

## REDUCING WORKPLACE STRESS

**D**o you have a demanding boss or difficult co-workers? Stacks of work to get done and not enough time? Everyone encounters job stress sooner or later — but that doesn't make it easier. There are many aspects of your work environment that you have no control over — but you can take action to manage stress so that work doesn't take a toll on your well-being.

### Stress Matters

Workplace stress has been linked to serious health problems — including heart attack. Your body releases greater amounts of the hormone cortisol in response to stress — stimulating an increased appetite for high-fat, high-sugar foods, and increasing fat storage in the abdomen. A study of workers coping with corporate restructuring and layoffs revealed that chronic job stress led to weight gain. Not surprisingly, consumption of high-fat, high-calorie vending machine snacks went way up during the most stressful periods. Research also shows that intense job stress is an independent risk factor for high blood pressure at work, home, and even while sleeping.

### Work Mindfully

Mindfulness is a way of zeroing in on the here and now instead of ruminating over the past, mulling over the future, or doing several things at once. Give your full attention to the task at hand, whether it's a call, a meeting, or a project. Scrolling through your messages while on a phone conference may feel productive — but in the long run, multitasking will only add to your stress and drain your energy.

### Be Nice

Get to know your co-workers by asking about their weekends, inviting their opinions, and eating lunch together. Collegial co-worker relationships make the workplace more pleasant for everyone — and studies even show that a positive outlook is contagious. Offer genuine compliments. Smile frequently — it'll boost your mood and encourage those around you to lighten up.

### Communicate Well

Miscommunication is the root of many workplace conflicts. Clarify details and expectations for every job task. Check for understanding if you're the one dishing out assignments.

Annoying co-workers are best dealt with immediately and directly — or the behavior may get worse. If your co-worker distracts you with loud, lengthy personal calls, talk with her



privately instead of just getting frustrated. If it continues, speak with your manager.

### Shake It Off

You can let yourself get wound up and upset about things that happen at work — or you can respond differently. Instead of stewing about a project that was dumped on you, could you view it as an opportunity to showcase your skills, talent, and teamwork — or speak with your supervisor? Instead of letting one grumpy customer get you down, can you focus on the 50 grateful customers you helped today? Take a few full, deep breaths to clear your mind and proceed down a more positive path.

### Practice Smart Self-Care

Regular exercise and good nutrition — along with time for fun and relaxation — boosts your ability to cope with stress. And when you're well-rested, stressors are more manageable. Consider taking a walk at break time, or meeting a friend for lunch. Learn relaxation breathing and stretching exercises to do at your desk. Choose high-energy, nutritious foods for meals and snacks. Cultivate a healthy sense of humor; look for the laughable moments in everyday life at work.

### Get Help

If your best efforts don't reduce your stress and talking with your manager doesn't help, seek advice from your human resources department or employee relations representative. Some employers offer employee assistance programs (EAP) that provide confidential, 24/7 phone consultation with professional counselors for personal matters and workplace issues. If your employer offers this benefit, don't hesitate to use it.

### Make a Change

Life is too short to spend it in a toxic workplace — and living with chronic stress isn't a long-term solution. No job is stress-free, but if your current job isn't a good match for your interests, talents, and goals, create a plan to move on. Paint a realistic picture of your dream job by talking with others in your desired line of work before you make the leap.

### Additional Resources

The American Institute of Stress Job Stress Self-Test  
[www.stress.org/topic-workplace.htm](http://www.stress.org/topic-workplace.htm)

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center  
Mindful Meditations  
[marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22](http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22)

University of Pittsburgh Medical Center -Stress  
Coping: Relaxation Techniques  
[healthylifestyle.upmc.com/StressRelaxation.htm](http://healthylifestyle.upmc.com/StressRelaxation.htm)

*If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at [www.acefitness.org/GetFit](http://www.acefitness.org/GetFit) and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts.™*



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