

Stress Management

Stress is the tension we feel when the pressure is on and we don't feel able to manage it well.

Stress is not negative, though it is often seen as such. We need stress to do our job; some of our greatest and most important accomplishments follow periods of stress. The key is to well manage stress, and not be overwhelmed by it.

Long-term Effects of Stress

Immune System: Stress may make you more likely to get sick more often.

Heart: Stress is linked to high blood-pressure, heart attack, heart failure, abnormal heartbeat, and blood clots.

Muscles: Stress can lead to neck, shoulder, and lower back pain.

Stomach: Stress may effect the stomach, especially if there are pre-existing conditions such as peptic ulcer disease, gastroesophageal reflux disease, etc.

Reproductive Organs: Stress may cause low fertility, problems during pregnancy, etc.

Lungs: Stress may worsen symptoms of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Skin: Acne and psoriasis may be made worse by stress.

Common Workplace Stressors

Lack of Time or Perceived Lack of Time: This may be caused by unrealistic expectations for deadlines.

Too Many Open Folders: Because we seek to accomplish projects and do them well, a portion of our mind may be occupied with the laundry list of things to do, which in turn can cause stress.

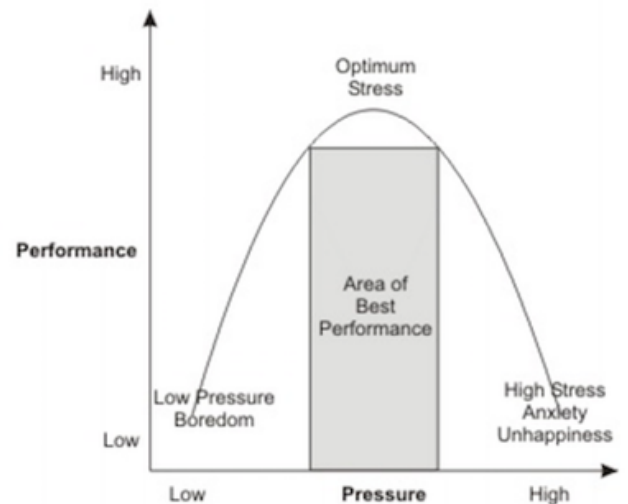
Lack of Clarity / Tentative Status / Indecision: Indecision, or flipped/flopped decisions, may lead to uncertainty. Uncertainty is the lifeline of stress.

Lack of Knowledge: Stress may occur when people feel that they do not have the right expertise to deal with a situation.

Change: The fear of effort required to learn something new can cause significant stress.

Worrying About Events Not Yet Realized: A worrying mentality may cause stress about something that may or may not happen.

Lack of Control: The most common reason for stress in the workplace is a feeling of lack of control. People may feel that they either do not have control over a situation or are not given an opportunity to problem solve.



The Inverted-U relationship between pressure and performance

Feeling Undervalued: People seek appreciation and acknowledgment of their efforts. A lack of gratitude may cause stress.

Lack of Job Satisfaction: People want to feel like they make a difference and contribute to something greater than themselves. Stress can result from a lack of meaning in work.

Workload / Taking on Other Work: Busy seasons of work that can create stress due to an increase in volume or additional responsibilities.

Coping with Stress

Recognize warning signs of excessive stress at work.

- Regularly monitor any signs and symptoms of stress—cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally, and physiologically.

Proactively lead a balanced lifestyle.

- Exercise regularly. Get at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise three times a week, and strength training at least once a week.
- Eat healthy food that provides energy. Low blood sugar can make you feel anxious and irritable, and eating too much may make you feel lethargic. Eat small but frequent meals to maintain even blood sugar levels.
- Drink alcohol in moderation, and avoid nicotine. Drinking alcohol as a coping mechanism may lead to alcohol abuse and dependency. Smoking leads to higher levels of anxiety.
- Studies also indicate that deep, regular breathing, not smoking, produces a calming effect. Get adequate sleep each night. A lack of sleep prevents maximum performance and leaves you vulnerable to additional stress. Aim to sleep 7–8 hours each night.

Prioritize and organize your responsibilities.

- Create a planned, balanced schedule. Prioritize your most pressing responsibilities for the following day while maintaining work-life balance.
- Simplify large projects into a series of smaller tasks. Focus on one manageable step at a time rather than being overwhelmed by taking on everything at once.
- Do not overcommit. Distinguish between “should” and “must,” while eliminating any unnecessary tasks. Be mindful that saying “yes” to something results in saying “no” to something else.
- Begin each day calmly. Beginning your day even 10–15 minutes earlier may reduce any frantic or overwhelming feelings.
- Plan regular breaks in your day. Identify breaks that bring you energy; focus on the quality of the break, not the quantity.

Break bad habits.

- Resist perfectionism. Identify responsibilities that do not require perfectionism, and realize that nothing is ever perfect. Determine what will suffice for your responsibilities, and then deploy.
- Resist negative thinking. Focusing on the downside of every situation drains energy and produces stress. Be mindful of the many things going right, and develop an outlook of gratitude.
- Do not try to control the uncontrollable. Find peace in knowing that you do not have control over every situation. Focus instead on what you can control, such as your response to challenges.

Action Plan

Identifying Stressors: What stressors have you experienced? What can you do to minimize these stressors?

Coping with Stress: To what coping mechanisms can you commit? When will these techniques be implemented? How will you know they have been successful? How will you be held accountable?
