



Managing Job Stress

Learning how to better manage on-the-job stress can improve the quality of both your work day and your life.

Do you have job stress?

Every job has challenges. Sometimes a job's challenges become so overwhelming that you may feel sad, frustrated, doubtful, or out of control. If you have these feelings, you could have job stress. This kind of stress can affect your health and become costly in terms of lost wages and medical bills. Learning how to better manage on-the-job stress can improve the quality of both your work day and your life.

Job stress and your health

When you feel stress, your body gets ready to respond to danger, whether it is real or imagined. Adrenaline and other chemicals enter your bloodstream and cause your heart to beat faster and your muscles to get tight. At work, this response can be good when you need to focus your attention on something, such as trying to meet a deadline.

But if your job is so high-pressure that you feel stress all the time, you may be at risk for serious health problems, including heart disease, respiratory illnesses, and diseases affecting the immune system.

Physical signs of stress include:

- exhaustion
- loss of appetite or overeating
- restless sleep

- high blood pressure
- headaches

Job stress may also affect your emotions, causing feelings of depression, which can hurt your relationships with family and friends.

Emotional signs of stress include:

- frustration
- constant worrying
- feeling bad about yourself
- being irritable or angry a lot
- feeling like you can't do your job anymore

In addition to these signs, there are certain behaviors that show that a person is having job stress. These include calling in sick a lot, yelling, using bad language with coworkers, or not wanting to go to work.

Causes and coping mechanisms

There are many reasons why people feel stress on the job. The key to dealing with job stress is understanding what causes it and learning how to respond in a positive way. Causes of stress on the job can include:

Working conditions: Feeling like you have too many things to do or working in a place where you don't feel comfortable – such as a noisy, crowded or messy area – can add to job stress. It's important to figure out what causes your stress and then come up with some ideas to help you deal with it. For example:

- Take some time during the day to clean your work area. Try to keep things neat as you work.
- Improve how you use your time.

Ask a coworker who seems good at using their time well for some tips.

- Learn to say “no” and to ask for help. Hand over some tasks to coworkers. When asked in a positive way, many people are willing to help out.

Changes at your job: A major cause of stress can be changes within your company that are beyond your control. These changes may include mergers, layoffs, or new management. Try to move with the change rather than resist it. Find someone that you feel comfortable talking to about any concerns that you may have. You might find that the change can open up opportunities – to work with different people, take on different projects, change your schedule, or work in a different area.

Relationships with coworkers: When you work with others on a regular basis, there are bound to be differences of opinion from time to time, which can cause job stress. Everyone has their own way of communicating. Here are some ideas that might help the situation become less stressful:

- Talk with coworkers about what is and isn't working and come up with possible solutions to make things better.
- Use active listening techniques. These include keeping eye contact, finding a quiet place to talk, giving your full attention, showing that you understand by summarizing what the other person said.
- Understand that there are different styles of how people talk to one



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another. Some people are passive and avoid upsetting others at all costs. Some are aggressive and push people around. Others are passive-aggressive and seem like they're going to give in during conflicts but then manipulate things to get their way. The most effective style is assertive communication. Assertive people are clear and direct in what they want without hurting any feelings; the end result can be a solution that works for everyone.

Balancing personal life: Problems with health, relationships, finances, substance abuse, or domestic violence can all contribute to the stress you may feel at work. Here are some suggestions for reducing stress in your personal life:

- Let go of wanting things to be perfect. There is no such thing.
- Eat healthy foods, exercise regularly, and get plenty of rest.
- Practice relaxation through deep breathing or meditation.
- Learn to assert your feelings and opinions without becoming angry or passive.
- Don't rely on alcohol or drugs to reduce stress. These substances can make problems worse.
- Find help for problems relating to health, relationships, finances, or substance abuse. Talk to a family member, trusted friend, clergy, or trained counselor.

- Contact your company's Employee Assistance Program, if available. They can provide counseling and educational resources for problems related to work and family life.

When it's time to move on

If you try to reduce job stress using the suggestions in this tip sheet and your stress is not reduced, ask yourself some questions:

1. Do you feel like you want to quit your job?
2. Do you find yourself bored with your work on a regular basis?
3. Have you lost your enthusiasm for your job?
4. Are you having more and more conflicts with coworkers or your boss?

If you answered "yes" to one or more of these questions, you may be in a situation you'll need to change. Think about whether the job you have or the company you work for is really a good fit for you. It might be time to start looking for something else.

Call Kaiser Permanente if . . .

- You are concerned about anger, depression, or anxiety and have not been evaluated by a health care provider.
- You are concerned that stress may be affecting your health.
- Stress is causing serious problems at work, at school, or at home.

Recommended resources

Books

- *The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook* by Martha Davis, PhD, Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman, MSW, and Matthew McKay, PhD (2000)
- *Toxic Work: How to Overcome Stress, Overload, and Burnout and Revitalize Your Career* by Barbara Bailey Reinhold, EdD (1997)
- *What Color is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers* by Richard Nelson Bolles (2004)
- *The Healthy Mind, Healthy Body Handbook* by David S. Sobel, MD, and Robert Ornstein, PhD (1996)

Web sites

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org for health and drug encyclopedias, online health programs, health classes, and much more.
- Mayo Clinic Health Information at mayoclinic.com. Look under "Healthy Living," then click on "Stress Center."
- The National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health (NIOSH) at cdc.gov/niosh/stresswk.html

Other resources

- Contact your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.
- Ask about your company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Internal company resources can help you handle stress, enhance time management skills, and take advantage of continuing education (i.e., technical training and/or other specialized training).

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.