

Starting and managing a successful business is demanding. Turning a profit, particularly in the early stages, often involves long hours, which can result in physical and mental strain.

Executive business coach Penny Holburn says entrepreneurship entails many emotional highs and lows which impact your personal relationships and mental processes.

"The biggest challenge is stress due to uncertainty and uncontrollable variables. The problem with unmanaged stress is that it can lead to and exacerbate all physical and mental health problems," she explains.

General practitioner Hussain Hartley agrees and advises looking out for the following:

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Entrepreneurs tend to work alone, often for long hours, which can be very isolating. In a recent study conducted by the USA's University of California on more than 240 entrepreneurs, 49% reported suffering from mental health problems, most often depression. ADHD, anxiety and hypomania were also listed as common disorders among business-owners.

CARDIOVASCULAR ILLNESSES

The "time is money" mentality means CEOs usually devote fewer hours to healthy eating, exercise and leisure. This, coupled with high levels of stress, can lead to heightened blood pressure, weight gain and an increased risk of hypertension – which, in turn, can result in coronaries and heart disease, if left unchecked.

COLDS AND FLU

A lack of sleep and nutritious food compromises the immune system, which makes one more susceptible to contracting viral infections.

VISION-RELATED PROBLEMS

Regardless of the industry, the majority of entrepreneurs spend most of their workday on a computer, smartphone or tablet. This can lead to eye strain, poor vision and frequent headaches.

NECK AND BACK PAIN

The sedentary lifestyle of most business owners is closely linked to an increase in circulatory and joint problems. Most entrepreneurs sit for six to 10 hours a day, which causes lower back pain and can lead to increased rates of heart disease and other chronic conditions.

THE (hidden) COST OF *entrepreneurship*

Business ownership can be incredibly rewarding, but the risks and pressure can take a toll on your health. Learn how to strike a balance between your work and well-being

BY Nazley Omar

SLEEP DISORDERS

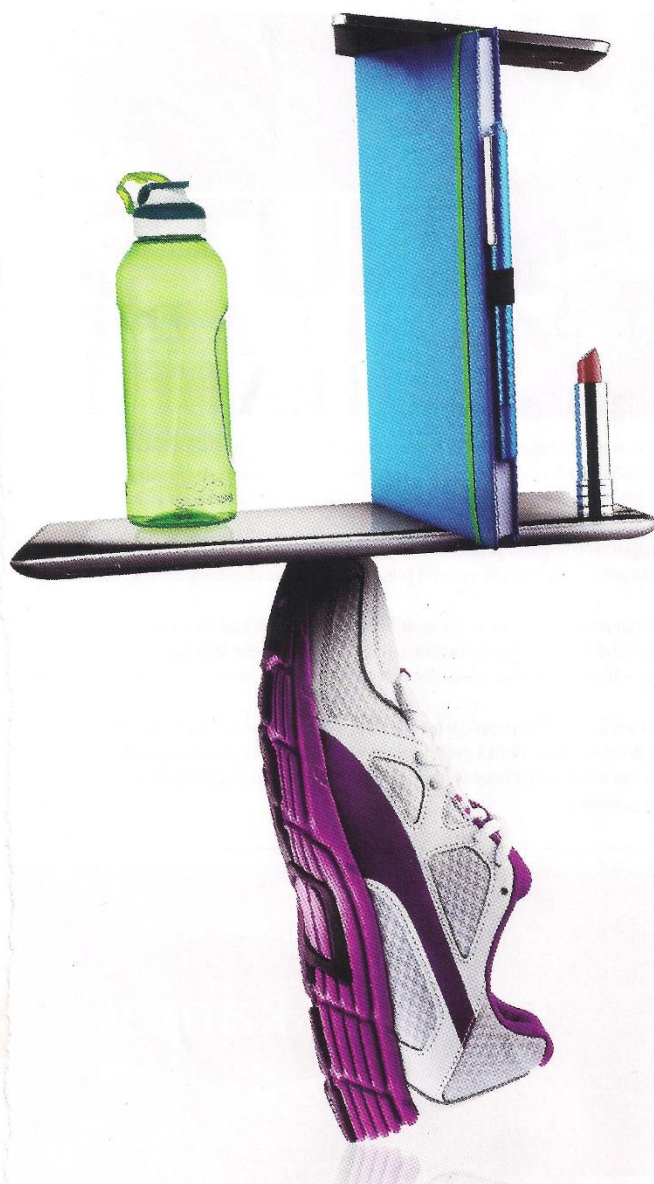
Riding the entrepreneurial roller coaster is almost synonymous with long hours. Studies find that CEOs work 50-70 hours a week, which leaves little time for relaxation and sleep. Jet lag and insomnia are common ailments among busy executives.

ADDICTION

People who are poor at emotional regulation – like stressed entrepreneurs – often develop addictions to substances such as cigarettes, alcohol, narcotics and sugar, and to behaviours such as Internet, cellphone usage and gambling.

LOW SELF-ESTEEM

Many business people judge their self-worth by their net worth, making the mistake of allowing what they do to define who they are. The danger of this is that when their company fails to achieve certain goals, they plunge into a psychological crisis.



HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH

Entrepreneurship can be a lonely and difficult journey. Hartley suggests joining a network of like-minded individuals to share your challenges and learn from each other. Engaging with other entrepreneurs can provide a new perspective and help alleviate anxiety and stress.

Entrepreneur and PhD candidate Kariema Price adds that stress can be minimized by implementing good management practices in your day-to-day operations and life choices. She advises maintaining financial health, risk management, efficiency-driven business processes and fair people management practices.

"In order to ensure that the health of your business remains intact, you need to prioritise your own health. Self care, proper nutrition and exercise need to be viewed as crucial components of success and should be scheduled into your daily tasks," she says.

Price suggests the following tips for warding off the health risks related to entrepreneurship:

- **Make yourself a priority:** If your health goes, everything else goes too, so ensure that your well-being comes first. Listen to your body and take a break when you need it. Set aside an hour a day when you turn off all gadgets and unwind.
- **Don't isolate yourself:** A lack of interaction with people can exacerbate most mental health issues, particularly depression, so make time to connect with your loved ones.
- **Have a support system:** It's important to have someone to turn to when you're feeling overwhelmed or stressed. Confide in your family and friends and find a mentor who can offer you business advice.
- **Regulate your sleep patterns:** Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. Strive to get at least six hours of shut-eye each night.
- **Fuel your body:** Be mindful of what and how you eat. Avoid eating on the run or at your desk, and include plenty of vegetables, fruits and lean proteins in your diet, rather than fast foods. Also avoid excessive consumption of caffeine and cold drinks; rather drink water.
- **Get moving:** To keep your body performing optimally, you should exercise for 30 minutes at least four times a week. If gym doesn't interest you, try outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, tennis or kayaking.
- **Get help:** If you feel that stress, anxiety or depression are impacting your life, seek professional help from a counsellor or psychologist.
- **Celebrate life:** Don't dwell on the downsides of business and always celebrate milestones (which will also do wonders for the morale of your company). ■

“
IF YOUR HEALTH
GOES, EVERYTHING
ELSE GOES TOO,
SO ENSURE THAT
YOUR WELL-BEING
COMES FIRST.
”