The Consequences of Multitasking

An unhealthy addiction to stress may be harmful to your health

BY ANNE GRADY

We are all living in a time of information overload, endless tasks and an unhealthy addiction to stress. New research from Stanford University has found that multitasking actually reduces your efficiency and performance because your brain can only focus on one thing at a time. And researchers at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom found that multitasking may even cause lasting harm to the brain. These findings support earlier studies that showed a connection between excessive media multitasking activity and poor attention in the face of distractions, along with emotional problems such as depression and anxiety.

People who operate at high levels of intensity for long periods can become addicted to the "high" of adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol. And like many other drugs, adrenaline and stress are making us sick. According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, two-thirds of all office visits to family physicians are due to stress-related symptoms. Stress is linked to the six leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver and suicide.

How can we stop multitasking and the damage it is doing to our health? Here are four brain-saving tips to cut stress, boost focus and productivity.

Define Your Priorities

Look at the areas of your life that matter to you. These may include career, finance, family, health, relationships, social life, attitude and personal growth. Realize that some areas should take priority over others. Focus on one at a time.

Manage Your Progress

Rank how you feel you are doing in each area that's important to you, from 1 to 10 (poor to perfect). Look at where you can make slight changes. Your goal isn't necessarily going from a 2 to 10. The goal is making slight changes, like going from a 2 to a 4.

Devote Yourself to What Matters

Identify your top three to five priorities and spend 80 percent of your time on them without apologizing for it. Schedule time for your priorities. If necessary, save money for them. Make sure you have enough emotional and physical energy for what you've deemed most important to you.

Cut Out the Interruptions

If you want to cut down stress and increase your productivity, take steps to cut out the interruptions caused by multitasking, constantly checking email and texts, and staying glued to social media. Each interruption can waste between 10 to 15 minutes of your work day, including time to re-engage in the task you were doing before we were interrupted.

Just think, if you can prevent two or three workday interruptions, that extra 30 minutes a day is like gaining an extra 22 days a year. Not to mention the long-term health benefits. So turn off your new email alert and other technology distractions, and do one thing at a time. And enjoy your newfound productivity!

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