

Ten simple steps can bring more calm to your life

STRESS has become the disease of the 24-7 society in which we live.

It is increasingly being blamed as the cause of more sick days and is known to be an exacerbating factor in a range of other illnesses.

On top of that comes the traditional stresses and emotional and psychological strain associated with the Christmas season.

Richard Haggerty, a Cardiff-based hypnotherapist and life coach, said, "I've seen a huge number of stress-related problems over the last five years and I would say that most of my clients seem to have some anxiety or panic symptoms. Many people find this an incredibly stressful time of year. First of all, it is darker and you can see how it changes people's moods as the nights draw in. Secondly, the run-up to Christmas is one of the most stressful times of the year for people – financially and emotionally."

In a bid to help people combat the effects of stress, Richard has designed an online course to teach everyone the 10 steps to minimise stress.

"These are practical tools that folk can start to use to reduce some of the tension in their lives. I go to considerable lengths to teach my clients forms of self-hypnosis, guided relaxation, breathing and visualisation techniques.

"I've helped hundreds of clients overcome panic attacks, public speaking fears and all manner of anxieties and worries. Unfortunately, a lot of the self-help and psychological books only deal with theory,

whereas it is much more important that people have specific tools to manage chronic worry.

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Stressing a serious issue

■ More than half a million people in the UK experience work-related stress at a level they believe is making them ill. Up to five million people in the UK feel "very" or "extremely" stressed by their work.

panic and anxiety – as it can cause a wide variety of illnesses and make daily living a nightmare.

■ Get clear on what the problem is. The 10 tricks are:

Many people blow things out of all proportion. With my life coaching clients, I help them focus on what they actually want and get a handle on their current worries. Start by answering these questions: What's the worst I'm worried might happen? What's within my control in this situation? What can I do now to start to overcome this problem?

■ Prioritise tasks to do. Most of us are so overwhelmed with too many things to do. You have to decide what is important to be done today and what can wait. I recommend dividing things into three piles – top priority must get done stuff; things that can be done later; wait and those that can be binned now.

When you have done them, give yourself a treat.

■ Reiki. Most people have far too much tension in their bodies. Consider a relaxing massage or Reiki. As a Reiki master, I offer many of my clients this gentle way to re-balance their energy. ■ Exercise, or anything

■ Work-related stress costs society about £3.7bn every year. ■ 13.5m working days are lost every year from stress-related illness – stress more staff absences than the common cold.

that gets your heart racing.

The benefits of exercise for relieving anxiety, stress and depression were studied as far back in the 1880s. The immediate lift in mood can be attributed to the increase in beta endorphins and serotonin levels.

■ Establish a ritual. Set aside at least an hour with no distractions. Put on some quiet music, light some incense or candles or burn some aromatherapy oils or take a relaxing soak in the bath.

■ Cut out stimulants. Coffee and alcohol cause a variety of problems with sleep cycles, headaches and focus.

■ Try a "news fast" for a week. Spend a week reflecting on what you want in your life. It is great to read the news, but you can use the extra time for yourself.

■ Social support. Joining a club or meeting people with mutual interests focuses you on something other than current anxieties and gives you a change of scenery. Dancing is especially great because of the physical contact, sense of community and vigorous work out you get.

■ SAD light therapy. If you have noticed that as the nights draw in, you are feeling more sluggish, withdrawn or generally lethargic, it may be worth thinking about getting a light box. These mimic the effects of the sun and you simply turn them on in the morning.

■ Self-hypnosis. This is one of the best ways to release tension and re-energise yourself. I teach all my clients how to do this so that in between hypnotherapy sessions they can relax deeply and experience the deep restorative effects of being able to go gently into trance.

It is an amazing experience for most people to be able to see how easily they can de-stress and release anxiety.

■ Richard Haggerty is a certified master hypnotherapist and life coach. For more information about his services, books and access to free online courses visit www.hypnotiscardiff.co.uk or call 029 2019 3978.

