



Workers ill if not at ease

Debra Bela

Your client has pushed the deadline forward again. Everyone is working back a little longer each day and you can't remember the last time you had a lunch break.

You might thrive on stress, but too much of it can kill you.

Workplace stress has been linked with the development of depression, heart disease and other physical and mental health problems, as highlighted in a 2006 University of Melbourne study for the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

Starting the day in a relaxed frame of mind could be the key to survival, according to Sydney-based Power Living yogi, Duncan Peak.

Peak has worked with elite athletes and celebrities including tennis ace Pat Rafter and cricketer Mark Taylor.

"The biggest addiction is thinking," Peak says.

"We don't need to think the whole time. If you can stop thinking (even for 30 seconds), it makes us smarter as business people because our mind is not constantly worn out."

Peak has developed a commuter CD to help workers calm their minds on the way to work.

The *Power Meditation CD* provides 15- or 28-minute meditations designed to work on your feelings of self-worth.

"Stress is out of control. There are many variables but the pace of life is so fast.

"We work, we come home, we have kids, we don't have time to sit and be still."

In Brisbane, Body4U fitness director Angela Houseman says exercise needs to be incorporated into every worker's day, not just before and after work.

"If you're pressed for time, take five minutes out to do some deep breathing and stretching exercises at your desk," she says.

"Go for a walk at lunch time,

even if it's just around the block."

She encourages employers to give workers an hour lunch break so they can take part in half-hour group fitness programs in their area or even employ someone to give 10-minute massages at their work stations.

"You may not feel like doing it at the time, but you will feel better afterwards," she says.

Working with a buddy on an exercise program, whether at a structured gym or in the lunchroom at work, is also beneficial. But make sure to vary the activity so your body (and mind) doesn't tire of the routine.

"On those days where you might want to give it a miss they might be having a day where they're full of energy and it keeps you going," she says.

Houseman says stress produces cortisol, which increases blood pressure and adrenaline, stimulating a natural flight or fright response.

"But in these highly stressed environments, we're sitting at a desk not running or expending that energy that has built up, and researchers are now linking high levels of cortisol in the brain to pre-ageing."

Peak says the nature of a corporate working environment plays a part in stress levels and urges people to work on their self-worth and self-confidence levels outside of work to carry them through the day.

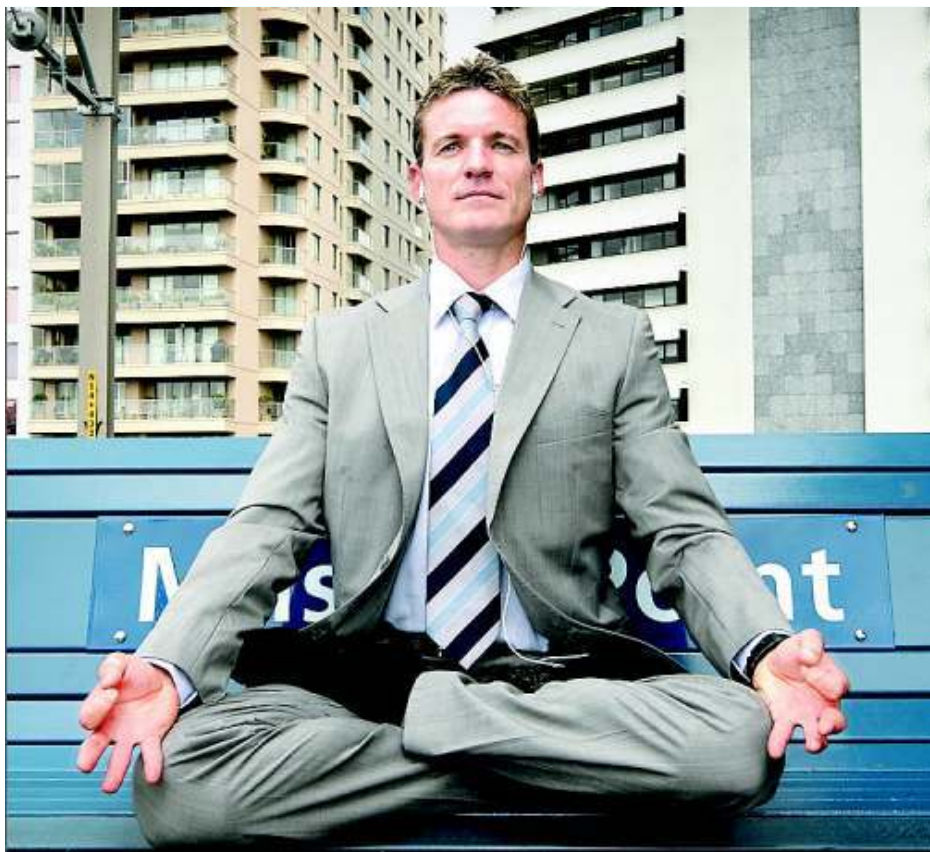
"Look at your posture all day and at the impersonal nature of your workstation," Houseman says.

"People carry stress in that repetitive environment.

"It's in their hips and shoulders and they develop postural imbalances and negative thought patterns.

"We need to get our motivation and feelings of self-worth from a different space."

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Duncan Peak brings his body and mind together for less stress.

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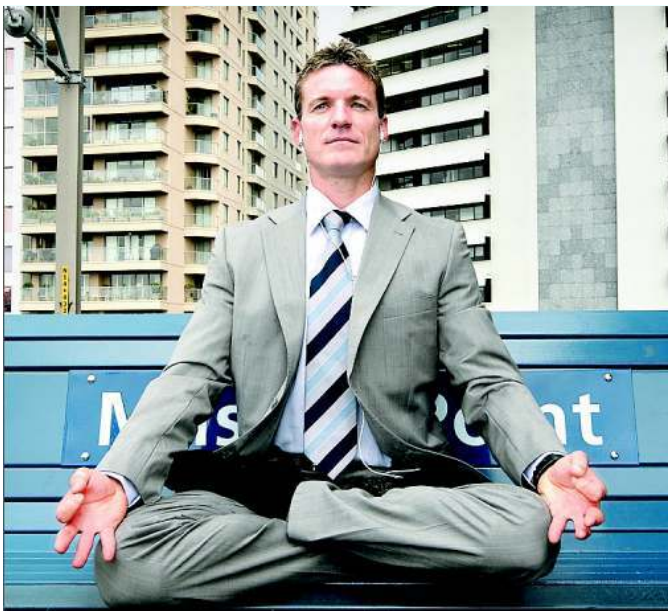
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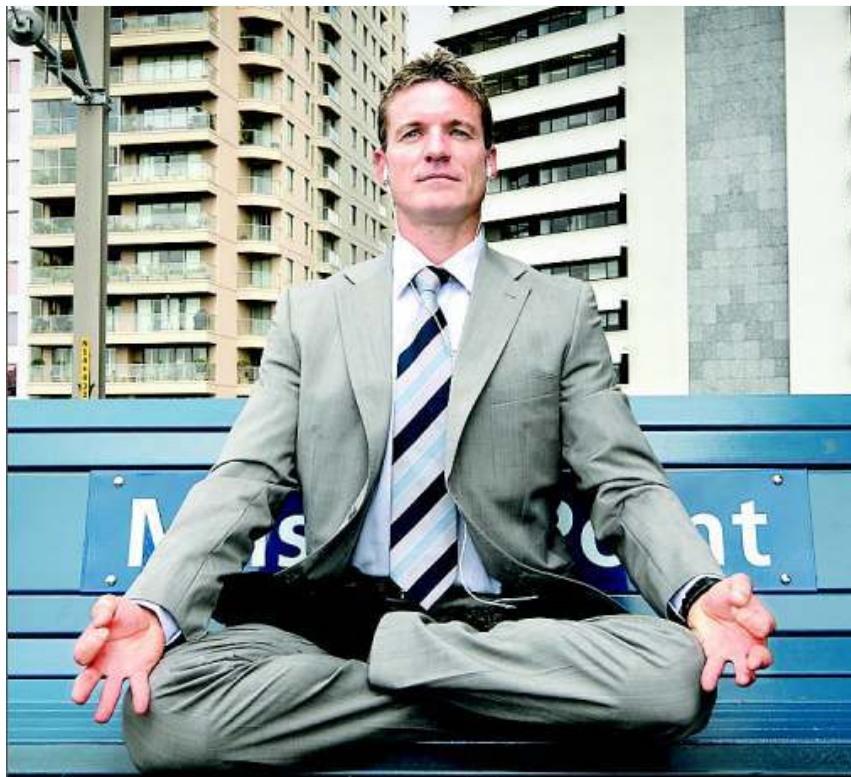
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