

Warning: work can kill. The Japanese even have a word for it: *karoshi*

I am a management consultant at a midsized international company and I like to work hard. But lately I have felt work taking over my life and I need to rebalance. Is there really such a thing as working too hard? And how can I make a change without risking my job?

Eve Menezes Cunningham, a wellness consultant, writes:

Working hard, under the kind of pressure that has us rising to the occasion, is a positive kind of stress that helps us thrive, stretch and grow.

But in your case, the scales have tipped and it has become the less healthy stress, or 'distress'. Congratulations for noticing and seeking balance - it is better to pay attention now than getting increasingly stressed and potentially ill.

If we don't take action to manage stress, our bodies can become so acclimatised to it that we stop needing external stressors to create stress hormones. This can lead to depression and burnout, which is bad for you and for your employer.

The Japanese have a word for 'death from overwork': *karoshi*. Lissa Rankin, the integrative medicine pioneer, believes that work can kill us if we don't pay attention to our body's signals.

Warning signs that our jobs could be shortening our lives include innocuous-seeming symptoms such as backache,

eyestrain, insomnia, fatigue, dizziness, appetite loss or gain.

Because you are paying attention, you can make healthy changes. If you have been experiencing any of these you should log the things that increase or reduce your symptoms, plus see the GP.

On the positive side, Ms Rankin found that work which encourages us to be ourselves, where we can express creativity, have flexibility and be part of something bigger than ourselves can be life-affirming.

Having purpose and striving to leave a legacy can strengthen heart health and deactivate the stress response.

When you think of the work you have until recently enjoyed, does it still have some of the benefits above? If not, you may need to look for alternatives.

When did you notice work taking over your life? What changed about your role or organisation? Was it something personal rather than work-related? What do you most look forward to? What do you dread? What changes might be possible in your current role?

Regardless of whether you decide to stay or go, prioritise exercise and downtime - anything from dancing and meditating to playing tennis and going to the opera.

Send your questions to workplace.questions@ft.com

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