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WORKERS FEELS
THEIR JOB IS TOO
STRESSFUL*

SHOCK TACTICS

For those times when smoke is about to burst out of your ears, swap your Topshop studs for the Alpha-Stim SCS – two clip-on earring-sized electrodes that attach to your ears and send an electric current into your brain. Don't worry, it's not like sticking your fingers in a socket – the current is pain-free and boosts the production of calming Alpha brain waves. Clever, huh? In fact, the device has been so successful in reducing anxiety that the British Army is now using it to treat post-traumatic stress disorder in soldiers returning from the front lines. Available for £299, from Themicrocurrentsite.co.uk.

SWITCH ON, CHILL OUT

Installing the latest stress-busting software on your PC could send your anxiety off into cyber space! The emWave Desktop program (£215 from Relax-uk.com) monitors your pulse rate through earplugs, transmits the info via USB and when your heart starts pounding into frazzled territory, pops up a screensaver telling you to chill. While the iStretch iPhone app offers a selection of do-at-your-desk videos designed to relieve muscle strain caused by hunching over your desk all day. Stretching decreases the production of stress hormones, too, so it's a calming investment at £1.19.

TAKE A BREATH

When was the last time you saw Cameron Diaz or Julia Roberts without a smile on their faces? OK, they probably have an army of PAs to keep their lives stress-free, but they also practise Qigong – the latest martial art taking the Hollywood serene scene by storm. Through specific poses, you learn how to control your breathing – perfect for lowering an about-to-burst pulse rate! "Instead of breathing from high up in the chest, Qigong teaches you to breathe from the abdomen," says hypnotherapist Jake Toby from London's BodyMind Medicine Centre. "This calms anxiety and conserves energy so you feel more relaxed." To find your nearest class visit UKtqf.co.uk.



Cameron Diaz stays stress-free with Qigong

CHOMP YOURSELF CALM WITH FRAZZLE-FIGHTING FOODS

TURKEY It might not be enough to avoid a Christmas lunch sprout-spat, but turkey is packed with tryptophan, an enzyme that encourages your brain to produce serotonin (a hormone that makes you feel happy and regulates sleep). Dates, honey and ice cream are also good sources. It can take an hour for tryptophan to reach the brain, so munch early for a sound snooze.

BANANAS When your blood is about to boil, don't hit the bottle – grab a banana! Packed with heart-loving potassium, one study* found that eating banana twice a day for a week can reduce blood pressure by 10 per cent. According to The Sleep Council, a banana and Marmite sandwich is the ideal pre-bed butty as both ingredients contain natural sleep boosters.

CUP OF TEA Research has confirmed that a good old cuppa can turn our "arrgghs" into "aahhs". In a study by University College London, levels of the stress hormone cortisol dropped by 47 per cent after testers sipped a cup of black tea.

CARBS We're not giving you the green light to embark on a pizza-and-chips fest, but carbs help to release stress-busting serotonin. Eating a baked potato or portion of rice can produce enough serotonin to counteract the stress of a whole day.

ALMONDS The ideal about-to-crack snack, almonds contain a chemical called phenylalanine, which tells our brain to produce mood-stabilising hormones like dopamine. You don't need lots – just a handful a day – to feel less on edge, and more at ease. Aaaaah!



Photography: Scape Studios; Photo: David Fisher; *Source: Medical 1995; Kallithea Media at College; India