

## Stress in Dentistry: Review article

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--- by Lou Holtz

**Abstract**

Dentists are subjected to a variety of stress-related physical, financial and emotional problems. It is important for the dentists to apply strategies that help them de-stress by decrementing the number of stressors and increasing the competence to cope with the stress. The topics such as resisting stress, time management benefits, and choosing realistic goals are being encouraged. This is encouraged so that stress can be curtailed to manageable levels. As with any profession transition from being a student to being in the workforce can be a daunting one. This is especially true for medical professional as they are responsible for well-being of their patients. The implications of integration of stress management into dental education, provide practical suggestions for decreasing and alleviating stress. This article gives an overview of such methods and promotes the overall wellness of the dentists by emphasizing on the importance of well-balanced life.

**Keywords:** Stress; Physical; Financial; Emotional; Exercise; Academic; Financial Advisor**Introduction**

It is often thought that dentists have a career of serenity but, it is a meagre known fact that, there is a lot to worry about if you are a dentist. Stress levels in the dental profession are at an all-time high, while job satisfaction is on the decline [1]. Dental professionals perceive dentistry to be more stressful than other occupations [2].

Many dental professionals are affected so deeply that their stress levels negatively interfere with their usual daily activities and interpersonal relationships, and often lead to early retirement from the profession [3]. Burnout, mood disorders (particularly depression and anxiety), alcohol abuse, and physical health issues such as cardiovascular problems can all be tied back to stress levels in dental practices [2,3].

**Discussion**

Stress is a result of certain external physical or mental factors that affect an individual's physical and psychological well-being [4].

Dental education can be a significant source of stress among dental students, and studies have observed higher levels of stress among dental students than in the general population [8]. A large body of literature examining stress in undergraduate dental students has revealed a significant increase in stress that intensifies with students' year of study [9]. Stress is a result of certain external physical or mental factors that affect an individual's physical and psychological well-being [4].

If you are a dentist in the making, the stress starts before you are even technically a dentist. People who pursue dentistry as a profession have a likelihood to be perfectionists with academic track record of excellence. You often have a hard time coping with the expectations of the dental curriculum, and personal goals to ace in your chosen career path. Post completion of graduation, you are worried about paying back colossal student loan and setting up your dental practice, and the new debts that follow, which has an influence on the overall quality of physical and emotional aspects of life.

When, it comes down to it, reconciling the clinical, operational, entrepreneurial, and organizational aspects of a dental career can result in dangerously high stress levels leading to innumerable debilitating problems like depression, anxiety, addiction, health disorders like heart disease, stroke, fluctuations in weight and professional burnout. The dental team is at high risk of musculoskeletal problems due to the limited work area and impaired vision associated with the oral cavity. These working restrictions frequently cause a clinician to assume stressful body positions to achieve good access and visibility inside the oral cavity. Many dental professionals, for many reasons, fail to practice adequate self-care to mitigate this.

If you own a dental practice, you are worried about dealing with capital expenditure, reimbursements from insurance companies, dealing with co-workers and employees, marketing, overhead control, supply, laboratory bills and lease payments.

It is critical to provide the best possible care with excruciating detail to often apprehensive patients, and you are worried about your professional liability, and the legal aspects if some aspect of your treatment plan goes sideways.

Most dentists practice alone, consequently, they do not have the opportunity to share and solve problems with their colleagues the way other professional groups do through peer support.

In a study published in NCBI [10], abnormal levels of depression, anxiety and stress were observed in 55.9%, 66.8% and 54.7% of the respondents, respectively. The mean total scores for the respondents were 12.79 (SD = 10.73) for depression, 12.35 (SD = 9.48) for anxiety and 17.17 (SD = 10.02) for stress. Alarming, severe and extremely severe scores for depression, anxiety, and stress were reported in 20.2%, 34.0% and 20.2% of respondents, respectively.

Stress N (%)	Anxiety N (%)	Depression N (%)	Levels
112 (45.3)	82 (33.2)	109 (44.1)	Normal
36 (14.6)	28 (11.3)	35 (14.2)	Mild
49 (19.8)	53 (21.4)	53 (21.4)	Moderate
30 (12.1)	22 (8.9)	21 (8.5)	Severe
20 (8.1)	62 (25.1)	29 (11.7)	Extremely severe

**Table 1**

### How to strangle stress?

Some stressors can be seen as a typically good stress which behoove in allowing to concentrate our energies into edifying the situations, which can occur through uplifting motivation, higher levels of execution, and excitation about the goals we are trying to accomplish.

We should make a conscious effort to put stress management techniques into practice if you feel yourself getting overwhelmed.

The most common contributing factors can be broadly classified as

1. Physical
2. Psychological and
3. Financial.

### Physical stress

Alongside many other skills, working as a dentist requires a combination of strength, endurance, flexibility, and coordination. So, indulge yourself in maintaining a good physical and mental health by eating well-balanced, nutritionally dense meals and getting enough sleep to help your mind to revitalize and rejuvenate.

Exercise, helps to keep your body at its peak performance level, in addition to providing mental and emotional perks. To prevent musculoskeletal ailments, preventive aerobic and relaxation exercises should be included in the weekly activities. Exercises to promote strengthening of the muscles that support the spine (i.e., the oblique abdominal and spinal extensor muscles) should be considered. An effective program may include a warm-up period, about 30 minutes of aerobic activity, isolated muscle group work (trunk muscles), and a cool-down period. Walking and/or water exercise are also recommended [5].

Such a practice would avoid future physical limitations and help them remain productive for longer periods of time during their professional lives. To reduce spine problems, correct postural practices, relaxation interval sessions during work, and weight monitoring could be utilized [6].

### Psychological stress

To ensure early identification of and intervention for psychological conditions, both students and faculty should be educated regarding the physical and psychological signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression [7]. As a medical professional one often tries

to solve for their own issues. It is completely and normal, in fact advisable, to seek help for improving mental health. We as doctors should be the first to recognize the need for good mental health.

Your friends and family can welcome the chance to help you find solutions to your stress problems and reprimand. Taking time off work to travel goes a long way in destressing oneself. Look for the humor in situations and walking away from the situation if you need to, to clear your head.

Try relaxation techniques like deep breathing and muscle relaxation exercises diminish the stress.

Improve the working environment at the clinic and make an effort to talk to other dentists and work together for understanding and master efficient practice management skills. Discuss methods for effectively handling patient anxiety. You should manage your time by working sensibly and taking off leisurely breaks and holidays.

### Financial stress

Your financial and entrepreneurial skills are enmeshed with a successful and stress-free dental practice.

You can hire a financial advisor, who can guide to manage the monetary aspect of your practice in exchange for a small management fee. This can be time saving and hassle free.

Consider refinancing your student loans at a lower interest which can lower your monthly payments and help you pay off your loans faster. This is a great way to lower your financial stress and improve your eligibility for future loans, since lenders look at debt-to-income ratios when deciding whether to lend money.

In this day and age, it is important to diversify your investment, so that dentistry is not the only source of your income. This can reduce the pressure and help reduce the patient load. Medical fields do tend to be lucrative, but it is important to manage expectations. Sometimes having unrealistic financial goals can lead to imbalance in work life balance. It is important that we realize that time is as important a resource as money.

### Stress coping mechanisms

A study published in NCBI [10] illustrates the different mechanisms that dentists use to cope with stress. The most frequently mentioned coping method for relieving stress was "activities such as watching television, reading, sleeping and

shopping" (71%), followed by "emotional support from others" (53%). Under "other" mechanisms, eating, traveling and smoking were mentioned by some. Below figure illustrates the result from the study [10].

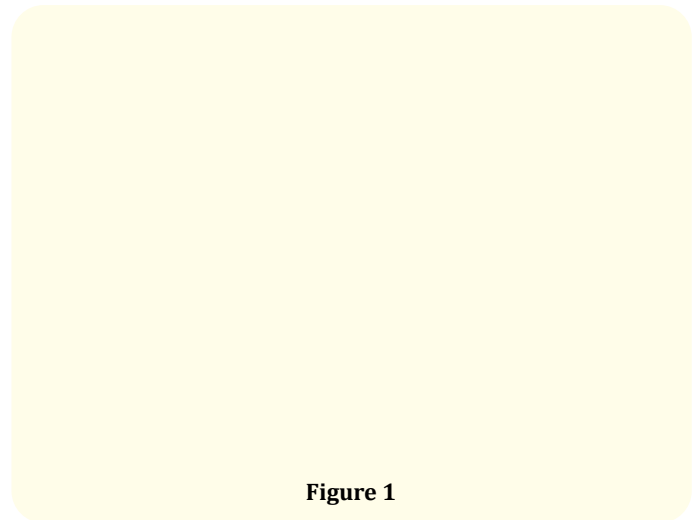


Figure 1

### Conclusion

To ensure early identification of and intervention for psychological conditions, both students and faculty should be educated regarding the physical and psychological signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression. Strategies for stress prevention and management should be implemented in dental schools to improve students' well-being, prevent drop out and ensure proper patient care. The persistence of these problems may lead to further physical and psychological complications that could continue after graduation, resulting in unhealthy dentists or early retirement and thereby affecting both the quantity and quality of the workforce [10].

We all are susceptible to stress. The bottom line is that yes, you have a tremendously stressful career, but you've got to take steps to strangle your stress levels where you can. It's what we do with the stress that eventually determines our outcomes. If you can identify your main sources of stress, you can start to look for patterns in your daily life that can help you avoid the stressor as much as feasible. Being kinder to yourself and less critical and demanding of your efforts. Remember, it is a marathon and not a sprint. We should not forget to live a good life, in pursuit of a better one.

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