

life & style

By Ross Chainey and Steff Sanchez, 19/08/2009 07:02

The rise of 'tanorexia' and other modern day afflictions

Our lifestyles have changed so much in recent years that it was only a matter of time before experts and lab boffins began to use medical terms to describe distinctly modern maladies such as sun-bed addiction, online hypochondria and lack of sleep due to a hectic lifestyle. We take a look at these 21st century conditions and examine whether they are cause for concern or have simply been created to grab a headline and scare people.



Tanorexia

British teenagers are apparently facing a skin cancer timebomb due to their obsession with sunbeds. A tan is an important fashion statement to any teen but doctors have now coined the term 'tanorexia' to describe the spiralling number of youngsters, primarily female, putting their health at risk as they go in search of the perfect tan.

The situation is in fact so bad that the British Medical Association and Cancer Research UK called for a ban on under 16s using tanning salons. The term 'tanorexia' may sound frivolous but researchers have also just discovered that frequent tanning is akin to a drug addiction; ultraviolet light (found in both natural sunlight and tanning beds) releases endorphins and create a feeling of euphoria. Meanwhile, a study carried out at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Centre found that frequent tanners, when given endorphin blockers, experienced withdrawal symptoms.

c And with skin cancer now the fastest growing form of the disease in the UK (up 43% in the last decade), this is one modern malady we have to take seriously.

Athletica nervosa

Lifestyle magazines and television shows are often criticised for promoting super-skinny models and endorsing the 'size-zero' body shape, which some say can lead to women, young and old, developing a well-known eating disorder such as bulimia and anorexia.

But now a new condition has been recognised, and this time it is health and fitness magazines that are in the line of fire. Athletica nervosa, which occurs when someone is obsessed with exercising, has actually been around for a while and is most commonly recognised in competitive athletes, but new research shows that men who read health and lifestyle magazines are the latest victims.

21st century lifestyle sins

It has been called the 'new lads' disorder', and the culture promoted by magazines is apparently to blame. Images of impossibly good-looking women and supremely sculpted male physiques are leading some men to embark on excessive fitness regimes.

David Giles, a psychologist at Winchester University, worked on the research and said: "The more such magazines a man reads the more likely he is to be anxious about his physique. Men who read the most lads' mags seem to internalise the appearance ideals portrayed to them. Models in these magazines are impossibly good-looking and seeing them can make readers anxious about their own bodies."

Drunkorexia

It may seem disrespectful to sufferers of proper eating disorders to give an official title to what is effectively binge-drinking, but that is what researchers did recently when they coined the phrase 'drunkorexia.'

The 'condition' is used to describe young women who skip meals to allow them to drink heavily and not put on weight. Not surprisingly, the phenomenon is most common among university students faced with the need to stay slim but, at the same time, the desire to drink their way through higher education.

How to get the perfect night's sleep

Some experts estimate that one in three women aged between 18 and 23 limit their intake of food calories so they can then drink without putting on weight. Liver specialist Professor Roger Williams, however, has a word of warning: Alcohol taken without food is much more dangerous because it is absorbed much more quickly. There is also evidence nutritional deficiencies may make liver disease worse."

Semi-somnia

Feeling a bit tired and run down? Do you drag yourself out of bed in the morning and use your computer keyboard as a pillow for the rest of the day? You could be one of the estimated 30 million Britons suffering from a condition known as semi-somnia, a so-called medical 'condition' identified recently by sleep expert Dr Neil Stanley.

Dr Stanley said: "A huge number of people are, often without realising it, battling with persistent low-grade exhaustion due to a combination of lack of sleep or poor quality sleep. Around 75% of the population admit to waking up exhausted every day, but many are wrongly blaming other factors like lack of exercise or a poor diet.

Could you have semi-somnia?

So what causes it? Dr Stanley blames the explosion of semi-somnia on our busy lifestyles and hefty workload, making it increasingly difficult for people to switch off and go to sleep, no matter how tired they are.

Cyberchondria

The wealth of health information on the internet undoubtedly has its benefits, but it can spell big trouble for people who are natural born worriers or, more likely, not being medically qualified they get the diagnosis wrong.

General practitioners in the UK have noticed a huge rise in the number of patients who comment that they have used the internet to read up on diseases and conditions and are convinced that their symptoms can only mean one thing: serious illness.

In fact, medical professionals have become so exasperated at the volume of people who frantically search online for detailed information on their medical problems that they have coined the phrase 'cyberchondria'.

Is your home making you ill?

The main problem with using the internet to find out more about your health is that much of this information is intended for medical experts and the average man on the street may find it hard to interpret. Information on the web may also be wrong, or could have been compiled by companies or individuals trying to sell a particular product.

And the one thing a computer can never know is your medical history – which is why there is no substitute for your local doctor.

Technoholic

Can you type a text faster than a speed of light, or find that you can't go anywhere without constantly looking at your Blackberry (which people now refer to as 'crackberries')? If so, then you may be one of the 33% of the country that academics say may be addicted to technology.

A study by Professor Nada Kakabadse of Northampton University found that up to a third of the 360 people who took part in a study felt deprived if they were separated from internet access or other device. The research also found that excessive use of the internet and technological devices cause social withdrawal, relationship problems and even physical sickness.

12 workplace health sins

Professor Kakabadse, said: "Your judgment is impaired. Equally your decision making processes are impaired. It's addiction to portable technology, which you take with you practically to bed, the cinema, to the theatre, to a dinner party. The symptoms are, like with any other addiction, that people spend more time using their technology than spending it in socialising or in family time."

Meanwhile, a 2006 article in the journal Perspectives in Psychiatric Care said that formally recognising this problem as a genuine addiction is the first step to helping sufferers. So, if you can't last five minutes without thinking about your inbox, don't worry, you are definitely not alone.

Oniomania

With the world economy getting tight, spenders should keep their purse strings tighter. Many Britons, however, are plagued by packed closets riddled with scores of unworn shoes and jumpers with tags still attached. These

remnants of 'retail therapy' are an indication of another modern malady.

Shopaholics, otherwise known as oniomaniacs, suffer from a compulsive desire to buy things. The disease is reaching epidemic proportions; it is estimated that one in 10 of Britons suffer from compulsive spending. The number jumps among women, with one in five displaying symptoms.

To avoid crippling, Manolo Blahnik-induced debt sit down and have a think before you charge and weigh your options. Yes, an outfit might be cute— but is it worth that portion of your salary? Will you wear it enough to justify the purchase? Be careful: you might later regret the impulse when there is no money afterwards for socializing in your pretty frock. Cancel cards that you are overusing and keep a diary of how much money is being spent—and on what. Chances are seeing the numbers in black and white, and not just hanging up in your closet, will help curb spending.

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