



KNOW

Your Benefits



Workplace Stress and Your Employee Assistance Program

While many people enjoy their job, most experience job stress at some time during their working hours. For some, this stress can become severe and impact their health and well-being. Fortunately, there are ways to cope with workplace stress.

What is Job Stress?

Job stress is the chronic state in which stressful conditions in the workplace impact a person's performance and well-being in a negative way, and can cause physical and/or emotional illnesses.

Causes

According to the United Nations' International Labour Organization, a majority of Americans consider their jobs to be stressful. Job stress may be caused by one or more of the following:

- Job insecurity
- Extremely long work hours
- Intense pressure to perform at peak levels all the time
- Excessive travel
- Too much time away from family
- Harassment or any other traumatic event
- Office politics
- Conflict with coworker(s)
- Unclear job responsibilities
- Lack of control
- Technology
- In addition, problems in one's personal life can cause

significant stress on the job. Financial trouble, marital trouble, grief and other family or personal issues can cause distraction and stress throughout the day, impacting a person's job performance and health.

Symptoms

The signs of stress will vary depending on the person, situation, duration and intensity of the stressor(s), but typical job stress includes the following:

- Insomnia
- Loss of mental concentration
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Substance abuse
- Extreme anger or frustration
- Family conflict
- Illnesses such as heart disease, migraine headaches, stomach problems and back problems

Negative Effects of Job Stress

Research indicates that many medical problems stem from stress. These medical problems are costly, in the form of lost wages, increased medical costs and decreased productivity. In addition, on-the-job accidents occur more frequently to stressed employees. Stress can cause shorter attention spans and fatigue, both of which heighten the risk for workplace injuries. Also, when workers are feeling pressured to complete more work in less time, they are more likely to take risky shortcuts.

Managing Job Stress

It is important to understand what affects your stress levels at work, so you can better manage that stress. Try the following suggestions:

- *Plan and prioritize.* Don't panic when faced with stressful situations. Set realistic deadlines for yourself and prioritize your tasks to stay focused.
- *Slow down.* Think things through before you act on them and begin with an end result in mind. If you take the time to complete a task safely and accurately, it will reduce your stress in the long run.
- *Think outside the box.* If you're feeling too overwhelmed, take a break from your task and come back later with a fresh perspective. Try approaching situations from a new angle or asking a colleague for input if you are feeling stuck.
- *Use all your resources.* You are not completely on your own. Seek the help of co-workers, advice from your supervisor or investigate external resources for solving a problem or handling a situation. Talk with your manager if you are feeling confused or overwhelmed, or need additional resources or direction.
- *Keep in contact.* Consistently communicate with co-workers, managers and clients. Their priorities and deadlines could change (and so can yours), so proper communication will ensure that everyone is on the same page.
- *Address your personal problems.* If you are having family or personal issues that are carrying over into your workday and causing you constant stress, you should do your best to address those issues. Work often will be less stressful if you are not worrying about other problems as well.

Getting Help

Everyone experiences periods of stress. Some stress is normal, but if your feelings of stress become persistent and overwhelming it may be an indication of a serious medical problem. In such a case, you should see your doctor or use your company's Employee Assistance Program if one is available.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The business community has come to recognize that everyday work stress can negatively affect employees' attendance, concentration, health and ability to perform on the job. Because of this, the number of companies adding EAP programs as an employee benefit has substantially increased.

An EAP supplies professional counselors who provide counseling to you and your family in a safe and private atmosphere. All the information disclosed will remain confidential, and no contact with your employer will be made without written permission. Using an EAP will not jeopardize your job or chance for promotion.

EAPs typically can address the following issues:

- Stress about work or job performance
- Conflict resolution at work or in one's personal life
- Marital or relationship problems
- Child or eldercare concerns
- Financial worries
- Mental health problems
- Alcohol/substance abuse
- Grief
- Interpersonal conflicts

The EAP program makes a limited number of counseling sessions available at no cost. Should you and your counselor decide that a referral to an outside provider is necessary, those costs will then be your responsibility.

Our Experience Is Your Advantage