

April Health Tips

Coping with stress in the Work Place. Job stress can be all-consuming — but it doesn't have to be. Address your triggers, keep perspective and know when to seek help.

The workplace is a likely source of stress, but you're not powerless to the effects of stress at work. Effectively coping with job stress can benefit both your professional and personal life. Here's help taking charge.

Identify your stress triggers

Your personality, experiences and other unique characteristics all influence the way you respond to and cope with stress. Situations and events that are distressing for your colleagues might not bother you in the least. Or you might be particularly sensitive to certain stressors that don't seem to bother other people.

To begin coping with stress at work, identify your stress triggers.

For a week or two, record the situations, events and people who cause you to have a negative physical, mental or emotional response. Include a brief description of each situation, answering questions such as:

Where were you?

Who was involved?

What was your reaction?

How did you feel?

Then evaluate your stress inventory. You might find obvious causes of stress, such as the threat of losing your job or obstacles with a particular project. You might also notice subtle but persistent causes of stress, such as a long commute or an uncomfortable workspace.

Tackle your stress triggers

Once you've identified your stress triggers, consider each situation or event and look for ways to resolve it. Suppose, for instance, that you're behind at work because you leave early to pick up your son from school. You might check with other parents or neighbors about an after-school carpool. Or you might begin work earlier, shorten your lunch hour or take work home to catch up in the evening. Often, the best way to cope with stress is to find a way to change the circumstances that are causing it.

Sharpen your time management skills

In addition to addressing specific stress triggers, it's often helpful to improve time management skills — especially if you tend to feel overwhelmed or under pressure at work. For example:

Set realistic goals. Work with colleagues and leaders to set realistic expectations and deadlines. Set regular progress reviews and adjust your goals as needed.

Make a priority list. Prepare a list of tasks and rank them in order of priority. Throughout the day, scan your master list and work on tasks in priority order.

Protect your time. For an especially important or difficult project, block time to work on it without interruption. Also, break large projects into smaller steps.

Keep perspective

When your job is stressful, it can feel as if it's taking over your life. To maintain perspective:

Get other points of view. Talk with trusted colleagues or friends about the issues you're facing at work. They might be able to provide insights or offer suggestions for coping. Sometimes simply talking about a stressor can be a relief.

Take a break. Make the most of workday breaks. Even a few minutes of personal time during a busy workday can be refreshing. Similarly, take time off when you can, whether it's a two-week vacation or an occasional long weekend. Also try to take breaks from thinking about work, such as not checking your email at home in the evening or choosing times to turn off your cellphone at home.

Have an outlet. To prevent burnout, set aside time for activities you enjoy — such as reading, socializing or pursuing a hobby.

Take care of yourself. Be vigilant about taking care of your health. Include physical activity in your daily routine, get plenty of sleep and eat a healthy diet.