

## Confessions of a Lateaholic By Lisa Schilling RN

Ok, it is time I come to grips with a very real problem. I am a lateaholic. There I said it. If you know me very well you will say, “Really, you are just coming to this?” If you don’t know me very well you might be surprised by my admission. In my nature, when I don’t understand why something happens, I will read and research until I can make sense of it. This issue is no different. I always knew I had a problem, and in fact it made me work even harder while I was at my destination. I work hard, stay late and put in extra effort, but for many reasons, I just don’t get anywhere early.

Now mind you, I am not always late. Often I am right on time, I mean right on the click. But I am never early. This fact troubled me. I know people with very little drive or ambition who can arrive early and are never late. So I set out to find out why someone as driven as myself, still struggled with such a simplistic issue. What I found was very interesting. I am an addict. There I have said it, an addict. “To what,” you say—to adrenaline.

What I discovered is that I use adrenaline like a drug to psych myself up to complete the numerous tasks I want to accomplish for the day. How do I do that? I unconsciously *create* emergent situations that require me to activate my fight or flight response. This releases my drug of choice, adrenaline.

Adrenaline is a potent, mind-altering narcotic. It’s legal and free, and the high it produces is very desirable. Addicts crave the next “fix” and will create situations that lead to the release of this powerful analgesic. It will manifest in a life filled with stimulants (notably caffeine), drama, challenges, crises and often danger. Even mundane events transform into big deals in order to trigger the response

created when the adrenals pump out their soothing euphoria.

Adrenaline, also known as epinephrine, is a hormone of the adrenal medulla. It is the most potent stimulant of the sympathetic nervous system. It produces increased heart rate and force of contraction, vasoconstriction (diminishing blood flow) or vasodilation (increasing blood flow), relaxation of bronchiolar and intestinal smooth muscle, glycogenolysis (sugar metabolism), lipolysis (fat metabolism), and other metabolic effects, according to “The American Heritage Stedman’s Medical Dictionary.”

Many other people suffer from this problem and never fully understand why. Pro-athletes and daredevils come to mind. But often overlooked are the “Type A” personalities, the driven, wired, busy or intense people. But also the procrastinator, who agonizes to the last minute, sweats through a project, heart racing because it’s down to the wire. For parents, there is always an emergency or practice or lesson or meal to prepare. People look for an “acceptable” way to make it all work.

Dr. Hart. Fidgetiness says, restlessness, pacing, leg kicking, finger drumming, intense gum chewing, and feelings of irritability and aggressiveness are all signs of a possible adrenaline addiction. He recommends four concrete steps to reduce the need for adrenaline:

- **Incorporate healthy physical activity into the life of your family.** Regular exercise burns off excess adrenaline.
- **Tolerate frustration.** Learn to calm down and accept the uneven flow of life.
- **Practice disengagement techniques.** Implementing the mental strategy of letting things go puts you and your children in neutral gear...coasting smoothly.
- **Slow down.** Be more selective with scheduling appointments, activities and obligations—allow yourself breathing room.

Using this cognitive approach, you can treat the issue as a behavior instead of

an addiction. It is vital to develop specific new behaviors to replace the harmful old ones. It will take patience and commitment to succeed. For me, it is time to face this issue and create some concrete steps to alter old patterns. Understanding what I get from the behavior is an important part of changing it.

Why have I chosen this as a wellness matter? It is because it is intertwined with total health. Many of us have hidden unhealthy behaviors that we do not admit to readily or take the time to understand. I challenge you to look at a behavior you are not proud of and find out what payoff you get from it. By learning this, you take the first step toward managing your situation. Become an active self-manager and face the unhealthy behaviors that are becoming roadblocks to your ultimate success. You have the power to alter your course if you choose to do so. Choose wisely!