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Stress of living the expatriate life

By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News
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When an international stress-guru hears about the 'fastest-growing city on earth', she can probably identify the forms of local stress as vividly as the locals themselves.

And if the Dubai way of life is stressful enough for a local, just imagine what it's like for an expatriate. I speak from the useful vantage-point of an on-off expatriate, based in London (rated pretty stressful itself), but working regularly in Dubai, meeting many of the expatriate community, often in a stress-management context. So what light can I shed on their hectic on-duty and off-duty lives?

If you're a first-time expatriate, there are the basic stresses that could apply anywhere. Forcing yourself to step decisively away from the old life. A bit of time is needed for adjusting. But Dubai - or 'Reach-for-the-sky' city', raises all these stress factors to astonishing new levels. It's as though the sheer speed of its growth has set up a heightened form of growing-pains.

Assuming reasonably that you came here for the money, I would immediately warn you not to get carried away with the earning possibilities. You're going to feel like a horse let out of a dark stable, and you'll be tempted to grab every bonus on offer. In fact, your employers may have had this in mind when they arranged the favourable terms that attracted you here. Just remember that you don't get something for nothing in big-money circles. Twice the income may not mean twice the satisfaction. It may just mean twice the stress.

Or maybe you don't yet have an employer. You've simply turned up in El Dorado with your hand held out. Well, you're liable to face plenty of stress before you find the right slot. For a start, if you're solo, you won't get anywhere without a support network. Trying to build up a new circle of contacts from scratch is hard work. You can't always know who to trust, as newcomers are often targeted by the unscrupulous. You're going to be taking each step forward within an entirely new and unfamiliar culture, having to cope without the essential local knowledge that you've always taken for granted up to now.

With your new-found affluence, however, you may feel you can afford to relieve the pressure through some of that good living that you've always dreamed of, and which is now satisfyingly within reach. But good living does not relieve

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pressure. It just sets up other forms of stress, through physical abuse.

And this leads back to the biggest single stress-management intervention of all. It's one I've emphasised before in this column, and that is HEALTH FIRST.

For every rise in the pressure and tension, you must compensate with sensible exercise to maintain physical and mental equilibrium. The logic is simple and inexorable. There is no way round it.





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

Managing yourself

- Dubai presents an exciting but stressful culture for newcomers
- The earning potential can lead to big temptations to overwork
- Lavish entertainment does not relieve stress. Only exercise does.

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