



Reducing Workplace Stress

Relaxing at work may sound like an oxymoron, but research shows you'll be healthier in the long run if you avoid letting your job stress you out.

"Practicing relaxation techniques can improve your ability to think clearly," says Warren L. Huberman, Ph.D., a New York psychologist. "When you're relaxed, the quality of your work will improve."

You can use the following techniques throughout your workday to manage your stress, feel better and get more done.

Breathe Deeply

Taking a few deep breaths is one of the most powerful techniques you can use to quickly lower your blood pressure and slow your pulse.

"Pick a number, say 25, and count backward on each breath until you get to one," suggests Dr. Huberman. Or teach yourself to relax on cue by picking a word such as "calm." Slow your breathing slightly while repeating the word.

"If you practice relaxation while repeating a word such as 'calm,' the word itself eventually becomes a cue to relax," says Dr. Huberman.

Another technique: While concentrating on your breathing, close your eyes and picture yourself bathed in a blue light," says David Edelberg, M.D., co-founder of American WholeHealth, a medical practice in Chicago that combines conventional and alternative medicine. "And to get even better at meditating when there's a lot of activity going on around you, listen to a guided meditation in your spare time."

Listen

Sometimes people are so anxious to tell their side of a problem that they forget to listen. Ask your co-workers their perspective of the situation, then listen.

Personalize your Workspace

Posting photos of loved ones, relaxing places, a vacation you've been on or destinations you want to go to can provide a much-needed respite from stressful situations.

"It's easy to get lost in whatever is going on when you're at your desk. Looking at a pleasant picture temporarily takes you someplace else," says Dr. Huberman.

Fragrant fresh-cut flowers also can help you reduce stress, as can a memento from your childhood.

Go for a Walk

To physically break the stress cycle, "walk around the block or to a different part of the building," says Dr. Huberman. "People often make jokes about feeling like they're chained to their desks — but very often, they're not."

Keep a Stress Journal

Write in your journal for two weeks. Include what is causing your stress, the day of the week and time of the day it occurred and how you handled it. At the end of the two weeks, read your journal to determine if there's a pattern. Is your stress related to the type of work you're doing? Is the job too complicated? Do you need more training? Is your workload too much? Is the work boring with not enough challenge? Or does your stress come from people — managers, co-workers or complaining customers?

Take a Vacation Day

You don't function well at work when you're overly stressed, so take a day off to have some fun. This will recharge your batteries and keep things in perspective.

Take Time to Reflect

Besides these short-term stress-reducing techniques, investigating the causes of your stress also can help. "It's vital to explore your life and the sources of your stress," says Dr. Edelberg.

Ask yourself: Am I doing with my life what I like? Are the decisions I've made in my life genuine, or am I living somebody else's expectations? What steps could I take to improve my life?

"You can be having the time of your life in a stressful job if it's genuinely what you want to do," says Dr. Edelberg. "The job doesn't affect your health adversely because you've made the decision and you have control. You start running into problems with stress-related issues when you relinquish control."





Building and Using a Career Action Plan

Today's workplace is full of unpredictable ups and downs. The only thing that may seem constant is change. To protect yourself and your family from the fluctuations that occur in the business world, and also to help you live your professional dreams, consider developing a career action plan. It can act as a safety blanket, allowing you to achieve your goals no matter what unexpected events arise.

Start by asking yourself a few questions:

- Do you know where your career is going?
- Do you know where you want your career to take you? How about in one year? How about in five years?
- Do you know how you will accomplish these short-term goals? How about the long-term career goals?

Despite how many of these questions you can answer right now, a career action plan is a helpful and useful tool to have. If you had difficulty answering all the questions above, this plan is an essential step in getting your career on a successful track. A plan like this takes into consideration how you want to spend your workday and where you want to spend your workday, so that you can properly prioritize what's important to you and how you can accomplish it.

Write Down Career Goals

Think about what's most important for you to accomplish in your career. This could be:

- Having a certain title
- Being promoted
- Having greater responsibility
- Learning a new on-the-job skill
- Earning a certain salary
- Completing something in a specific length of time

Accomplish Career Goals Through Leadership

By taking on a leadership attitude, you can lead yourself to on-the-job success. Develop your leadership attitude by:

- Discovering how you learn and using that information wisely
- Developing new skills that make you more marketable
- Talking with people who are learning new things

- Challenging yourself to do things that may scare you, like trying something completely new or difficult
- Learning to make good judgments based on the information you have
- Being flexible and keeping calm, no matter the situation

Take Action

Once you've mapped out what's important for you to accomplish, find out how you can accomplish it. Write down what you need to do to accomplish your career goals. Set deadlines for each step, and start acting on your goals.

Define What's Important to You

If you need more help defining your career goals, try the exercise below:

- What skills do you like the most? Write down the 10 skills that you enjoy using the most in the workplace.
- What do you value the most in the workplace? Some people value creativity, challenge, travel, security or honesty. What do you consider most important?
- As you develop your career action plan, it's important to note where you are right now in your career. What is your current job status and what is your position like? Does it allow you to use your favorite skills and does it support what you value about a workplace? Does it allow for growth and could it lead you to your long-term career goals?
- As you think about the present, also visualize the future. Assuming that what you're doing now is a good fit, where do you want to be five years from now? Could you consider or explore other positions that can use your favorite skills or support your values?

