled in pain before dropping dead.

Lauren Connelly, 23

Two weeks ago, it was reported in Scotland that Connelly, a medical doctor, crashed her car and died on the way home due to severe exhaustion. She was a few days short of her 24th birthday.

THERE is an abundance of information on the Internet on how to reduce stress at work, but we suppose those who really need it won't have the time to go looking for it. So we've summed them up in five points right here:

organising and prioritising, Melnick says there's only one thing to do – breathe. Clear your head by taking a deep breath – inhale for five seconds, hold it there for a moment, and exhale through your nose. You'd be surprised what a difference it'll make.

4. Break bad habits

Helpguide.org says to reduce stress, you should identify your bad habits, and make an effort to change. It's often our own bad habits – like procrastinating, or even being too much of a control freak – that cause us stress.

5. EQ is just as important as IQ

Improving your "Emotional Intelligence" plays an important role in reducing workplace stress, according to Helpguide.org. There are two ways to do this. Number one, learn to understand your own emotions, so you can avoid letting your feelings affect the way you work. Number two, be self-aware, so you can avoid causing unnecessary conflict with your colleagues.