Tips to Overcome Workplace Stress

Everyone who has a job or career knows that working provides many benefits. Offering a steady flow of income, fulfilling personal goals, delivering a sense of purpose, and in the case of Public Health Professionals and others in the service industry, it also allows for daily opportunities to support our community! Along with all the great aspects, workplace stress is a factor in every position. Even the perfect position has deadlines, job responsibilities, performance expectations, and in most cases, various personalities to interact with during the entire work week. For some, workplace stress can be motivational. For the rest of us, workplace stress can become overwhelming, if not managed properly.

Whether it is worrying about a project deadline, difficulty meeting goals, feelings of unfair treatment, organizational restructuring, or accepting more than you can handle in hopes of impressing the boss - we have all put our work ahead of our health at some point in our lives. Studies show that workplace stress is the leading workplace health problem, ranking above physical inactivity, and resulting in higher rates of cardiovascular diseases. It can also cause burnout, emotional exhaustion, and clinical depression.

Employers and employees are beginning to better understand the causes of workplace stress and the potential negative results, if left unchecked. More and more organizations are looking at opportunities to address these issues by creating a healthy work environment. A few resources promoting workplace health include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) launch of the online “Workplace Health Resource Center” and the American Psychological Association’s articles for employees. Many organizations also have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that may offer trainings and tips on reducing stress and work/life balance. And don’t forget your own employees who can share in the design of their own wellness plans.

The Peoria City/County Health Department’s “Be Well” committee is one of these employee-driven groups - dedicated to developing and implementing a Worksite
Wellness Operating Plan to enrich and balance employees’ personal and professional well-being. Our committee researched programs that blend relaxation techniques with nutrition, activity, and trainings (such as time management and assertiveness training), and have something to benefit everyone. Our plan touches on all these areas, and includes the addition of healthy work/life balance, positive thinking, and office ergonomics. Goals in our wellness plan include:

- Provide “lunch-n-learn” sessions on a disease prevention topic with a healthy lunch provided. When stress gets overwhelming, we tend to develop erratic eating habits that might not be as nutritionally balanced as we would normally have.
- Develop and implement a workplace policy that outlines staffs’ ability to participate in walking or stretching activities during the working hours. This can refresh your mental outlook and give your mind a chance to “reset”.
- Establish one room or area in the facility that is designated for relaxation. Focusing a few minutes a day on your breathing, positive thinking, or silent reflection can prevent burnout and recharge your “batteries” to tackle established responsibilities.
- Email a healthy recipe each quarter to all staff to inspire healthier eating, and offer healthy snack options in vending machines. If we have healthier options available to us, that is one advantage we have when selecting a mid-morning snack.
- Research and implement techniques that work for individual work/life balance needs. Highlight benefits that are available to staff that aid in a positive balance such as: employee discounts, an employer sponsored EAP, 401k or Pension Plan options, and reimbursements for gyms and education.
- Offer workplace ergonomic training and office equipment that is ergonomically certified. This can help reduce workplace injury over time and therefore reduce undue hardships on our co-workers.

Some other tips for a healthy attitude are to set reasonable standards for yourself and others, don’t expect perfection, and communicate with co-workers to ensure clear direction. If you find yourself getting angry, mentally regroup by walking away and taking a look at the situation later. Sometimes clarity comes with distance.

The most important thing for employers and employees is to make your mental health a priority in your workplace and in your life! Each person has individual needs, so find out what works for you and practice it daily.

Learn more about the benefits of public health policies and programs at [www.pcchd.org](http://www.pcchd.org) Peoria City/County Health Department, a nationally accredited public health department.

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The Peoria City/County Health Department continues efforts to improve community health in Peoria County with the overarching goal “to increase the number of people who are healthy at every stage of life.”

2116 N. Sheridan Rd. • Peoria, Illinois 61604 • PH: 309/679-6603
FAX: 309/679-6610 • TDD: 800/526-0844 (hearing impaired use only) • [www.pcchd.org](http://www.pcchd.org)