

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 or through your EFAP.
- 🌿 **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 skillset 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.