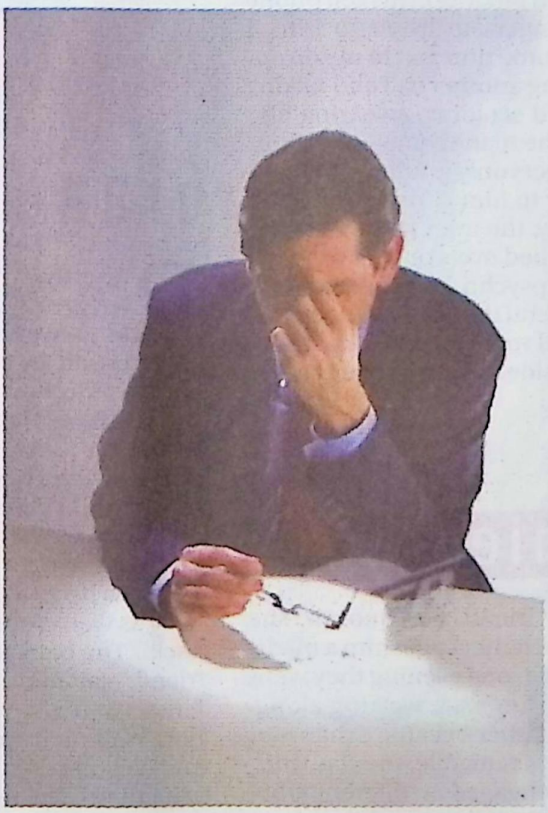
To many, including Samiya, stress in the work place is something that has little meaning and a concept that is often rejected without a second thought. What people need to understand is that stress has been linked to diverse conditions such as heart disease, infertility, skin conditions, hair loss and psychological illness, and hence needs to be tackled as a priority.

Infertility is specially worrying for career-minded young women. One in seven couples in the UK struggle to conceive, and long term stress and anxiety is the major reason behind the infertility. Research has shown that women who lead a stressful life have high levels of a hormone called 'cortisol' in their bodies, that inhibits ovulation, and thus conception. Fortunately, stress related infertility can be treated and reversed. In men too, high levels of stress may lead to lowered sperm count.



One of the early and major manifestations of high stress is hair loss. The number of people suffering from hair loss has doubled over the past decade, with more than half complaining of balding and considerable thinning of hair. Hair loss is usually genetic, but this process can be catalysed by the hormonal imbalances caused by stress. Stress affects the body's ability to absorb nutrients and induces a rise in a hormone called adrenaline, which is broken down to a compound called 'dihydrotestosterone' that brings about hair loss. Hair loss is rarely recoverable, so it is important to learn how to deal with stress before it causes too much damage. Maintain a good diet rich in Vitamin B, dairy products and iron rich food such as red meat and spinach. Try not to miss out on breakfast, as this is the time when the hair follicles have low supplies of nutrition.

Adult acne is also another debilitating symptom of high stress. Stress increases levels of testosterone in both men and women, which make oil glands in the skin more active and encourage growth of bacteria in skin, causing acne, or pimples. Over the counter preparations such as Benzoyl Peroxide are helpful to fight acne, but unless the underlying cause, i.e., stress, is tackled, the acne will keep on coming back.

So, the burning questions is how can work related stress be tackled?

First, try to identify the real reason behind your stress. Is it the long commute to the office that tires you out even before you start working? Are you taking up too much work beyond your ability? Do you feel you are not qualified enough to tackle jobs handed over to you? Do you find it difficult to stand up for yourself and find it diffucult to say 'no'? If so, you are not the only one. Speak to someone and share you concerns, and you would be surprised at how many of your colleagues share the same feelings as yourself. Knowing you are not the only one is the stepping-stone to tacking your stress.

Second, analyse your time management skills. Do you feel that your colleagues are distracting you? Having to wait around to use the computer to write up a report? Taking constant tea breaks, or having personal conversations on the phone during office hours? Saving even 30 minutes by being more time efficient means you have that extra time to spend with your family and loved ones at home, or simply relax to alleviate your stress.

Third, take part in activities that you enjoy doing. Not only will this refresh your mind and temporarily take the pressures off work, it will also make you feel worthwhile, be positive and feel appreciated when you do the activity well.

Fourth, ensure that you draw the line between work and family. Your family should not have to bear the brunt of your stresses at work. Separating work from family life is paramount to leading a healthy, happy life.

Fifth, and most importantly, ask yourself whether you are in the right job in the first place. If you enjoy your work, it should be a pleasure, not a bane in your life. Do you like what you do, or do you see it as just another job? Do you feel you were happier working for a different person or a previous employer? If such is the case, it would be wise to analyse your career path again.

If you feel that stress in the work place is causing significant health problems such as anxiety, insomnia, palpitations, high blood pressure and depression, it would be best to go and see a doctor immediately. The good news is that stress related counselling and medication can easily treat symptoms, and it is always wise to bring these symptoms to a stop before they cause significant and irreversible damage to your body.

Stress affects different people in different ways. It can affect anybody and is not a sign of weakness. The main way of dealing with it is by leading a balanced life and knowing when to seek help. Millions across the world suffer from work related stress. Like Samiya, if you suffer from stress related symptoms, remember that you are certainly not the only one and help is available to help you get through it.

As Samiya puts it, 'I was blaming myself for all the troubles I have been going through, but it's a relief to know that I am not the only one going through such hardship. I want to take control of my own life once again, and be the same happy person I was before.'

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