The American Institute of Stress estimates that an element of stress is related to 75 to 90 per cent of visits to primary-care doctors. It is likely that being a professional of any sort carries with it a fairly high level of stress, and it is also likely that dental professionals are in the top percentage of stressed professionals. Stress can manifest physically: headaches, shoulder and neck ache, nausea and stomach disorders are just some of the symptoms; it can also manifest at a psychological or mental level through anxiety or depression.

It would also be true to say that the overwhelming majority of patients who attend for dental treatment arrive in a state of fear-related stress. It seems therefore to be in our interest to give the whole notion of stress serious consideration, not only as to how we can protect ourselves, but also how we can alleviate it for others.

Ten things we can do for ourselves:
1. Acknowledge it, but push on
2. Take medication
3. Exercise: strengthen our outer core and maximise endorphin response
4. Practice stress-relieving activities, such as yoga and meditation
5. Seek counselling
6. Seek medical help
7. Lifestyle change
8. Develop realistic rather than unrealistic expectations of ourselves and others; perfectionism is a very demanding taskmaster
9. Become less judgmental of ourselves and others
10. Set realistic and attainable goals.

For our patients, we can:
1. Treat patients: not only their teeth, but develop an empathetic attitude to our patients’ problems rather than a ‘what’s that got to do with me?’ dismissive approach
2. Inform before we perform, and be honest at all times. Inform them of benefits and risks, but where possible, emphasise the benefits
3. Avoid keeping patients waiting – the notion and term ‘waiting room’ is bad karma
4. Give everyone the respect you would hope others would always give you. Treat every patient as you would a friend, and every friend as you would a patient – give more than they expect
5. Cut out the fear of lack of physical safety
6. Keep up with all current ideas and techniques for minimising pain and implement these in your daily practice
7. Approach every situation with a sense of humour and a touch of lightness, no matter how tricky or unpleasant the circumstances – teach your staff to do the same
8. Smile – often!

9. Become less judgmental of ourselves and others
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