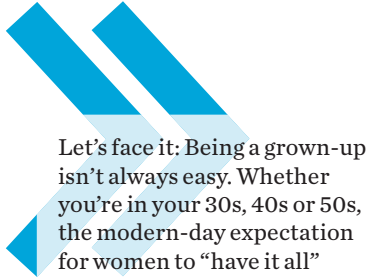




LIFESTRESS SOS

Sometimes, staying on top of “life things”—be it sorting out a leaky washing machine, facing that “So, what are we?” moment in a relationship, or just trying to juggle your schedule to fit in everything from the gym, to your work commitments, to your friends and family (or simply deep conditioning your hair)—isn’t an easy feat in today’s constantly on-the-go-world. We get it. Which is why we’ve gone to the experts to help us figure out how to make sure even if we have 99 problems, these won’t be among them.

By Yi-Hwa Hanna



Let's face it: Being a grown-up isn't always easy. Whether you're in your 30s, 40s or 50s, the modern-day expectation for women to "have it all" has left many of us feeling like not only can we have and do anything—if only we put our minds to it—but that we're almost obligated to. With the rise of girl-power has come the rise of the superwoman, and with it, the expectation that we're all meant to have perfect hair, glowing skin, a great career, a fantastic relationship, and a killer wardrobe to dress our insanely fit bodies in.

This pressure to be "perfect" isn't restricted to grown women, either: According to *The Triple Bind*, a new book by University of California, Berkeley, psychologist Stephen Hinshaw, the imperative for teenage girls to be smart and successful, caring and sweet, and athletic and attractive, is leading the next generation of women to feel as though they need to be models of female perfection 100% of the time—and the stress this causes is leading to a mental health crisis. The empowerment of the modern woman has come at a price, and the burden of trying to manage the traditional role of our gender alongside the expectations of today has left many of us collapsing under its weight.

New findings from the University of California, Berkeley, also show that chronic stress can trigger long-term changes in our brain structure and function—leaving us more prone to mental problems such as anxiety and mood



Feel like your life is piling up on top of you? It's ok to ask for a little help!

Research shows that chronic stress can trigger long-term changes in brain structure and function, leaving us prone to mental problems. /

disorders, not to mention learning difficulties. Intense chronic stress can also lead to physiological changes: According to researchers from the University of Kyoto in Japan, the increase in body temperature that can manifest from mental stress—known as psychological stress-induced hyperthermia—can lead to a condition called psychogenic fever, bringing about intense fatigue. Further research from the Ruhr-Universität

Bochum in Germany claims that exposure to permanent stress can even damage our immune system.

No matter how big or small your problems may seem, if they're leaving you constantly frazzled, don't ignore them. It's time to 'fess up to the fact that at times, the struggle of dealing with even the basic tasks of daily life *is* real... and that we could use a little help. We're here to get you started.

THE PROBLEM:

Your credit card debt seems to be spiralling out of control (not least because you feel like you need to always keep up with the Kardashians) and you want to start being responsible about clearing that up, but you don't even know where to start, and the bills just keep on coming.

TAKE CONTROL:

First things first: It's time to get your head out of the sand and face up to the facts. "Look at your credit card statement to start with, and see what your expenses are like. Differentiate between the necessities and "nice-to-haves." You have to be strong, however, so as not to fall into the social pressure traps of overspending. You will need

to understand that something has to change in your lifestyle. Effectively, it is a mental shift," says Ambareen Musa, CEO and Founder of SouqAlMal.com. To begin the clean-up process, Ambareen suggests first cutting out any non-essentials, to allow yourself some breathing room with which to pay off your debts. Once that's done, she then recommends looking at how much you can afford to spend on your credit card that will allow you to pay it off every month—in full. "This will ensure that no interest is borne on the credit card, and it also ensures that you are living within your means. Ask yourself if you really need to have the latest gadget or the latest fashion item—how much would those material items change you as a person and how long does the satisfaction last?" she says, continuing: "Being financially in control has a lot to do with your sense of security and state of mind. Being secure and accepting the lifestyle that you can afford are critical. Look at your bills and see where you can save in simple steps like shutting off lights when not using them, using the metro instead of

Salik, controlling your phone bills and even eating out less.”

THE PROBLEM:

You can't afford to live on your own but your flatmates are driving you crazy and you're too afraid to broach subjects like shared bills and dirty dishes to how noisy they are at night for fear of making the living situation too awkward.

TAKE CONTROL:

Banish the guilt, and don't hesitate to set boundaries and be assertive about what you want with your flatmates. “As we value ourselves, we are to value and ultimately honour our own needs,” says Kelly Armatage, a Coach and Cognitive Behavioural Therapist and creator of A.S.K. (A Serenity Kit), a self-help guide designed to be a therapist in a kit (aserenitykit.com). “If people are overstepping the line or mistreating us in any way, we can choose to self-sacrifice and over-give by allowing them to do this, which will just create resentment and others taking us for granted. Or we can teach people how to treat us with respect, by setting a boundary and letting them know what we need.” Next time they do something that irks you, remind yourself that you have no need to feel guilty and that setting those boundaries is better for all of you in the long run, then calmly express your needs to them, so you can resolve the issue before it turns toxic, Kelly suggests.

THE PROBLEM:

The new guy you've been dating is great but he keeps putting pressure on you to commit to a more serious relationship—which you're not ready for yet, especially with a time limit ticking.

TAKE CONTROL:

“There are different stages of couple relationships,” says Ebru Goksu, a Life, Relationship Systems and Personal Branding Coach

(unlockedpotentials.com).

Before we're ready to commit to someone, we move through phases of readiness—where we obtain a clear vision of what we need and want in a partner or relationship—then attraction, Ebru explains. In the pre-commitment phase, we may ask ourselves, “Am I setting myself up for failure, is this a good choice, or is this the right relationship for me?” she adds, explaining that this transitional period can lead to feelings of anxiety, possibly even triggering relationship saboteurs such as bringing unpleasant past experiences to the surface. “We simply get edged-out when this big change happens in our life. This is very normal: We are being challenged, and that's absolutely ok!” Ebru says. To help deal, she suggests first scanning your feelings, so you can be honest with yourself about what you really need. “[Ask yourself] meaningful questions: What do I want and need? What's real about this relationship? What's important to me? What's possible? What's holding me back? What am I scared of?” she adds. Most importantly, Ebru says, ask yourself what your vision is—an internal image of what you want for your life that will drive your energy, your wants and needs, and your choices. She also suggests having a heart-to-heart with your partner about how you feel, what you're afraid of and what would shift things, and how they might shift, to help you explore what would be possible if you stopped fighting the changes.

THE PROBLEM:

You're constantly plugged into social media and you find it almost impossible to switch off—both mentally and physically—whether it's out of work obligations, peer pressure, or simply FOMO.

TAKE CONTROL:

“Calculate the hours per week [that] you're spending on

Is your stress ball feeling the strain? Try a new tack!



distraction, as opposed to creation,” Kelly says. “If it's two hours a day, that's 56 hours a month of distracting, non-value activity. You could have written a few chapters of a book in that time, or formed a six-pack through exercise, or have been on the way to achieving some dream goals. Successful people limit their time on social media, because they are establishing successful, powerful and purposeful lives,” she says. Looking at how much time, energy and effort you put into it as a mathematical equation may make it easier to put things into perspective. While we love Instagram as much as the next girl, it's important to draw a line between how much time we spend on it—

either posting about our lives or looking at other peoples'—and actually going out and living full lives of our own. Studies show it takes us about 21 to 66 days to form a new habit, so for the next month, try setting yourself a daily limit—instead of logging on to social media every single time you get on your phone, set yourself certain times of the day where you allow yourself to “check in”—and be aware of how long you're spending online each time. If you need to, try setting alarms for when you can log in, and when you must switch off.

THE PROBLEM:

You haven't had a raise in forever and know for a fact that you're being paid less



We get edged out by big life changes. Ask yourself: *What do I want and need? What's important to me?* What am I scared of? /

that, you feel like it's literally impossible to switch your brain off, to the point where you're struggling to focus on everyday conversations or even fall sleep at night.

TAKE CONTROL:

Be honest: Are you over-committing yourself? Is there anything in your life that you could cut out? While in our quest to be superwomen, we all fall victim to trying to cram too much in, it's important to occasionally reassess what is actually essential, and what we can—or may need to—cut out of our lives. “This is a typical case of poor planning, lack of self focus and burn-out. Here, procrastination will come into play, as well as insomnia and low energy levels. It is essential to take regular breaks for self care,” Kelly says. When you feel like things are getting a little too much to handle, it's ok to let yourself take a break. Kelly suggests trying meditation, a little nap, journaling, a little walk, or some yoga. “Anything to detach the mind. Once detached, you will find your mind has the focus, energy and direction to re-commit to the to-do list,” she says, adding that removing tasks via delegation—it's also ok to admit that you can't always do

everything on your own—or taking a new approach to your scheduling and brainstorming for solutions for persistent issues can help lower your stress levels.

THE PROBLEM:

You're so busy that although you don't lack motivation—in fact, you're actually dying to hit the gym—you just don't have the time and are always so shattered that when you do make it, you have zero energy to even wash your hair let alone lift a weight. You're starting to feel like you are slowly watching your muscles atrophy, and feel more sad and resentful about it each day.

TAKE CONTROL:

We get it—when life gets busy, and you have to drop your six-times-a-week gym habit cold turkey, you feel like you're letting yourself down if you only work out once or twice a week, if at all. The key here is to make “Little but intense and often” your new mantra. Try drawing out two new workout regimes for yourself: One for “good times” and the other for “busy times.” When life allows you the time for it, you can enjoy the variety of activities that you normally do, from paddleboarding and boxing to swimming and the weights room at your fave gym. When you know you're about to hit a busy time of the month or year, switch over to your efficiency plan, where convenience and getting the most out of a short span of time—be it through High Intensity Interval Training, short and intense sprints in your workouts, or just hitting your building's rusty old gym instead of the fancy one you have a membership in—is the name of the game. Think of it like the power-saving mode when your phone is running low on battery. Schedule in a couple of workouts like you would appointments, and try waking up just 15 minutes earlier in the mornings to help fire up your metabolism for

than some of your peers—even if you've performed just as well as, if not better than, them...and it's making you lose motivation and your sense of self-worth more each day.

TAKE CONTROL:

“First, you have to understand that asking for a raise is very similar to asking someone to invest in you. Do you have a solid, convincing reason to support your case?” says Ambareen. Preparing an argument in favour of your salary raise is your first step, she adds. “Explain how you have added value at work and why you are indispensable to the company. List all of your major achievements and demonstrate how you have put your skills, judgement and expertise into action

to overcome challenges.

If you can quantify your accomplishments, that's even better—especially where revenue or savings are concerned,” she says, adding: “To make an even stronger case, look at what pay rates are for jobs similar to yours and you can then prove that you are underpaid by market rates. Be confident and rational when approaching your superiors, and use a logical approach to your request. A major factor that affects your credibility is how much you believe you deserve that promotion or raise.”

THE PROBLEM:

You have what seems like a constantly never-ending to-do list, and as a result of

the rest of the day. Even squeezing some squats into your lunchbreak can help maintain your fitness levels, so that when you *do* have the time to pick up on your more regular routine again, it won't feel quite as intimidating. And when you do have the time to fit in your regular workouts, give them your all!

THE PROBLEM:

Dealing with paperwork and bureaucracy in this region can be a nightmare. Fact. But when you need to move house, buy a new car, renew your visa, and set up your DEWA account all in the span of a couple of months, it feels like you're drowning in an avalanche of the stuff—not to mention you don't know how you'll get it all done without taking a week off work to do so. You wonder, how do other people do this?

TAKE CONTROL:

"By allowing this paperwork to mount up over time, you will create a task that is just overwhelming. Manageable ten minute tasks daily of admin, filing [and so on] will keep things easy and do-able," Kelly says. "Another good mindset to have with arduous tasks is to mantra to ourselves 'I love doing paperwork,'" she continues, explaining: "As we repeat this statement over and over, we can actually approach the job in an emotional state of joy and perform the task at hand with flow. Any task can feel wonderful, if we have a positive emotional state and are living fully in the moment." To make sure things don't pile up with a

non-negotiable deadline unexpectedly, sit down with your organiser every few months and write down key dates to remember—with a reminder in advance. Know you need to have your car serviced in June? Write in a first reminder for early May, then a second reminder just before, so you can plan it into your schedule. Got an impending move when you know your visa runs out at the same time? See if you can switch one of them to be earlier, or try to book time off work to deal with it in advance. If even that's not possible, try to ensure you keep all other distractions during that hectic week to a minimum so you have the energy to deal with them.

THE PROBLEM:

You enjoy cooking and are beyond sick of ordering in deliveries night after night, but simply don't have the time to cook by the time you've left work, battled traffic, and hit the gym, let alone go out and buy some groceries. Are you doomed to takeout forever?

TAKE CONTROL:

Don't fret—just find a middle ground. Rather than setting yourself expectations of whipping up a Pinterest-worthy dinner each night, a solution that involves a few shortcuts is more realistic, and totally ok. Save the fancy dinners for another time, and pick easy recipes that involve just a few ingredients, or only one or two pots and pans to wash up so the overall effort feels less monumental. Don't have time to hit the grocery store? Many supermarkets



At times things won't go to plan. But learning peaceful, self-forgiving and non-stressful reactions to life's external 'stuff' will take you a long way.

offer to-your-door delivery services that allow you to order online—try supermart.ae, grocery.geantonline.ae or trolley.ae. If you're in need of speciality items, ripeme.com, biorganicstore.com and glutenfree-supermarket.ae all offer online ordering and a home delivery service. Alternatively, why not try out one of the super-convenient home cooking delivery plan services? Companies such as CookABox.com and DinnerTime.me can send you a box containing all of the ingredients you need to make a delicious, nutritious and home-cooked meal, with even the portion sizes already measured out. You can order as many portions as you need, and can opt for either a one-

time meal or a week's worth for a truly no muss, no fuss home-cooking solution.

THE PROBLEM:

Your life is scheduled down to the minute, to the point where every time you're driving around in traffic—usually late—you feel like you're having a heart attack. How do you keep calm and still keep all the balls you're juggling in the air?

TAKE CONTROL:

"Audiobooks on self-development subjects are wonderful to have in the car to keep our minds motivated, calm and focused. It is also a great way to rewire the mindset, emotional state and behaviours. At times we will be late and at times things will not go according to plan. But,



Drowning in mounds of paperwork? Just take it one step at a time.

if we are going to react with stress every time, we are just sweating the small stuff. Learning peaceful, self-forgiving and non-stressful reactions to life's external 'stuff' will take us a long way," Kelly advises. Next time you're stuck in traffic during a manic day, try putting on a calming audiobook or choose music that you know will ease your frazzled nerves, and take a few deep breaths. Our bodies react to stress and anxiety with a "fight or flight" system that leaves us hyper-alert with an increased heart rate, and research shows that practising tried-and-tested relaxation techniques can reduce stress by lowering blood pressure, slowing our heart rate and increasing

blood flow to our major muscles. Try and visualise some peaceful mental imagery, and inhale as deeply as possible through your nose, feeling your chest expand with it, before exhaling slowly through your mouth. Repeat this a few times until you feel calm.

THE PROBLEM:

A lot of your friends have gotten married, and while you're super happy for them, you've started to feel like a third (or 5th, or 7th...) wheel when you go out with them. Their constant barrage of questions about your love life—which seems like the only part of your life they're interested in hearing about—makes you feel like until

you're coupled up, you're not of as much value to them anymore. This isn't only hurtful and frustrating, it also makes you feel like you've turned into *Bridget Jones*. You're happy with your fabulous single life, and are tired of feeling like you have to constantly defend it around them—and you're wondering why they seem to go out of their way to make you feel like you no longer fit in with them now that you're not part of the "married club."

TAKE CONTROL:

As much as you may be dreading it, try talking to your friends about how they're making you feel—if you don't feel comfortable doing this with them as a group, then try speaking to each couple

individually. If they still don't get it, it may be time to reassess whether the friendship is worth the negative energy. "If the 'married club' cannot accept your single status, find it a threat, or are placing conditions on you in any way, it's time to join a new club," says Kelly. "If you truly are proud of your single status, then you will naturally emit that to others and you can easily move away from those that judge you. High self-esteem individuals have acceptance for themselves and others, no matter what state other people's lives are in. So go ahead and find a club of friends that celebrate your relationship status and you, no matter what," she says.