Stress management in work and life

1. Break bad habits that contribute to workplace stress

Many of us make job stress worse with negative thoughts and behavior. If you can turn these self-defeating habits around, you’ll find employer-imposed stress easier to handle.

1. Resist perfectionism.

When you set unrealistic goals for yourself, you’re setting yourself up to fall short. Aim to do your best; no one can ask for more than that. Being a high achiever can help you feel good about yourself and excel at work. Being a perfectionist, on the other hand, can drive you and the people around you little nuts. Especially in busy, fast-paced jobs, you may not be able to do everything perfectly. But striving to just do your best and then congratulating yourself on the effort is a good strategy. Your results will actually be better and you’ll be much less stressed at work.

1. Flip your negative thinking.

If you focus on the downside of every situation and interaction, you’ll find yourself drained of energy and motivation. Try to think positively about your work, avoid negative co-workers, and pat yourself on the back about small accomplishments, even if no one else does.

1. Don’t try to control the uncontrollable.

Many things at work are beyond our control, particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control, such as the way you choose to react to problems.

1. Look for humor in the situation.

When used appropriately, humor is a great way to relieve stress in the workplace. When you or those around you start taking work too seriously, find a way to lighten the mood by sharing a joke or funny story.

1. Clean up your act.

If your desk or work space is a mess, file and throw away the clutter; just knowing where everything is can save time and cut stress.

1. Walk at lunch

Exercise is an age-old stress buster. Organize groups to take short walks throughout the day at work. You might have one group that heads out for a stroll over the lunch hour—or maybe a group that fights the afternoon slump with a walk around the block. Regardless of when, where or how long, offering employees the option to take a short walk during the workday can be an excellent break, as well as the exercise boost they need.

1. Switch To Decaf

Caffeine can be a natural anxiety booster. It gets the energy and emotions flowing and can really increase stress. Most people need a little caffeine to get them going in the morning, but after lunch it isn’t usually necessary. Consider switching the break room coffee pot to decaffeinated coffee in the afternoon. That way, you aren’t adding caffeine into potentially stressful situations—which is like adding gasoline to a fire.

1. Track your stressors.

Keep a journal for a week or two to identify which situations create the most stress and how you respond to them. Record your thoughts, feelings and information about the environment, including the people and circumstances involved, the physical setting and how you reacted. Did you raise your voice? Get a snack from the vending machine? Go for a walk? Taking notes can help you find patterns among your stressors and your reactions to them.

1. Develop healthy responses.

Instead of attempting to fight stress with fast food or alcohol, do your best to make healthy choices when you feel the tension rise. Exercise is a great stress-buster. Yoga can be an excellent choice, but any form of physical activity is beneficial. Also make time for hobbies and favorite activities. Whether it's reading a novel, going to concerts or playing games with your family, make sure to set aside time for the things that bring you pleasure. Getting enough good-quality sleep is also important for effective stress management. Build healthy sleep habits by limiting your caffeine intake late in the day and minimizing stimulating activities, such as computer and television use, at night.

1. Establish boundaries.

In today's digital world, it's easy to feel pressure to be available 24 hours a day. Establish some work-life boundaries for yourself. That might mean making a rule not to check email from home in the evening, or not answering the phone during dinner. Although people have different preferences when it comes to how much they blend their work and home life, creating some clear boundaries between these realms can reduce the potential for work-life conflict and the stress that goes with it.

1. Take time to recharge. To avoid the negative effects of chronic stress and burnout, we need time to replenish and return to our pre-stress level of functioning. This recovery process requires “switching off” from work by having periods of time when you are neither engaging in work-related activities, nor thinking about work. That's why it's critical that you disconnect from time to time, in a way that fits your needs and preferences. Don't let your vacation days go to waste. When possible, take time off to relax and unwind, so you come back to work feeling reinvigorated and ready to perform at your best. When you're not able to take time off, get a quick boost by turning off your smartphone and focusing your attention on non-work activities for a while.
2. Learn how to relax.

Techniques such as meditation, deep breathing exercises and mindfulness (a state in which you actively observe present experiences and thoughts without judging them) can help melt away stress. Start by taking a few minutes each day to focus on a simple activity like breathing, walking or enjoying a meal. The skill of being able to focus purposefully on a single activity without distraction will get stronger with practice and you'll find that you can apply it to many different aspects of your life.

1. Talk to your supervisor.

Employee health has been linked to productivity at work, so your boss has an incentive to create a work environment that promotes employee well-being. Start by having an open conversation with your supervisor. The purpose of this isn't to lay out a list of complaints, but rather to come up with an effective plan for managing the stressors you've identified, so you can perform at your best on the job. While some parts of the plan may be designed to help you improve your skills in areas such as time management, other elements might include identifying employer-sponsored wellness resources you can tap into, clarifying what's expected of you, getting necessary resources or support from colleagues, enriching your job to include more challenging or meaningful tasks, or making changes to your physical workspace to make it more comfortable and reduce strain.

1. Get some support.

Accepting help from trusted friends and family members can improve your ability to manage stress. Your employer may also have stress management resources available through an employee assistance program (EAP), including online information, available counseling and referral to mental health professionals, if needed. If you continue to feel overwhelmed by work stress, you may want to talk to a psychologist, who can help you better manage stress and change unhealthy behavior.

1. Listen to Music on the Drive Home

Listening to music brings many benefits and can offer an effective way to relieve stress after work. Combating the stress of a long day at work with your favorite music on the drive home can make you less stressed when you get home, and more prepared to interact with the people in your life.