

AGD

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NEWS FOR THE GENERAL DENTIST

Impact

STRESS MANAGEMENT AND YOUR CAREER

How to Avoid Burnout and Maintain Physical and Mental Well-Being



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of 9.1 (severe/burnout) on average, compared with 4.9 (mild/moderate) among all Americans.

With dental students, 100 percent of undergraduates indicated a 100 percent prevalence of stress, according to the 2011 *Southeast Asian Journal of Tropical Medicine and Public Health* study, "Stress and its relief among undergraduate dental students in Malaysia."

Identifying the Causes of Stress in Dentistry

Gary Glassman, DDS, FRCD(C), a Toronto-based endodontist and faculty member at University of Toronto, says dentistry-related stress comes from several key areas:

- **Restrictive work environment:** A dentist spends most of his or her work life in a small, and sometimes windowless, operatory.



How Stress Takes a Toll on Your Body

Stress can affect your body in many ways, resulting in:

- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Muscular pain, tension or discomfort
- Interrupted sleep
- Digestive problems
- Chest pain
- Decreased sex drive
- Anxiety
- Weakened immune system that leads to colds, flus and viral infections
- Anger or irritability
- Lack of focus or motivation
- Feelings of sadness or depression
- Restlessness

Sources: National Institute of Mental Health and Mayo Clinic

- **Repetitive physical stress:** Dentists often perform the same motions and revisit hunched, leaned-in and rigid postures when working on each patient, which can overwork key muscles and joints.
- **Patient anxiety:** The psychological strain of working on fearful patients can wear down dental practitioners.
- **Expectations of perfection:** "There is a relentless pursuit of perfection and permanence in an inhospitable oral environment, which can be a major cause of frustration for dentists," Glassman says.
- **Time pressures:** Staying on schedule in a busy dental practice can be a chronic source of concern.
- **Economic pressures:** Especially early in the career, a typical dentist may be paying off student loan debt and trying to finance a private practice.
- **Isolation:** Most dentists practice alone and may lack opportunities to share and solve problems with their colleagues.
- **Lack of exercise:** Many practitioners do not stretch or exercise enough to prevent progressive deterioration of connective tissues, small blood vessels, muscle groups and general circulation.

A study of Iranian dentists, "Occupational Stress and Coping Behaviours Among Dentists in Kerman, Iran," published in 2016 in the *Sultan Qaboos*

University Medical Journal, corroborates many items on the aforementioned list; it suggested that stress is most commonly caused by the need to maintain high levels of concentration while working (as indicated by 65.6 percent of surveyed dentists), time pressures (64.5 percent), concern about the ability to deliver future dental services (60.2 percent) and increasing costs (59.1 percent).

"Today, the business of dentistry is more complicated and challenging than ever before," says Academy of General Dentistry (AGD) member Roger P. Levin, DDS, founder and CEO of Levin Group Inc., in Owings Mills, Maryland. "You've got more competition in the profession, a wider expansion of dental service organizations and insurance companies reducing reimbursement rates. As those challenges mount, the stress increases, and running the perfect practice becomes a more elusive goal."

Dentistry never truly allows you to take a break mentally, as you are always doing something considered "critical," says AGD member Edward A. Alvarez, DDS, who practices in New York.

"Consider that we have to deal with insurance companies, patient collections, perceptions from patients that we're overflowing with money, reps and marketing companies that are constantly bombarding us and other pressures," Alvarez says. "We also practice in a

Reaping the Benefits of Taking a Break

If most of the unease dentists feel occurs inside the office, it makes sense to get away from the source of that strain more often and pursue extracurricular pastimes. That means taking vacations that don't turn into "staycations," dabbling in music or fine art, and volunteering your time to a cause you care about.

"It's important to take regular vacations, as doing so balances your emotions and allows you to spend time with your family and friends — the people whom you love and the reason why you work so hard," says Odiatu. "Also, try to plan long weekends where you get off the grid."

Exploring the great outdoors can work wonders, many agree. "Reconnecting with nature after my busy office hours is a way for me to regain my composure," says Glassman, who often

had no anxiety. However, among non-painting dentists only 17.5 percent had no stress, 25 percent had no depression and 42.5 percent had no anxiety.

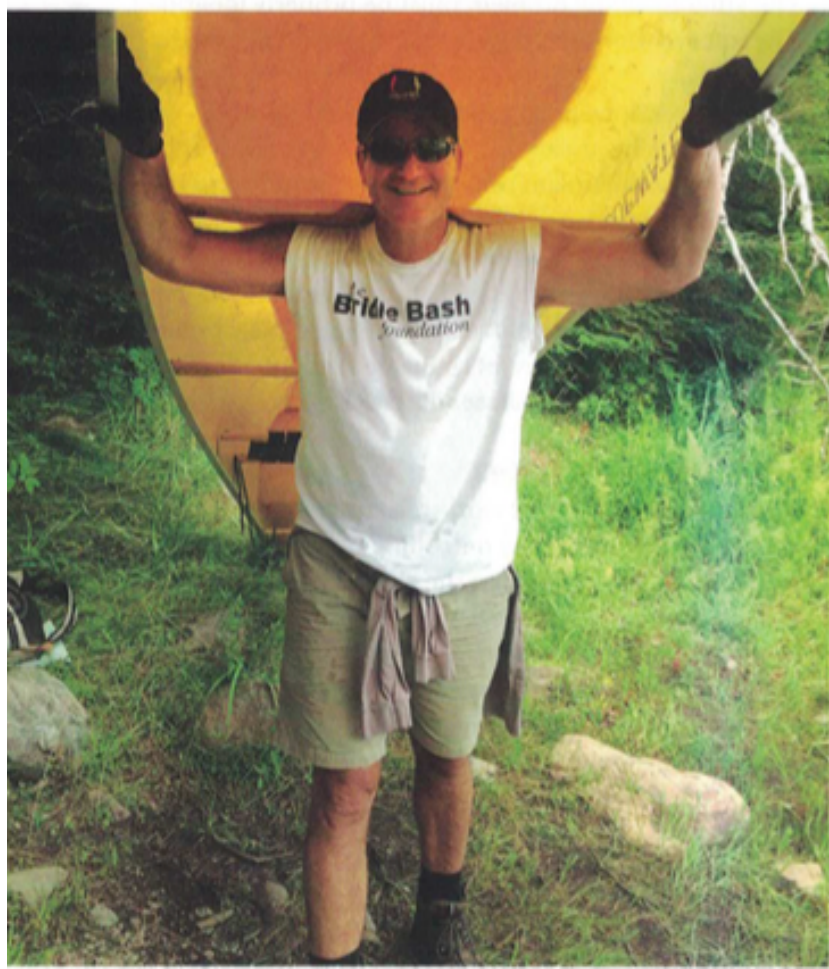
Instead of picking up a paintbrush, Alvarez enjoys working a turntable during his downtime. "My creative outlet is being a DJ and playing music at clubs and festivals around New York and Los Angeles," he says.

Others may relish investing time and energy into their community. Kerr, for instance, has volunteered in leadership roles with organizations such as his local Kiwanis chapter, the American Cancer Society and Habitat for Humanity. He also cofounded a charitable clinic and remains active in his church.

Remember: It's OK to take time for yourself sometimes. "As dentists, we are givers, but it's OK to get a massage or plan a sudden getaway with your family," Alvarez says.

Lastly, revisit perhaps the best advice your parents have ever given you: Get more rest.

"Try to get at least seven to eight hours of restful sleep every night," Glassman suggests, "and take small, frequent breaks throughout your workday that require you to walk around and find a quiet place away from the commotion." ♦



Gary Glassman, DDS, FRCD(C), of Toronto, decompresses from dentistry by exploring the great outdoors regularly near his cabin in Canada.



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