HSBC Life



Are you giving your mind the rest it needs?

Feeling tired after a busy week is one thing. But when stress builds up over time, simply taking a break may not always be enough to help us feel like ourselves again.

Looking after our mental wellbeing isn't only about responding when we feel overwhelmed. It can also mean recognising when we're running low, understanding what helps us truly recover, and building the resilience to navigate everyday stresses and challenges.



In this newsletter, we speak with **John Lee, Senior Clinical Psychologist** at **Adam Road Medical Centre Psychiatric & Psychological Services**, to learn more about burnout, true recovery and how to actively strengthen our mental wellbeing.

Q: What is burnout, what causes it, and how is it different from everyday stress or tiredness?

John Lee: Burnout is ongoing emotional and physical exhaustion that persists when demands consistently outdo recovery. It can show up as fatigue, irritability, detachment, low motivation, and feeling ineffective. Unlike normal stress or tiredness, it lingers and does not go away quickly with rest.

Q: From your experience, are you seeing any trends in people seeking help for stress or burnout? What tends to trigger it, and what symptoms do they usually experience before seeking help?

John Lee: More and more people are seeking help for stress and burnout, not just from work, but also from studies, family, and relationships. Common triggers include deadlines, role overload, perfectionism, and pressure to keep pushing. Many only seek support after persistent fatigue, low mood, poor sleep, or reaching an emotional tipping point.

Q: As we approach the year end holiday season, some of us may be looking forward to taking a break. But is a holiday enough to recover from burnout?

John Lee: A holiday may help, but it is not always enough if the same pressures remain. Lasting recovery requires managing ongoing demands, building daily restorative habits, and addressing the patterns that led to burnout.

Q: We often hear about looking after our mental health, but what is mental fitness?

John Lee: Mental fitness is a state of well-being in which we respond in ways that support resilience and everyday functioning. It is built through consistent and intentional habits that support clearer thinking, emotional regulation, and stress management. It helps if we normalise caring for mental health as part of everyday well-being.

Q: How can building our mental fitness help us better manage stress and reduce the risk of burnout?

John Lee: Building mental fitness helps us respond to stress with more calm, focus, and control instead of simply reacting. Through consistent practice, the brain can form stronger pathways for balanced thinking and emotional regulation, making it easier to gently stretch and stay within our "window of tolerance." These skills reduce the intensity and duration of stress responses, support better mood and sleep, and lower the risk of burnout.

Q: What are some everyday, practical things we can do to build mental fitness?

John Lee: Mental fitness can be built through small, repeatable habits that help the nervous system feel safe and the mind stay balanced.

Try these simple starters:



Physiological sigh
Two inhales through the nose (one deep, one short top-up), then one long slow exhale through the mouth. Repeat a few times.



Mood check-in
Rate your mood from 1–10 and challenge unhelpful thoughts with a more balanced perspective.



Boundaries & pacing
Set clear limits, break tasks into smaller steps, and take breaks before you run on empty.



Co-regulation
Connect with someone who helps you feel safe and grounded through a chat, walk or quiet moment together.



Purposeful Breaks
Leave your desk during lunch or go for short walk outside for fresh air.

Over time, such practices weaken unhelpful thinking loops such as rumination and catastrophising and strengthen pathways that support calm, resilience, and a stronger sense of control over time.

Thinking Well starts with small, everyday choices.

It's not about avoiding stress altogether, but knowing when to pause, recharge and give your mind the space it needs to recover. Whether it's taking a breath, setting a boundary or connecting with someone who helps you feel grounded, small habits can make a difference over time.

Keep living well

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Wishing you good health and wellbeing,
HSBC Life