

Preventing 'Burnout'

Arianna Huffington has devoted most of her time in recent years highlighting the consequences of stress related burnout and offers advice on how to prevent a personal burnout crisis.

Ms. Huffington is a very successful business woman and is the author of several books dealing with stress and burnout issues. What triggered her exploration of these issues? BURNOUT.

This 'successful', high flying, globetrotting business woman collapsed suddenly and fractured her jaw in the resulting fall. It was during her recovery process that she was confronted with the reality that there was more to life than what society in general considered, 'success'.

Statistics about stress are frightening and challenge us to reassess our priorities in our own lives and in those of our children. We should be aware that children, as well as adults, can be stressed by self-imposed pressures or the perceived expectations of parents or teachers.

There are different levels of stress and these can have positive as well as negative consequences. Perhaps the best example of the former, are the well documented situations where the intense stress experienced by a parent seeing his/her child in danger is galvanized into actions which are ordinarily far beyond their normal physical abilities.

Negative stress can be detrimental to the physical, emotional, relational and occupational aspects of day to day living.

Clinicians who have studied the effects of 'good and 'bad' stress say, that when an individual is subjected to prolonged stress, anxiety or personal difficulties, these cause the brain's 'coping chemicals' to become depleted. Intervention with antidepressants help to alleviate the symptoms, without addressing the cause.

Experiencing protracted stress can become a serious problem which needs to be addressed before it reaches a critical stage such as experienced by Arianna Huffington.

I think it is helpful to be aware of the personal conditions which were the warning signs experienced by those who have themselves gone through adverse, debilitating burnout. A recurring theme in many of their stories was their mistaken view that for them to have any sense of 'worth' they had to be regarded by others as being 'successful'. This led to self-imposed pressures to be always in a constant state of having to 'do more', 'be more', 'show more', 'deliver more' compared to colleagues in the workplace or among their friends and associates. Doing and working became the key to their identity.

Through the delusion that their worth was measured by achievement they sacrificed a much important thing - time for themselves. There is an acknowledgement that women in employment carry a double burden through

family commitments and/or career pressures, and this is especially so where the employment involves the care of, or engagement with, children.

The two paragraphs above have outlined some aspects of life which can result in stress generated burnout, and below are some of the frequently listed indicators:

An ongoing state of anxiety.	A lack of motivation.	Reluctance to socialize.
Being impatient & critical.	Poor appetite. Never enough time to get things done	Disturbed sleep.
Lack of energy/exhaustion.	Emotional deadness.	Negative disposition

These 'indicators' are however only part of a much larger scenario of a very complex condition and various sources make the following suggestions:

- Recognising the danger and taking steps to counterbalance the negative aspects of stress.
- Perhaps the crucial and at times difficult priority is, **MAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF!** Being selfish with our time is not easy.
- Focus on the 'here and now'. Anxiety drives our thoughts to future 'worse case' scenarios.
- Treat yourself and don't feel guilty about it.
- Do something you enjoy.
- To avoid frenetic activity with little end-product, make a list of goals.
- Having identified your desired goals, prioritise them, review and revise as necessary.
- Set out on paper, wishes that are achievable and plan how to bring these about.
- Give your brain 'Time Out' time. Stop responding immediately to every text, email, phone call or social media exchange.
- Connect with family and friends who can be your support base in time of need.
- Regulate sleep patterns, as sleep is an essential ingredient for health and well being.
- If necessary, seek appropriate help through qualified health professionals.

Now and then everyone has to deal with a measure of stress. This short article simply provides a thumbnail sketch of some issues, but there is a wealth of material in books and online giving advice about preventative strategies to reduce the prospect of stress spiralling down into 'burnout'.

