

## Mental Health

# Mental Health - Dealing with Stress in the Workplace

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## How can I deal with workplace stress?

There are many ways to be proactive when dealing with stress. Do not forget that elements of the workplace itself can be a cause of stress. Mental fitness, self help, taking healthy steps, stress management training, and counselling services can be helpful to individuals, but do not forget to look for the root cause(s) of the stress and to address them.

Employers and organizations are encouraged to see these other OSH Answers documents about how to help prevent stress in the workplace:

- [Mental Health - Introduction](#)
- [Mental Health - Psychosocial Risk Factors in the Workplace](#)
- [Mental Health - How to Address and Support](#)
- [Workplace Health and Well-being - Comprehensive Workplace Health and Safety Program](#)

However, in some cases, the origin of the stress is something that cannot be changed immediately. Therefore, finding ways to help maintain personal good mental health is also essential.

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## How do I know if someone is (or if I am) having trouble coping with stress?

Below is a quiz from the Canadian Mental Health Association to help identify the extent of a person's stress:

| <b>What's Your Stress Index</b>                                   |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| DO YOU FREQUENTLY:  | YES | NO |
| Neglect your diet?  |     |    |
| Try to do everything yourself?                                    |     |    |
| Blow up easily?   |     |    |
| Seek unrealistic goals?   |     |    |
| Fail to see the humour in situations others find funny?           |     |    |
| Act rude?   |     |    |
| Make a 'big deal' of everything?                                  |     |    |
| Look to other people to make things happen?                       |     |    |
| Have difficulty making decisions                                  |     |    |
| Complain you are disorganized?                                    |     |    |
| Avoid people whose ideas are different from your own?             |     |    |
| Keep everything inside?   |     |    |
| Neglect exercise?   |     |    |
| Have few supportive relationships?                                |     |    |
| Use sleeping pills and tranquilizers without a doctor's approval? |     |    |
| Get too little rest?  |     |    |
| Get angry when you are kept waiting?                              |     |    |
| Ignore stress symptoms?   |     |    |
| Put things off until later?                                       |     |    |
| Think there is only one right way to do something?                |     |    |
| Fail to build relaxation time into your day?                      |     |    |
| Gossip?   |     |    |
| Race through the day?   |     |    |
| Spend a lot of time complaining about the past?                   |     |    |
| Fail to get a break from noise and crowds?                        |     |    |

Adapted from: [What's Your Stress Index?](#) Canadian Mental Health Association.

Interpretation of the score (based on the number of "Yes" selections):

- 0-5: There are few hassles in your life. Make sure though, that you are not trying to deliberately avoid problems.
  - 6-10: You've got your life in fairly good control. Work on the choices and habits that could still be causing you some unnecessary stress in your life.
  - 11-15: You are approaching the danger zone. You may be suffering stress-related symptoms and your relationships could be strained. Think carefully about the choices you've made and take relaxation breaks every day.
  - 16-25: Emergency! It is critical that you stop and re-think how you are living; change your attitudes and pay careful attention to diet, exercise and relaxation.
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## How can I identify stress triggers?

For some people, it may help to try to identify what causes you to have a reaction.

Record or keep a journal for a week or two to identify which situations create the most stress and how you respond to them (physical, mental, emotional). Include a brief description of each situation, answering questions such as:

- Where were you?
- Who was involved?
- What was your reaction? (Did you raise your voice? Get a snack from the vending machine? Become emotional? Go for a walk?)
- How did you feel?

Taking notes can help you find patterns among your stressors and your reactions to them.

Next, review your journal. You might find obvious causes of stress, such as the threat of losing your job or obstacles with a particular project. You might also notice subtle but persistent causes of stress, such as a long commute, pace of work, many interruptions, or an uncomfortable workspace.

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## What are some tips I can use to help manage my reaction to stress?

Try some of the following steps:

- **Build confidence:** Identify your abilities and weaknesses. Accept them, build on them, and try your best whenever you can.

- **Prioritize:** Take charge of the situation by taking 10 minutes at the beginning of each day to prioritize and organize your day. Be honest with colleagues, but be constructive and make practical suggestions.
- **Talk to others:** Talk with trusted colleagues or friends about the issues you are facing at work. They might be able to provide insights or offer suggestions. Sharing a problem with others who have had similar experiences may help you find a solution.
- **Set boundaries:** Set limits to when you will work extra hours (including when you will take work calls or check for e-mails outside regular work hours).
- **Eat right, keep fit:** A balanced diet, exercise, and rest can help you to reduce stress and enjoy life. Learn to relax, take several deep breaths throughout the day, or have regular stretch breaks.
- **Make time for family and friends:** These relationships need to be nurtured; if taken for granted they will not be there to share life's joys and sorrows.
- **Give and accept support from friends and family.**
- **Create a meaningful budget:** Financial problems cause stress. Over-spending on our wants instead of our needs can be added stress.
- **Volunteer:** Being involved in your community can give a sense of purpose and satisfaction.
- **Learn to laugh:** Share a laugh with a co-worker, watch a funny movie at home with friends, read the comics, and try to see the humour in the situation.
- **Identify and deal with moods:** We all need to find safe and constructive ways to express our feelings of anger, sadness, joy and fear.
- **Learn to be at peace with yourself:** Get to know who you are, what makes you really happy, and learn to balance what you can and cannot change about yourself.

Other mental fitness tips include:

- Give yourself permission to take a break from your worries and concerns. Recognize that dedicating even a short time every day to your mental fitness will help you feel rejuvenated and more confident.
- "Collect" positive emotional moments - Make a point of recalling times when you have experienced pleasure, comfort, tenderness, confidence or other positive things.
- Do one thing at a time - Be "present" in the moment, whether out for a walk or spending time with friends, turn off your cell phone and your mental "to do" list.
- Enjoy hobbies - Hobbies can bring balance to your life by allowing you to do something you enjoy because you want to do it.

- Set personal goals - Goals don't have to be ambitious. They could be as simple as finishing a book, walking around the block every day, learning a new hobby, or calling your friends instead of e-mailing. Whatever goal you set, reaching it will build confidence and a sense of satisfaction.
  - Express yourself - Whether in a journal or talking to a wall, expressing yourself after a stressful day can help you gain perspective, release tension, and boost your body's resistance to illness.
  - Treat yourself well - Take some "you" time to help relax- whether it's cooking a good meal, mediation, participating in sports, seeing a movie, go for a walk, play with your family and pets - do something that brings you joy.
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## What are some ways to get support?

Support may come in many ways, including:

- Talk to your supervisor: Start by having an open conversation with your supervisor. They may not be aware that you are struggling. The purpose of the meeting is to come up with an effective plan for managing your work or the stressors you've identified so you can perform at your best on the job. While some parts of the plan may be designed to help you improve your skills in areas such as time management, other elements might include clarifying what is expected of you, getting necessary resources or support from colleagues, enriching your job to include more challenging or meaningful tasks, or making changes to your physical workspace to make it more comfortable and reduce strain.
- Set realistic goals. Work with management to set realistic expectations and deadlines. Set regular progress reviews and adjust your goals as needed.
- Seek and accept help. Your employer may also have resources available through an employee assistance program (EAP), including online information, available counselling and referral to mental health professionals, if needed. Accepting help from trusted friends and family members or professionals can improve your ability to manage stress.

If you continue to feel overwhelmed by work stress, you may want to talk to your doctor, a mental health professional, or a psychologist who can help you better manage stress. Know when to seek help.

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