

IDENTIFYING SYMPTOMS OF WORKPLACE STRESS

QUARTERLY PUBLICATION ON WELLNESS INFORMATION

Rate each of the below in terms of how often it was true for you during the last three months:*

0 = Never, 1 = Occasionally 2 = Somewhat Often, 3 = Frequently, 4 = Always

- I feel little enthusiasm for doing my job.
- I feel tired even with adequate sleep.
- I feel frustrated doing my responsibilities.
- I am moody, irritable, or impatient over small inconveniences.
- I want to withdraw from the constant demands on my time and energy.
- I feel negative, futile, or depressed about my job.
- I find making decisions difficult.
- I think I'm not as efficient as I should be.
- The quality of my work is less than it should be.
- I feel physically, emotionally, or spiritually depleted.
- My resistance to illness is lowered.
- My interest in sex is lowered.
- I'm eating more or less; drinking more coffee, tea, or sodas; smoking more; or drinking more to cope with my job.
- I'm feeling unmoved by the problems and emotions of others.
- My communication with my boss, coworkers, friends, or family seems strained.
- I'm forgetful.
- I'm having difficulty concentrating.
- I'm easily bored.
- I feel dissatisfied.
- When I ask myself why I go to work in the morning, my answer is a paycheck.

Total your responses for a final score.

WORKPLACE STRESS SCORE

- 0-25 You are coping well with stress.
- 26-40 You are suffering from stress and should take preventative action.
- 41-55 You need to take preventative action to avoid burnout.
- 56-80 You are burning out and must develop a comprehensive stress management plan.

*Adapted from *The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook*, by Martha Davis, Ph.D., Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman, MSLW, and Matt McKay, Ph.D. (New Harbinger Publications, 1988)

WORKPLACE STRESS How to Identify and Manage It



Some workplace stress is normal. In fact, a small amount can be beneficial challenging you to meet a deadline or excel in the delivery of a presentation. However, excessive stress on a daily basis can interfere with your productivity and impact your physical and emotional health. Over time it has been linked with decreased productivity, job dissatisfaction, trouble concentrating, loss of sleep, muscle tension, headaches, stomach problems, feeling depressed, social withdrawal, and the use of alcohol or drugs to cope.

The effects stress has on you comes from your response to stressful events more than from the events themselves. While you can't control everything in your work environment, it doesn't mean you're powerless even when you're stuck in a difficult situation. Finding ways to manage workplace stress isn't about making huge changes or rethinking career ambitions, but rather about focusing on yourself and the things within your control.

- **Identify your stressors.** Become aware of situations which create the most stress and how you respond to them. Detail the environment and people involved recording your thoughts, feelings, and reactions. This can help you find patterns between stressors and your reactions to them.
- **Establish healthy responses.** Any form of physical activity is beneficial. Make time for hobbies and recreational activities that bring you pleasure. Learn how to relax using meditation, deep breathing exercises, and mindfulness. Build healthy sleep habits by limiting your caffeine intake late in the day and minimizing stimulating activities, such as computer and television use, in the evenings.
- **Maintain boundaries.** Make a decision not to check email from home in the evening or not answer the phone during dinner. In today's electronic world, it's easy to feel pressure to be available 24 hours a day. Creating clear boundaries between your work and home life can reduce the potential for work-life conflict and the stress that goes with it.
- **Take time to recharge.** Replenish your energy and return to a pre-stress level of functioning by scheduling periods of time where you neither think or engage in work-related activities. Use your vacation days to relax and unwind so you come back to work feeling reinvigorated and capable to handle your responsibilities. When you're not able to take days off, get a quick boost by turning off your phone or computer and focusing your attention on non-work activities for a few hours.
- **Speak to your manager.** The purpose of this isn't to lay out a list of complaints, but rather to develop an effective plan for managing the stressors you've identified, so you can perform your best on the job. The plan may include improving your skills in time management, clarifying what's expected of you, getting necessary resources 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.
- **Develop support networks.** Accepting help from trusted colleagues, friends, and family members can make you feel understood and improve your ability to manage stress. Contact your Employee Assistance Program for stress management resources including online information, available counseling, or referral to mental health professionals.

When workplace stress interferes with your ability to perform in your job, manage your personal life, or adversely impacts your health, it's time to take action. Even small things can lift your mood, increase your energy, and make you feel like you're back in control. As you make more positive lifestyle choices, you'll soon notice a reduction in your stress levels. The better you feel, the better equipped you'll be to manage workplace stress without becoming overwhelmed.

