

Advice on stress

Aleksander Perski, Associate Professor at Karolinska Institutet and head of the Stress Clinic, offers his best advice for dealing with stress:

Sleep problems, deep fatigue, concentration and memory problems, frequent infections, stomach problems, heart palpitations, uneasiness, anxiety or depression may be signals that we are in a serious imbalance—namely, stress – do not ignore these signals. Try to change the situation - such serious situations usually do not resolve by themselves. Creating alternative, cutbacks or create distance.

Sleep Needs. Regardless of what happens in life, never give up your need for sleep. Do you need to sleep eight hours to feel refreshed the next day, then you should do it. The latest research shows that it is not possible to get ill out of stress if you get enough sleep.

Sleep quality. It's easy to disturb your deep sleep and in particular the part of the night that give you the recovery of strength and regeneration of the body. It is not a good strategy to lie in bed speeded up. Nor lie and think hard about the next day's challenges. Then you will reduce the deep sleep even if you do not affect total sleep duration. Sensible cooling down, routines and a technique to stop the thoughts to roll on before going to sleep, will help you to increase your quality of sleep, which is just as important as the length of sleep.

Weekends. Relax after a hard week. Remember that in all cultures is inscribed that weekends are for rest. In our culture's most important document - the Bible - says the Third Commandment: "Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day you shall have the day off, the Lord's Sabbath of rest. Anyone who do any work that day will be killed," promises (and threatens) God. Those who tire themselves out as much over the weekend as during the week are risk full candidates for a health breakdown due to stress. We call them "preburnouts".

Lifestyle habits. Remember that it is meant for us to live until we are about 100 years. Until then, the 45 tons of new cells are produced and 3.5 billion heartbeats beating. The terms for it is to live a reasonably healthy life with the right food, well-balanced weight, some exercise, enough sleep and fairly regular habits. Despite extensive research on the prevention of common diseases such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes, are above advice substantially what scientists have outlined. But even though the message is simple, as it seems to be very difficult to fulfill.

Vita contemplativa. The need of time for reflection is also inscribed in all cultures that we know of. To meditate, get in touch with oneself, with others and with nature develops us and give place for man's versatility. The same principle that applies to an optimal farming, seems to apply to our organism - the need for a rotation where some of our functions are resting, while others are activated. A three days with 8 hours work, 8 hours of sleep and 8 hours of vita contemplativa, (which in our culture can take many different forms and meanings), seems to be a basic biological need for our organism to work for 100 years.

The more effort the more rest. Very often we do just the opposite. In periods of extra demands we sacrifice sleep and sleep time. Are you extremely talented and a perfectionist, you need to expend more on recovering forces.

There are also other kinds of devices than pills, coffee and alcohol to cope with stress in everyday life. Pain killers and tranquilizers or antidepressants can help in the short term, but they can also have negative consequences, especially if you use them for a long time. It's cheaper and healthier to listen to your body and as an alternative to pills to try something different such stretching, yoga, quigong, meditation in the morning, physical activity and breathing pauses during the day, relaxation, or love in the evening.

If you feel that the time is like an arrow that has begun to fly sometime in your teens and just rushes forward (to death?) perhaps you should search for other images, for example through mindfulness. In childhood experiences you may sometimes felt that time stood still or went in a circle. Try to experience that feeling again and get yourself your own breaks, stopping time - sing, do the dishes, go out to the forest, put your children to bed, read poetry, watch a silly TV comedy. It is only when time "stops" that you have time to experience what really happens in life.