

## Is Your Job Making You A Stress Case?

Having a job and being stressed out seem to be two common themes in our daily lives. It's normal - healthy even - to stress out over deadlines and meetings, as long as it gives you a boost of energy and stays within your comfort zone. However, some workplaces make you so stressed out that you start developing chronic illnesses, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, as well as a myriad of physical and mental ailments.

“The evidence is clear that the leadership qualities of ‘bad’ bosses over time exert a heavy toll on employees’ health,” says Jonathan D. Quick, an instructor in medicine at Harvard Medical School and co-author of the book *Preventive Stress Management in Organizations*. “The evidence is also clear that despite the rationalizations some leaders may use to defend their stress-inducing, unsupportive style, such behavior by leaders does not contribute to improved individual performance or organizational productivity.”

Stress affects each one of us differently and the reasons behind it vary. The important first step you need to take in order to minimize stress at the workplace is to understand that stress is how we respond to external factors, such as taking on more work than you can handle, feeling undermined and undervalued, dealing with annoying co-workers and bosses who may also be acting inappropriately towards you.

Feeling overwhelmed with things like deadlines, traffic, and all the damaging effects of stress in between, is something you need to be wary of and learn to control early on, or else it will cast a shadow over you and your health for many years to come.

Most of us think of stress as something that happens to us, but you need to realize that stress is something you can control. After all, it's your own body's response to everything going on around you.

### **But why does your body do that?**

Well, stress is basically your belief that you're in danger in some way or another. Therefore, your brain starts releasing high levels of cortisol and adrenaline to try to get us out of danger as soon as possible. It's your nervous system's flight-or-fight response.

Now that we've established how we become stressed and why, we need to know how we can control it, rather than leaving it to control us. Here are a few tips to help you regain control over your stress levels:

- 1. Focus on the positive.** There will be bad things that happen every single day. It can go from suffocating traffic to missing a deadline to stubbing your toe. But try to see the humor in the bad, and more importantly, whenever

you're faced with a negative situation and start feeling that stress headache coming on, train yourself to focus on the good things that happened throughout the day; your lunch was great, the view from your office is spectacular, you look good in your outfit. By doing that, you'll find that levels of cortisol decrease, thus stabilizing your stress.

**2. Meditate regularly.** Even for only five minutes a day, meditating can do wonders for lowering your stress levels. The best part is that it can be done right at your desk. If your boss gives you more work on top of the overflowing list of things you have to do, just take a deep breath, lean back in your seat and think of a place you've been dreaming of visiting, a happy memory, or clear your mind altogether. The point is to control your thoughts that trigger stress and help lower your blood pressure.

**3. Say 'no'.** We tend to bite off more than we can chew. It shows that we're go-getters and perfectionists, that we can handle anything and that we're diligent with our bosses. But, in fact, the reality is that it shows that we have poor judgement of how much we can accomplish in the amount of time we have.

It's okay to say 'no' when your boss or co-worker bombards you with more work than you can handle. Be polite, but firm, and explain that you're already overcommitted and that taking on more work will just decrease the quality of your work. They'll get the idea, you'll remain the hard-working, high-achiever that you are, and they'll respect you for it.

**4. Schedule social time.** You are not your job; don't forget that. If you let work consume you, you'll lose focus of your purpose in life. You need to reconnect with your social network, go out with friends, do creative things, and take time out for yourself to prioritize what you value in life. Just talking to one of your friends and venting out about your day at work will do wonders to your nervous system. Studies show that when we discuss what's troubling us, it lowers our levels of cortisol and stabilizes our blood pressure. It also puts things in perspective and gives you a sense of renewed power and control over the things going on in your life.

**5. Be healthy.** This includes eating whole foods, eating more fruits and vegetables, getting the right amount of omega-3 fatty acids into your diet. When you're well nourished, you're less likely to stress out at work.

What's more, exercising should be a non-negotiable part of your life. When you exercise, you release all that pent-up stress and your body releases endorphins, which shuts down your fight-or-flight response and increases your relaxation and happiness modes.

Furthermore, sleeping is key to maintaining stress levels. When you're sleep-deprived, you're more anxious, tired, and unable to think clearly. Schedule eight hours of sleep each night, even if you have work you still need to finish.

Leave it for the next day and you'll find yourself quicker and more agile in your thinking.

At the end of the day, we know cannot eliminate or escape from stress at the workplace. It is a fact of modern life. Yet we can learn to neutralize it by fueling our lives with meaningful actions, thoughts, and beliefs. We all deserve to live a happy, contented life. And the best part is it's never too late to start.