

Stress at Work: Tips to Reduce and Manage Job and Workplace Stress

While some workplace stress is normal, excessive stress can interfere with your productivity and impact your physical and emotional health. And your ability to deal with it can mean the difference between success or failure. You can't control everything in your work environment, but that doesn't mean you're powerless—even when you're stuck in a difficult situation. Finding ways to manage workplace stress isn't about making huge changes or rethinking career ambitions, but rather about focusing on the one thing that's always within your control: you.

Coping with Work Stress in Today's Uncertain Climate

For workers everywhere, the troubled economy may feel like an emotional roller coaster. "Layoffs" and "budget cuts" have become bywords in the workplace, and the result is increased fear, uncertainty, and higher levels of stress. Since job and workplace stress increase in times of economic crisis, it's important to learn new and better ways of coping with the pressure.

Your emotions are contagious, and stress has an impact on the quality of your interactions with others. The better you are at managing your own stress, the more you'll positively affect those around you, and the less other people's stress will negatively affect you.

You can learn how to manage job stress.

There are a variety of steps you can take to reduce both your overall stress levels and the stress you find on the job and in the workplace. These include:

- **Taking responsibility** for improving your physical and emotional well-being.
- **Avoiding pitfalls** by identifying knee-jerk habits and negative attitudes that add to the stress you experience at work.
- **Learning better communication skills** to ease and improve your relationships with management and coworkers.

Recognize warning signs of excessive stress at work.

When you feel overwhelmed at work, you lose confidence and may become irritable or withdrawn. This can make you less productive and less effective in your job, and make the work seem less rewarding. If you ignore the warning signs of work stress, they can lead to bigger problems. Beyond interfering with job performance and satisfaction, chronic or intense stress can also lead to physical and emotional health problems.

Signs and Symptoms of Excessive Job and Workplace Stress

- Feeling anxious, irritable, or depressed
- Apathy, loss of interest in work
- Problems sleeping
- Fatigue
- Trouble concentrating
- Muscle tension or headaches
- Stomach problems
- Social withdrawal
- Loss of sex drive
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope

Common Causes of Excessive Workplace Stress

- Fear of being laid off
- More overtime due to staff cutbacks
- Pressure to perform to meet rising expectations, but with no increase in job satisfaction
- Pressure to work at optimum levels all the time

Reduce job stress by taking care of yourself.

When stress at work interferes with your ability to perform in your job or manage your personal life, or adversely impacts your health, it's time to take action. Start by paying attention to your physical and emotional health. When your own needs are taken care of, you're stronger and more resilient to stress. The better you feel, the better equipped you'll be to manage work stress without becoming overwhelmed.

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Taking care of yourself doesn't require a total lifestyle overhaul. Even small things can lift your mood, increase your energy, and make you feel like you're back in the driver's seat. Take things one step at a time, and as you make more positive lifestyle choices, you'll soon notice a reduction in your stress levels, both at home and at work.

Get moving.

Regular exercise is a powerful stress reliever even though it may be the last thing you feel like doing. *Aerobic exercise* (activity that raises your heart rate and makes you sweat) is a hugely effective way to lift your mood, increase energy, sharpen focus, and relax both the mind and body. For maximum stress relief, try to get at least 30 minutes of heart-pounding activity on most days. If it's easier to fit into your schedule, break up the activity into two or three shorter segments.

Make food choices that keep you going.

Low blood sugar can make you feel anxious and irritable, while eating too much can make you lethargic. Healthy eating can help you get through stressful work days. By eating small but frequent meals, you can help your body maintain an even level of blood sugar, keep your energy up, stay focused, and avoid mood swings.

Drink alcohol in moderation and avoid nicotine.

Alcohol temporarily reduces anxiety and worry, but too much can cause anxiety as it wears off. Drinking to relieve job stress may also eventually lead to alcohol abuse and dependence. Similarly, smoking when you're feeling stressed and overwhelmed may seem calming, but nicotine is a powerful stimulant—leading to higher, not lower, levels of anxiety.

Get enough sleep.

Not only can stress and worry cause insomnia, but a lack of sleep can leave you vulnerable to even more stress. When you're well rested, it's much easier to keep your emotional balance, a key factor in coping with job and workplace stress. Try to improve the quality of your sleep by keeping a sleep schedule and aiming for 8 hours a night.

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