

Links between cancer, stress, and overwork: why I'm cutting my hours

written by Holly

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By Holly Lisle

TO DO LIST

1. SO
2. MANY
3. THINGS



Too much to do

I'm here to tell you that there is no medical journal article currently available on the long-term physical effects of writers working ten-to-seventeen-hour days seven days a week for stretches of up to seven months. (Either with or without a healthy diet and exercise.)

However, there is a breadcrumb trail I'm following:

Crumb one: The cellular changes in my tongue arose because of a decreased immune response to mutations.

Crumb two: I am clear of internal (viral) agents that cause decreased immune response.

Crumb three: There is a strongly correlative link between external factors, such as grief, anxiety, or exhaustion, and immunosuppression.

Following those breadcrumbs, then, and doing a ton of

searching for details, I have come to the conclusion that there is enough evidence to suggest the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Working stupid-long hours every day and living in a constant state of stress because I am constantly missing self-imposed deadlines could be the cause of the dysplastic changes in my tongue cells.

Hypothesis 2: Continuing with my current schedule and working habits has a higher than acceptable chance of creating an environment susceptible to dysplastic recurrences even after the clean removal of the existing lesion, or even the occurrence of cancer.

In plain English, I've been working too hard for too long. While the science (referenced below) is not in agreement, and there are sources that state there is no relationship between cancer and stress, I come from a family with non-existent cancer history (hell on wheels for alcoholism, diabetes, obesity and stroke, though). I have no personal risk factors for cancer other than stress. And I developed a condition that is known to lead to cancer.

Plan of action:

After you develop your hypothesis, the next step is to formulate your plan of action.

Mine is as follows:

- Work a maximum of six hours a day and a maximum of five days a week (the standard eight-hour workday includes mandatory breaks, killing time doing non-work tasks, and generally includes much less work than the eight paid hours) My six hours is six hours of straight work, just as my seventeen hours was seventeen hours of straight work.
- Focus on doing the work that only I can do: creating my

nonfiction courses and writing my fiction

- Eliminate website work completely.
- Move to a secondary role in the Help Desk, and eventually move out of that entirely
- Move all blogging and newsletter activities into OneStep, so that I can accomplish these WHILE creating my fiction and nonfiction.
- Beat my great-grandmother's 103 years of alert, cognizant, functional life, but skip the soap operas in favor of creating cool stuff.

The actual putting of this into action starts with keeping my promise of six hours a day. A timer is going to be running from now on. I'll pause it for food and bathroom breaks, but when it hits six, I'll save my work and close the office.

Checking the outcome will be the work of the rest of my life.

My references (all sources open in new tabs):

- Cancer and stress: the psychologist and oncologist point of view (Argues that other risk factors—smoking, drinking, and obesity—cloud the connection between stress and cancer. I don't have any of the noted risk factors. <http://www.hoajonline.com/jctr/2049-7962/3/6>
- *Relationships between perceived workload, stress and oxidative DNA damage:* <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s004200000209>
- *Changes of immunoregulatory cells induced by psychological and physical stress: relationship to plasma catecholamines:* <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1576968/pdf/clinexpimmunol00139-0136.pdf>
- *Psychosocial Modifiers of Immunocompetence in Medical Students:* <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.322.7375&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Contrary view: Stressors, stress response, and cancer

recurrence: a systematic review. (This is survey-based—that is, reviewing and commenting on work done by others—and as such I don't give it high confidence, but I do include it as proof that links between stress and cancer still theoretical, and not considered fact.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23619331>

ARTICLES FOR GENERAL READERSHIP:

- Stress and Cancer:
<http://blogs.webmd.com/cancer/2012/07/stress-and-cancer.html>

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