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How to keep fit in today's workplace

By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News
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Managing personal stress is basically one long challenge.

It's a permanent juggling with the mounting complexity of modern day life and work today, a long-running campaign that demands a continuing high level of mental resilience. And mental resilience has to be supported by physical resilience.

Of course, anyone in a responsible position will have seen the irony of trying to keep fit in today's workplace. Outwardly, your conditions of employment are favourable - the subject of sensible health-and-safety regulations, including workplace policies on ergonomic design. But these have solved yesterday's problems, not today's.

Sitting in your clean air-conditioned environment, with good ambient lighting and all necessary technology to hand, you are facing a whole new set of health hazards that would have been unimaginable just 20 years ago. These are too obvious to go into - the demands of email that set up a perpetual crisis, raising the tension through the day, and spilling over into your evenings and weekends, ruining the home life that is meant to re-charge your batteries.

But one pressure is seldom mentioned, though it could hardly be more serious. And that is the challenge of taking regular exercise. A little walk round the block? Well, your street may not be designed for it - more like a building site, in many cases. A game of football with the boys after work? No - you're the one who's going to be ringing-in to say sorry, can't make it. Well, how about an hour in the company gym, then? Hmm. Trouble is, there's this panic on...

So your never-ending challenge with stress must go hand-in-hand with a never-ending insistence on taking exercise. There is no way round this logic: for every rise in the personal pressure-gauge, you need to compensate with more exercise, in order to stay on top of the situation.

Let us remember what exercise actually is.

Biologically, exercise boosts the circulation, lowers the blood pressure and reduces muscle tension, leading to better weight control, improved appearance and self-image. It also produces the endorphins that make you feel euphoric and relaxed.

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Simply, the fit person is capable of packing more into a working day. The quality of the work will be greater. The problem-solving urge will be stronger. The whole outlook will be more optimistic. You will be more resilient to shocks and disappointments.

Not long ago, I was visiting a friend when her son came into the house, straight back from a local Marathon. As always, the idea of a 26-mile run was rather beyond my imagination. Yet when the young man had showered and come to join us, he wasn't even looking tired. "I could run another one right now," he said.

Do you see the dynamo effect? That famous 'second wind' can generate a heightened state of thinking, doing and being. Now think what it could do for your own life and work.

The writer is a BBC broadcaster and motivational speaker, with 20 years experience as CEO of Carole Spiers Group, an international stress consultancy based in London.

Key points





Building resilience through fitness

- The necessary mental resilience depends on physical resilience.

- Today's work atmosphere threatens your health in endless new ways.

- You must prioritise daily exercise for a healthy mind and healthy body.

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