



How to relieve workplace stress

Have you heard that more heart attacks occur on Mondays than any other day of the week? It's called Black Monday Syndrome. A feeling of anxiety and being trapped by uncontrollable workplace events causes your body to release chemicals known as stress hormones. Over time, this has a harmful effect on your health. Many experts believe that chronic stress is the cause of half of all illnesses, including heart disease.

For millions of Americans, the workplace is a major source of stress in their lives. It's unrealistic to think you can control everything at work, but you can have some control on how you react to work stressors, and how they ultimately affect your health. Here are some tips to help you tackle workplace stress:

Get a handle on your feelings. Maybe you have learned some techniques to manage stress, like getting regular exercise. Physical activity is a great way to combat the effects of chronic stress, but when something happens at work that you think of negatively, you may not be able to get away for some exercise. You need to detach yourself from those thoughts immediately. Instead of focusing on what just happened to make you angry or stressed, think of a time when something good happened to you at work. Or keep a picture of your family, your pet, or your favorite place at your desk or in your wallet. Focus on that picture and the good feelings you associate with it. For that moment, you'll be in a happier, more peaceful place.

Keep the lines of communication open. If the way things are done doesn't seem to be working, try talking to your supervisor about it. Suggest a team approach involving your coworkers. Working together as a group can help to relieve stress. Instead of putting the blame on someone for what's not working, try suggesting an idea that might actually work to solve the problem. Negative talk tends to come true. Positive attitudes are contagious!

Get control of your schedule. If you're involved in a lot of meetings, try not to have them scheduled back-to-back. Give yourself time to refresh before the next one. Allow yourself adequate time to work on other things that need to get done. Know your limits. When other people's expectations get to high, learn to say "no."

Because many companies are downsizing, many workers experience a different kind of job pressure. They're often asked to change work shifts, be "on-call" and forced to work mandatory overtime. If you can, reduce the amount of overtime you work. Again, keep the lines of communication open. Try to speak to your supervisor to see if you can work towards a more manageable schedule. Also, free up demands on your time from family and friends, especially when their demands are unnecessary and unimportant.

Use your time-off benefits. Everyone needs a break from the demands of work. Take your scheduled vacations or use personal leave benefits if needed. Give yourself time to relax and reenergize. And don't wait until it's scheduled; find time every day to unwind. Look for a quiet room to meditate, take a walk or just sit in a chair and listen to some relaxing music.

The goal of managing stress at work is not to get rid of it, but to get control of how it affects you.