

DEALING WITH STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Although a certain degree of stress at the workplace is good for you, excessive levels are unhealthy and can have a serious impact on your health. This is the view of PAG (the Professional Assignments Group) leaders in the recruitment industry.

Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary defines stress as "the result produced when a structure, system or organism is acted upon by forces that disrupt equilibrium or produce strain." Workplace stress can, therefore, be defined as the state when the combination of high demands in a job and a low amount of control over the situation disturbs the emotional, physical and psychological equilibrium of an employee.

PAG says workplace stress can be caused by an endless number of factors, but the most common perpetrators include fear brought about by the issues relating to your job security, feeling the pressure to perform or deliver, internal politics, huge unmanageable workloads, bad relationships with colleagues or superiors and a sense of isolation.

We also live in a technology-driven work environment, where cell phones and the internet ensure that we can never really get away from the office or the working environment.

The symptoms of stress vary depending on the triggers but the most common ones include headaches and gastrointestinal disturbances; anxiety; irritability, cynicism and negativity; shallow breathing; chronic fatigue, defensiveness; anger at those making demands; mood swings; sleeplessness and depression; over-eating or a loss in appetite resulting in weight gain; absenteeism; disengaging from the company; and being overly suspicious.

Just as there are many causes and symptoms of stress, there are also many ways to deal with it. If the root of the cause is due to a problem at work such as internal politics, or an overabundance of work, then talk to your manager or HR executive about it. They will be sympathetic to your cause and it helps to get these things off your chest and in the open. Also, allow yourself some personal time, in which you focus on the things which make you happy.

Tips for dealing with workplace stress:

- Find out what causes the stress in your life and notice your reaction to the stimulus.
- Teach yourself to control your physical reactions to stress.
- Take charge of your situation. Organise and prioritise your work to achieve maximum efficiency.
- On your way to work, listen to relaxing music, or books on tape.
- Dedicate at least 10 minutes a day to just consciously breathe and stretch.
- Learn to relax by doing activities that you are passionate about, e.g. gardening and other creative activities
- Set aside the "me time" during which you will allow yourself the freedom to do the things you are passionate about.
- Set aside time for personal activities and family.
- Don't skip breakfast, and eat lots of protein for sustainable energy.
- Exercise to release endorphins, the "happy" hormones. This will build up your physical capacity to deal with stress.
- Take notes as you will tend to be more forgetful.
- Give yourself permission to have a work life balance
- Tell someone – utilise your employee assistance programme