

Workplace Wellness



Sources of Hidden Stress

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Some of the stress you experience as a dental hygienist is obvious: a client being late or rude, feeling like your appointment time isn't long enough to provide proper dental hygiene care, frustration with a problem in the office or with a person at work or home. But then there is some stress that isn't as obvious. It is "hidden."

This type of stress is not actually hidden. It is right out there in the open, but we have simply become accustomed to it, used to the feeling of it, numb, and unaware of it. We adapt to the stress we feel from daily pressures, irritations, and annoyances of life and tend to think of it as "not a big deal." We end up thinking the stress we feel because of these daily challenges is "normal" and we allow the stress in our body to stick around, unnoticed...hidden.

Even if it isn't obvious, and even if you don't notice it or are unaware that you are experiencing it, stress is stress. It is physiological disharmony, and it is draining your energy, decreasing your resilience, and contributing to physiological wear and tear on your body systems—taking a toll on your health and well-being.

The director of research for the HeartMath Institute, Dr. Rollin McCraty, says, "Ongoing low-grade stress can do more harm to the body, mind, and emotions than one large stressful event can."¹ Hidden stress is that ongoing, low-grade stress.

WHAT DOES HIDDEN STRESS LOOK LIKE?

There are two broad categories of hidden stress:

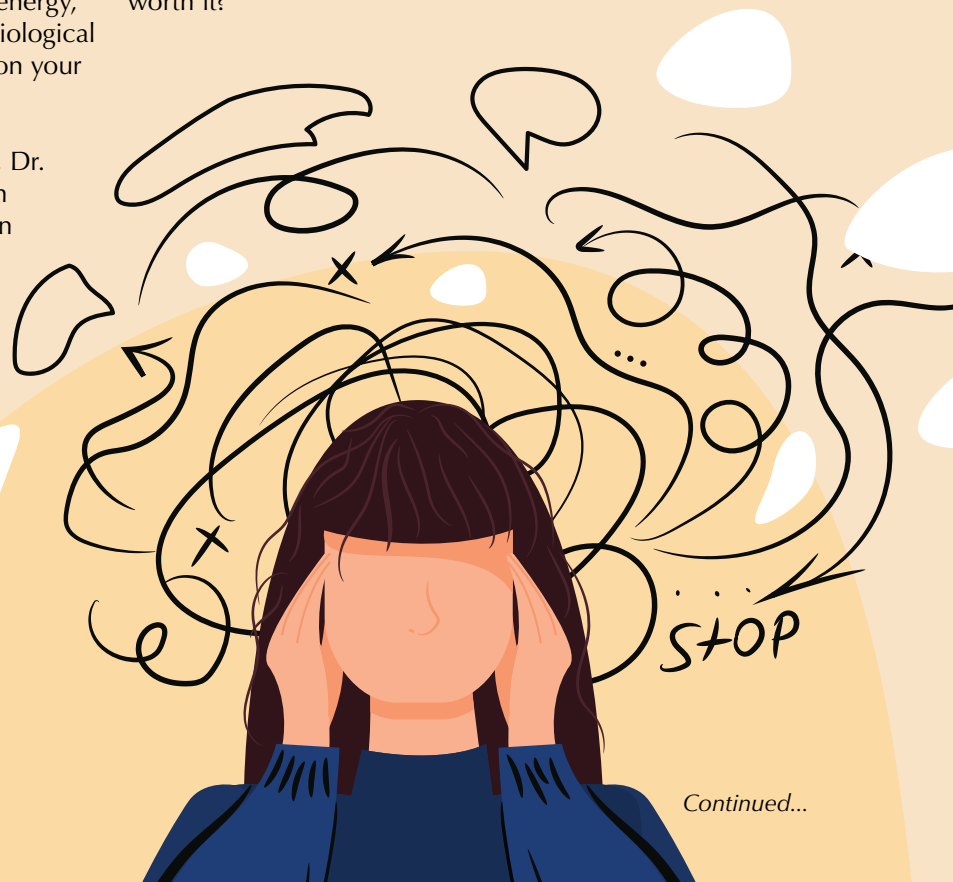
1. subtle negative attitudes
2. drama

Both categories can go unseen, yet negatively impact well-being.

Subtle negative attitudes include those such as pessimism, cynicism, "I'm not good enough," "I'm worthless," and "Life is hopeless." They can be negative attitudes about yourself, about others or about life. Regardless of what the negative attitudes are about, their detrimental effect on your body, mind, and general well-being is the same.

Drama, like subtle negative attitudes, comes in a few different forms. Drama tends to perpetuate the stress, and the resultant energy drain, in clandestine ways. Here are some examples:

Justifying: "I have every right to feel this way!" It's probably the most dangerous one, the one we fall into quickly, and sets the stage for some bigger energy drains because we convince ourselves that it's better to feel negative. This is when we justify our feelings. While you might have the right to feel that way, do you really want to? Is it really worth it?



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Blame: “Of course I’m angry. That guy is a jerk!” This is about making your emotions someone else’s fault, thereby shirking responsibility for your reactions and limiting your emotional responses to only those triggered by other people or life situations. In other words, when bad things happen you feel bad, and when good things happen you feel good; your emotions are not your responsibility.

Histories: “You ripped my head off yesterday and today you want to talk?!” This is when you have difficulty starting with a clean slate. These emotional histories or records can become very heavy to carry around. They create emotional undercurrents that colour and distort the current situation, leading to more and more stressful encounters.

Rehashing: “How could he dare speak to me like he did?!” “I should have said this or that.” This is mental replaying, making the issue bigger and bigger in your head, after the fact. It leads to bigger and bigger energy drain... with no real resolution.

Resignation: “Well, whatever!” You may be tempted to think that not dealing with a situation is an effective way to stop stressing and to stop the energy drain. However, what’s really happening is that you might say that you are “done” with the issue, but below the surface, the issue is still simmering. There can also be a sense of hopelessness attached to the resignation, which adds to the stress.

Brooding: “It’s been days, but it feels like yesterday.” When we keep an issue “warm” and do not let it go or allow the “dust to settle,” we are brooding.

Negative Projections: “It didn’t work out before, so it won’t work out now.” Assuming the worst of the present or future because of negative experiences of the past contributes to stress.

These are seemingly small stresses but they accumulate quickly and we may not realize how much they are impairing our overall health and quality of life.

Awareness is key. With awareness of these forms of hidden stress, we have the opportunity to not fall into these stress-perpetuating patterns.

Where are there hidden stresses in your life? Learn more at thestressexperts.com

Reference

1. HeartMath. Are We Resigned to Stress? [internet]. April 10, 2014. Available from: www.heartmath.com/blog/health-and-wellness/are-we-resigned-to-stress/

