



Cass Business School
CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Are you suffering from ‘wellness syndrome’?

Our obsession with health and happiness is making us feel worse – and January is the worst time for it, say researchers

Broken your New Year’s resolution to hit the gym or cut down on calories? It might not be a bad thing – our obsession with health and happiness could actually be working against us, academics claim.

Researchers at Cass Business School, part of City University London, and Stockholm University, in Sweden, argue a growing number of people are suffering from ‘wellness syndrome’, where they are increasingly fixated on health and happiness.

“This fixation on health and happiness often backfires,” said Professor Andre Spicer of Cass Business School. “An obsession with individual wellness actually makes some people more anxious, guilty, depressed and ultimately unhealthy, both physically and mentally. People are under pressure to keep up an appearance of being upbeat and happy, even when they are not.

“The pressure to maximise our wellness, which is ever-present at this time of the year, can make us feel worse. We have started to think that a person who is healthy and happy is a morally good person while people who are unhealthy and unhappy are moral failures.”

The pair weigh up the evidence in new book titled *The Wellness Syndrome* due to be published later this month. In it, they unearth stories of how the quest for health and happiness is leading to extreme consequences.

They say attempts by governments to control people’s health and moods are now being followed by big companies.

“For many years, governments have attempted to control how much people eat and drink, whether we smoke and exercise, and how happy we feel,” said Dr Carl Cederstöm of Stockholm University.

“More recently, big companies have got in on the act as well. They encourage employees to sign up to wellness plans which require them to adopt a healthy diet, exercise, quit smoking and cut down on their drinking.

“Some companies also closely monitor the private lives of their employees. By making life logging mandatory, they can collect intimate data such as people’s eating habits, sleep patterns and even toiletry routines.”

They give the example of a Swedish vehicle manufacturer where unhealthy employees are required to spend hours each week in company run health and fitness coaching sessions.

In the UK, there is a new exercise venture which offers city workers the opportunity to 'rave their way into the day'.

A Danish local council sends overweight people on seaside retreats where they are encouraged to locate their will-power.

In the US, college students at over 20 Universities are required to sign 'wellness contracts' before they can live in particular college accommodation. These contracts oblige them to participate live a healthy life style and engage in all manner of wellness enhancing activities.

Professor Spicer said a backlash against our obsession with wellness has already begun. "There are increasing groups of people who feel discriminated against by this obsession with health and happiness. They have started to form small sub-cultures which celebrate living an unhealthy life style. For instance, we look at the fat pride movement who celebrate the overweight body."

The Wellness Syndrome, by Professor André Spicer of Cass Business School, City University London and Carl Cederstöm of Stockholm University.

The book will be launched at Cass Business School, 106 Bunhill Row, London, EC1Y 8TZ on 13 January 2015, 6-8pm.

For more information about the book: <http://www.wellness-syndrome.com>

To order a review copy, please contact: Ginny Graham at Polity Press gigraham@wiley.com

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