

WHY AM I SO TIRED?

The Emotional And Physical Connection

You sit at a desk all day. You try to solve the mental challenges of work. The only physical activity you get is when you get up to go to a meeting room only to sit again through meetings about why nothing is getting done. At the end of the day you find yourself in traffic along with others who are all desperate to get home, but you are just trying to get to the gym knowing that if go straight home there is no way you are going out again. After finally making it to the gym you realize you are physically exhausted! Why? The only physical exertion of the day was when you changed rooms for a meeting, and yet you physically feel like you ran a marathon (or at least from what your friend described after running hers). The point is...it doesn't make any sense. You eat well, you get enough sleep, so why are you physically exhausted after a day of physical inactivity? It is because our brains control all the functions of the body and when they are on overload our bodies are also.

Dr. Hans Selye studied the physiological changes that took place in rats after being stressed. He came up with the theory of General Adaptation Syndrome or GAS. "GAS is the three-stage process that describes the physiological changes the body goes through when under stress." The stages are the same no matter what the stressor is: They are the Alarm Reaction Stage, the Resistance Stage and the Exhaustion Stage. The Alarm Stage is the initial reaction to stress: Cortisol levels increase, heart rate and blood pressure increase, and there is a shot of adrenaline. All to prepare for fight or flight. After the initial reaction comes the Resistance Stage where your body starts to calm down after the initial shock and tries to go back to homeostasis, the problem comes when the stressor remains present or there is one stress after another and the body cannot recover. This leads to the Exhaustion Stage where your physical, mental, and emotional sources get drained, leading to burnout, depression, anxiety, etc. <https://www.healthline.com/health/general-adaptation-syndrome#stages>.

In a study from the American Physiological Society another physical effect of mental exhaustion was a change in perceived effort. In this study participants were either mentally challenged or not before exercise. The same diet and form of exercise was performed by both groups. Physiological measures of heart rate, cardiac output, oxygen consumption, blood pressure and ventilation were measured. The two groups exercised to exhaustion and both stopped the exercise at the same perceived exertion. The mentally exhausted group however, stopped much sooner. They also started at a higher perceived exertion. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/02/090224132915.htm>

The point to these studies is that it has been found that mental exhaustion and physical exhaustion can affect each other. However, do not fret I have advice (you knew this was coming). Try your best to move around at work as much as possible: take stairs, stand at your desk, being as physically active as you can will give you more energy at the gym which will inevitably increase your “feel good” hormones. Another tip.... “Change it up” Try challenging yourself mentally with a new task, or new activity or hobby. Stimulating yourself mentally with an unfamiliar activity will help you feel more alert at work. The point is, your odd, misplaced feeling of exhaustion is not in your head...or is it?