

Managing **WORKPLACE STRESS**



Are you one of the one in three Canadians who says work stress is getting them down? If so, you can find ways to deal with the causes of stress and develop proactive strategies to help you reduce your stress and anxiety levels.

Of course, not all stress is bad stress. In fact, you need to have some stress in your life in order to perform at your very best. The key is to determine the right amount that will give you energy, enthusiasm and drive while not taxing your physical and mental well-being.

HERE ARE SOME STRATEGIES TO HELP YOU BETTER MANAGE YOUR STRESS AT WORK

Prioritize. At the end of each day, make a list of tasks you need to do the next day. The following morning, review your list and tackle each item in order of priority. Try to leave 20% of your day free for working on unexpected emergencies.

Limit interruptions. If you experience frequent interruptions from phone calls, emails, and co-workers stopping by for a chat, it's hard to get your work done on time. Try screening phone calls for their priority (let some go to voicemail) and set aside a single block of time for returning messages. Similarly, don't answer each e-mail when it arrives unless the matter is urgent. And if you have a door to your office, keep it closed for part of your workday to let colleagues know that you are busy and don't want to be interrupted.

Clarify expectations that others have of you. If your job expectations are not clear, or if the requirements of your work constantly change, stress and anxiety can build up. Consider speaking with your supervisor to clarify these expectations and strategies for meeting them.

Don't let conflicts grow. Interpersonal conflicts take a toll on our physical and emotional health and they can sometimes be difficult to escape. It's a good idea not to share your personal opinions about religion and politics and stay clear of colourful office humour. If you find yourself in a potential conflict situation with co-workers or a supervisor, seek advice from someone you trust in the organization.

Keep perfectionism in check. Strive to do your best, but don't worry about ensuring that everything you do is perfect. Focus on the big picture (e.g. how your work contributes to your organization's plans and strategy), learn from mistakes, and ask for help if you don't have a skill set to complete a task.

Do one thing at a time. Multi-tasking (e.g. working on a report while speaking on the phone) may seem like a good strategy but it doesn't usually improve productivity, efficiency, or accuracy. Focus on doing one thing at a time and doing it well.

MAKE A CHANGE!

If you believe that you're doing all you can to manage your workload but you still feel exhausted at the end of the day, it may be time to make a number of small changes in your personal and family life. You may be surprised at how a few small changes during the day can make a big difference to how you feel overall.

Wake early. Give yourself an extra 15 minutes (or more) each morning. By getting up earlier, you won't feel as rushed and your state of mind will be more calm. You can use this time to read the paper, do some stretch, meditate, or spend time with your family.

Cut back on caffeine. If you need a cup of coffee to start your day with a kick, go ahead. But be aware that too many cups of coffee in your day add to your body's stress levels and actually contributes to dehydration. Try substituting coffee with herbal teas, water, juice, or electrolyte-infused drinks.

Walk at lunch. A brisk walk at lunchtime can help you blow off steam, lift your spirits, and get you into better shape. At the very least take breaks during the day to stretch and do some full, deep breaths to help your blood circulation and blood pressure.

Listen to music on the drive home. Listening to music you find soothing on the way home can be a way to let go of the stress of a long day and put you in a good mood for interacting with the people at home.

Sleep. It may be obvious, but getting a restful night's sleep helps you cope better with the stresses of the day. Do what you can to get to bed earlier if that what's needed, or if you have difficulty falling asleep learn about and experiment with different techniques to help you.

Tips for **STAYING WELL AT WORK**



“Relaxing at work” may at first seem like a contradiction in terms because no matter where we work, we are paid to work not to relax! But even if you absolutely love what you do, at times the pace of work can become overwhelming and exhausting! And many aspects of work can be stressful: co-worker issues, a demanding boss, an unhappy customer, a looming deadline, too much paperwork and so on.

This is why we need to take time during our busy workdays to replenish and re-energize! Taking time to relax in the workplace is important and it doesn’t have to be difficult or time consuming. Sometimes even a small investment of time for relaxation can have a big pay off! In fact, the following exercises can create more time than they use because, when you refresh yourself, you are more productive and efficient.

You can use the following three relaxation exercises at work to help you manage your stress, maximize your energy and maintain a healthy and positive attitude at work. Try them and make your own judgments about how helpful they are.

DEEP BREATHING

This deep breathing exercise is a simple but very effective method of relaxation. Here’s how you do it:

1. Take a long, slow, deep breath. Inhale through your nose, allowing your diaphragm to fill with air and letting your chest expand.
2. Exhale through your mouth. As you exhale, dig deep and allow any stress, anxiety, or tension to be released along with that breath.
3. Try, as best you can, to empty your head of all thoughts, plans and worries: right now all you need to do is relax. Allow yourself to exhale negative thoughts along with your breath.
4. Repeat these steps several times until you feel calm and relaxed. When you are ready to go back to work, allow your breath to return to normal.

This exercise can be done anywhere and takes only seconds out of your day. So why does it help? Studies show the area of the brain that signals the stress response also signals the relaxation response. By breathing deeply for at least ten seconds you signal your brain to switch from stress mode to relaxation mode, giving your body and mind a break.

Do you ever run out of steam half way through the day? This is also a great exercise to help with the afternoon blues. Breathing deeply allows oxygen to reach your brain, which makes you more alert and re-energized. So instead of grabbing another cup of coffee, or eating another chocolate bar, or taking an aspirin to fend off a headache, take a few seconds and **B-R-E-A-T-H-E**.



FREEZE FRAME*

This imagery exercise can be very rejuvenating and effective. The idea behind using imagery to relax is that we harness the power of our imagination to envision a situation that is positive and beneficial for us. The more intensely you imagine the situation, the more you benefit from it.

1. Imagine a TV remote in your hand with a big “pause” button on it. When you are ready, press “pause” and let all your thoughts and actions freeze in time.
2. Take three long deep breaths using the technique outlined above, except this time imagine you are breathing through your heart. This encourages all your body rhythms to slow down.
3. Now close your eyes and imagine doing something you love to do. Bring all your senses into this process...What does it feel like? ...Sound like? ...Look like? Your image can be as simple or complex as you wish. For example: Picture yourself lying on a beach. You may “see” the ocean around you, “hear” the waves crashing against the rocks, “smell” the salt in the air, and “feel” the warmth of the sun and gentle breeze on your body.
4. Spend at least 30 seconds “being” in this experience. If distracting thoughts come into your mind, just refocus on the scene you have created. Remember the world is on “pause” so whatever you need to do will be there for you when you get back.
5. When you are ready to come back, slowly open your eyes, take three deep breaths and take life off “pause.”

This exercise is a great way to take a mini vacation in the middle of your workday without any of the hassle. It can be a potent method of stress reduction and relaxation. How does it work? With imagery, scenes from your imagination are substituted for actual experience. Your body reacts to these imagined scenes almost as if they were real. These positive images generate the relaxation response and can profoundly influence perception, emotions, behaviours, performance and of course your overall health and well-being. Use your imagination to promote your health rather than to generate worry or anxiety—grab that imaginary remote, press pause and take 30 seconds to enjoy yourself!

MEDITATION

This next exercise is extremely simple but it is very effective. For some of us, meditation sounds intimidating because we equate it with sitting for long periods of time, disciplining the mind or having some sort of religious or spiritual experience. While it can be all of the above, it can also be much more basic. Meditation is simply a way to quiet the mind and take a break from the millions of thoughts that pop in and out of your head every day. Here's how to do it:

1. Choose a quiet, comfortable place and close your eyes.
2. Think of a mantra - a positive, inspiring word or phrase. For example, "Life is Beautiful!"
3. Clear your mind and begin to breathe deeply. With each complete breath repeat your mantra creating some kind of rhythm or pattern.
4. Continue for at least 3 minutes, and whenever you are distracted by a thought or physical sensation, simply return your attention to your mantra and your breath. You may have to do this many times. Don't worry – this is normal. Our mind can have a tendency to "chatter" and it takes practice for it to become quiet.

Research has scientifically proven that meditation is a safe and simple way to balance your physical, emotional, and mental state. Its countless values have been known and practiced for thousands of years in every country and culture.

Every day most of us experience stress in different ways and we are often unaware of how much stress we are holding onto. One of the most important benefits of all of the exercises above is that they release stress from our bodies. Practiced regularly, they will lead you to a deeper level of relaxation; they will enhance your energy, increase your ability to concentrate and create an overall feeling of well-being.

"Relaxation in the workplace"! Hopefully this sounds a little less contradictory and a little more achievable now? Keep in mind, taking time out for yourself during the workday does not have to be complicated or take away from productivity and accomplishment. In fact the reverse is generally true. You'll find, when you get back to work, what seemed overwhelming or unmanageable suddenly seems possible to accomplish. What you may have thought of as an indulgent extra break may in fact be an excellent boost to your productivity, good for both you and your employer!

QUICK TIPS

- Laughing: this is one of the easiest and best ways to reduce stress. Share a joke with a co-worker, read the comics on your break, and try to see the humour in the situation.
- Stretching: get the blood and oxygen moving through your body by taking a minute to stretch.
- Grab a healthy snack: this will nourish your mind and body.
- Prioritize: Take charge of your situation by taking 10 minutes at the beginning of each day to prioritize and organize your day.
- Be creative! What works best for you?