



**Anxiety,
depression,
burnout. These
are just a few
consequences
of...**

...The perils of perfectionism

Lying on her bathroom floor, Natalie Trice took a shaky breath. Having just had a panic attack, she felt faint and weak. 'It was a family occasion and I was meant to be downstairs with my husband, Oliver, now 48, and my two boys, Eddie, 15, and Lucas, 13, but I just didn't have the energy to get up,' the 48-year-old from Devon remembers. 'I knew then that something had to change. I just couldn't go on the way that I had been.'

Natalie is a self-confessed perfectionist who has always set high standards for herself. 'During my 20s, I threw myself into my career in PR and I loved it. I quickly climbed the ladder and had high ambitions. Then, in 2006 I married Oliver, and we had the two boys. I did everything I could to keep up with work, as well as looking pulled together and being the best wife and mum I could be.'

Living in the Home Counties, Natalie found herself comparing

her life to the 'yummy mummies' in their idyllic houses. She not only wanted to have the perfect life, she wanted to be seen to have a perfect life too, which piled the pressure on even more.

Yet, last September, when she took on a role in a new company, things came to a head. 'Looking back, I think I knew on my first day that I'd made a mistake. It seemed that one person on the team didn't like me and, as I tried to impress them, my perfectionist side took over. Trying to make everything as good as possible, I started to question myself. I'd work long hours, even weekends, struggling over every last piece of work.'

Of course, this was still on top of helping her boys with their homework, running the house, organising the food shop, trying to keep up with friends and finding the best medical treatment for her father, who has Alzheimer's.

Natalie soon found herself in burnout. 'If I wasn't working, I was sleeping. I just felt so exhausted and anxious constantly. I lost all of my confidence. I couldn't focus on anything else, all of the joy in my life was gone. I didn't even have time to cook dinner. Instead, the boys lived off beige food or Oliver had to cook for them.'

Coach, mentor and founder of the people development company, High Definition You, Gitanjali Trevorrow-Seymour, believes that Natalie is just one of countless women who are suffering in the name of perfectionism.

'A lot of people wear their perfectionism as a badge of honour, as something to strive towards,' Gitanjali explains. 'And in many ways, it can be a good thing – taking pride in your work, and believing if you're going to do something, you want to do it well.'

'Yet it can be extremely bad for you. I don't know a single perfectionist who

doesn't experience fear – and stress – regularly.'

And sadly, women tend to be perfectionists more than men, as Professor Cary Cooper,

workplace as well – without giving up their previous responsibilities. They now have numerous primary roles to juggle, all of which they

where would they be now?'

It is not just starting a task which perfectionists suffer with either. Gitanjali explains that when they are actually doing something, perfectionists are hyper-aware and hyper-critical of how they are performing. And they are reluctant to finish it because they're never convinced it is correct or good enough. By placing so much pressure on themselves, they're making the whole process harder.

And, as she reminds us, you don't need to be a perfectionist to be a high achiever. High achievers are decisive, able to take risks and are happy to be on a learning journey – things that perfectionists don't feel comfortable with.

Gitanjali argues that we should replace the popular saying, 'practice makes perfect', with 'practice makes progress'. 'Because progress is what we should be striving for,' she explains. 'After all, try to think of a situation or a task that you think went perfectly. I've never

known anyone be able to.' Thankfully Natalie has finally given up on her quest for perfection – and feels much better for it.

After talking to her husband, she quit her job just a few days later, and took a couple of quiet weeks to reassess her life. 'Now I work for myself and, while I do still set extremely high standards for myself and it is going very well, I've put some measures in place to stop me getting that low again,' she says.

'I no longer work at weekends and one of my favourite ways to relax is to take the boys down to the beach for an hour and have a coffee and a piece of cake. Rather than renting an office, I've joined a gym with a lovely lounge. So at least three times a week, I'll do a class or go for a swim and then work from there. My mental health has improved massively.'

And surely that is the one thing we shouldn't ever compromise on?

'I'd struggle over every last piece of work'

Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health at Manchester Business School, Manchester University, tells us.

'Women strive to give 100 per cent at work, while men are happy to give 80 per cent. Women want to do a fantastic job in the workplace, they want to be a fantastic mother, they want to have a fantastic home.'

Professor Cooper argues that the enormous demands on women are a societal issue.

'For centuries, their primary role was in the family and at home, but since the industrial revolution, women have gradually migrated into the

want to do as well as they can.

'But there is a price to pay for all of this, and that price is burnout.'

Gitanjali explains that not only is perfectionism bad for your mental health, but it is not an efficient way of working, or living. 'Procrastination and perfectionism are perfect bedfellows,' she explains. 'People become unwilling to start something because they're worried about not getting it just right. I often ask my clients to think back to when they started walking – if they had waited until they had got that "just right",

