

Managing Workplace Stress: Plan Your Approach

Stress is a physical response to an undesirable situation. Mild stress can result from missing the bus, standing in a long line at the store or getting a parking ticket. Stress can also be severe. Divorce, family problems, an assault, or the death of a loved one, for instance, can be devastating. One of the most common sources of stress, both from mild and severe, is work.

How much stress should you be able to handle?

“You are too stressed when the 5 telltale signs appear.”

- You feel irritable.
- You have trouble sleeping—you’re either sleepy all of the time or you can’t sleep at all.
- You don’t get any joy out of life.
- You lose your appetite or can’t stop eating.
- You have relationship problems and no longer get along with friends and family members.

Too much stress may appear in the form of illness, infertility or fatigue.

Chronic stress can damage your overall health, including:

- **Your Immune System.** Stress can suppress your immune system, making you more susceptible to viral infections, such as influenza, and bacterial infections, such as tuberculosis.
- **Your Cardiovascular Health.** Stress causes a more rapid heartbeat and may bring on chest pain (angina) and irregular heart rhythms (arrhythmia). Stress may even lead to a heart attack or stroke.

Acute Stress can cause uneasiness and concern, sadness, loss of appetite, alertness and a heightened sense of energy, suppression of the immune system, increased metabolism and use of body fats, and infertility.

Chronic Stress can cause anxiety and panic attacks, depression or melancholia, anorexia or overeating, irritability, lowered resistance to infections, diabetes or hypertension, absence of menstruation or loss of sex drive.

Tips to Relieve Stress

- Simplify your life. Cut out some activities or delegate tasks.
- Practice relaxation techniques such as controlling your breathing, clearing your mind and relaxing your muscles.
- Focus on one thing at a time. Don’t take work problems home or home problems to work.
- Keep a stress journal. Track what sets you off and learn to prioritize. Do what is most important first.
- Look for the positive. Consider the situation an opportunity to improve your life.
- Use humor to reduce or relieve tension.

Practice Healthy Habits

- **Exercise.** It relieves tension and provides a timeout from stressful situations.
- **Go to bed earlier.** More sleep makes you stronger and better able to handle day-to-day responsibilities.
- **Eat a good breakfast and lunch.** Keep your energy level high throughout your workday. Reduce or eliminate caffeine consumption. Caffeine is a stimulant and can aggravate your stress level.

Take a Break

- **Go on vacation.** Take some time off to rejuvenate yourself—even if it’s just one day midweek or a long weekend.
- **Set aside some personal time.** But limit time spent with negative people.
- **Do volunteer work or start a hobby.**
- **Stop for several mini breaks during your workday.** Take 30 seconds to look out the window or stretch.

Other Suggestions

Get a massage, indulge in a hot bath, practice relaxation techniques, pray or meditate, read a book, hug your family and friends, consider the value of pets—their love is unconditional.