



Heading Off Burnout

When running away from it all seems like a realistic option, you may be headed for burnout — physical and mental exhaustion from chronic stress. People who reach burnout often don't realize it.

SIGNS TO WATCH FOR:

- Feeling trapped, bored or apathetic
- Feeling like a failure or losing your self-esteem
- Feeling depressed, cynical, hostile or overly negative
- Inability to enjoy work or normal activities
- Persistent fatigue
- Chronic cold or flu symptoms
- Frequent headaches, skin problems or lip blisters
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Insomnia, teeth grinding, nightmares
- Chest pain or palpitations
- Drinking too much alcohol, using drugs, overeating or other addictive behavior

Start paying attention to possible symptoms.

If you have been experiencing these problems for several weeks, talk about it. Whether to a friend, family member or counselor, talking helps ease the feelings of isolation that feed burnout. If your life doesn't smooth out, seek professional help through your health care provider.

Settling Workplace Conflict

Getting along with co-workers and customers is vital to the health of any workplace. That's why it is a major source of stress at times. **Tips:**

On demanding days when stress and emotions run high, people can make mistakes or inappropriate remarks. Rather than resorting to gossip and complaints, take a positive approach: Forget where the fault lies and move forward.

If you're headed into a discussion that's a potential source of conflict, take the high road.

1 **Keep it private.** If possible, meet in neutral territory (a conference room, a coffee shop). Be sure it is a space where both of you feel comfortable and can talk freely.

2 **Talk less, listen more.** Understanding the other person's point of view will help you feel less stressed and angry.

3 **Focus on solutions.** Don't rehash past situations or vent anger. Find ways to solve the problem that you can both be happy with.

Remember: When employees are under stress, the whole workplace suffers. Learn stress management techniques that work for you (and use them!).



Stress-Proof Your Job

Turning the Tables on Workplace Stress



Getting Worked Up Over Stress?

Few workers escape the stress of today's fast-paced, changing workplace. You can't hide from job stress, but you can learn to cope with it. Here are some productive ways to ease those stress-filled days.

Do You Have a Low-Stress Work Style?

Everyone has days when they experience more stress or feel less than enthusiastic on the job. How are you coping at work? Take a stress check. Check the boxes that apply to you.

- I can usually spot what triggers my stressful reactions before I get upset or angry.
- I try to stay flexible and accept that frequent changes in the workplace are normal, not threatening.
- I recognize my personal energy level and work pattern, and match each to the task at hand for the best results.
- I practice good communication by asking questions and being a good listener.
- I practice tension relief through regular exercise or relaxation techniques.
- I take at least a 30-minute break from my work area every day.
- I try to be a problem solver rather than a complainer.
- I know that work relations can't be perfect and I do my part to maintain harmony.

If you checked fewer than three boxes, you could use some coping strategies.



3 Ways to Get Your Work Life in Order

Feel like you're going in a million directions at once? Get off that merry-go-round and get organized. All it takes is a few tried-and-true time management techniques.

- 1 **"Batch" tasks.** Schedule similar responsibilities together. Do tasks that require lots of energy early in the day, and save some "no-brainers" for those post-lunch hours.
- 2 **Make a list.** Create tomorrow's to-do list at the end of every workday, putting the most important items first. Check off items as you complete them.
- 3 **Lose the unnecessary.** Get rid of those tasks that aren't important. Do you have a pile of trade journals on your desk you've been meaning to read for months? File them away so they're not staring you in the face. Sort the "must-read" pieces out of the day's mail, and put the rest in a box to get to later.

Remember: There's no such thing as a stress-free workday. What you can do is keep a positive attitude and think of yourself as "stress resistant." It's mind over matter!

BEAT THE CLOCK

Manage Your Time, Reduce Your Stress

Feeling like you're running out of time can put the pressure on. Following are some typical time robbers and practical solutions for each of them.

- **Phone calls:** Before making a call, write a mini-agenda to keep you focused. To avoid phone tag or long conversations, use e-mail.
- **Returning messages:** Schedule a routine time during each day to return your nonurgent calls and e-mail. This can reduce interruptions and give you a sense of control.
- **Interruptions:** They break your focus and momentum. If possible, escape to a quiet area for a while to work with more efficiency, or post a "Do Not Disturb" sign.
- **Gag the gab:** Chitchat is part of the workplace, but stay aware that a lot of talking costs you time and energy.
- **Remove the clutter:** Clear your work space of unnecessary papers and objects that can be distracting. The more stuff you have around, the more time is required to move it, step over it or deal with it.

Ease the Squeeze

1 STRETCH

Interlace your fingers. Lift your arms over your head while keeping your elbows straight. Lean your arms backward as far as you can. Then slowly lean to the right and then to the left until you can feel the stretch in your sides.



3 At-Work Exercises

2

SHOULDER ROLL. Using your full range of motion, slowly roll your shoulders forward four times in a circular motion. Then roll them backward with the same motion.

3

BACK RELAXER. Lower your head and slowly curl your spine forward toward the floor as far as you can. Hold for 10 seconds. Unwind slowly, allowing the spine to gently uncurl. Repeat several times a day.

FORGET THE SMALL STUFF

Stress is not something that happens to you; it is your reaction to something — a disagreement, event or circumstance. Having this knowledge can reduce the effects of negative stress in your personal and professional life.

To help you cope with high-stress situations on the job, focus on your strengths and use them, rather than anger or anxiety, to drive your response. Learn to spot potentially stressful events and, before getting worked up, ask yourself, "Is this really worth being upset over?"

