

Expert tips on how to manage work stress

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Imagine a perfect week at work. Everything runs smoothly, and you love your job. Sounds like a dream, doesn't it?

While those days are possible, work can also be a source of frequent and intense [stress](#).

Let's face it, [work stress](#) is unavoidable.

In 2022, 83% of U.S. workers suffered from [work-related stress](#) and about 1 million Americans missed work each day because of stress, according to the [American Institute of Stress](#) (AIS).

But what exactly is work-related stress and what can you do about it?

Causes of work stress

There are a variety of reasons why work is stressful.

"A leader who isn't empathetic to what's going on or not connected to the problems in the workplace can result in a stressful work environment," says [Dr. Jessica Gold](#), a psychiatrist and member of the Council on Communications for the American Psychiatric Association.

Gold also identifies a lack of control over responsibilities and time as a common reason workers battle job-related stress.

Other causes of work stress include tight deadlines, job insecurity and a toxic work environment (bullying, manipulation).

Symptoms of work-related stress

The [American Psychological Association](#) identifies physical and emotional symptoms of work stress including:

- Headaches

- Stomachaches
- High blood pressure
- A weakened immune system
- Insomnia
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Poor concentration
- Mood swings

How to manage work stress

There are specific ways to manage work stress. Gold suggests the following tips.

Be nice to yourself. "I know it might sound silly, but we don't have a lot of compassion for ourselves, and the voice we hear in our heads is usually not a very nice voice," Gold said.

Feeling stress at work *and* being unkind to yourself has a compounding effect.

Listen to the messages you say to yourself and ask if you would talk to a friend that way. If not, reframe the message as though you're talking to a friend.

Find things you can control. You don't have control over everything at work. Figure out what you have control over and focus your energy there.

Gold noted you should look for "some element of control you can get back in a system that can feel very out of control and dysfunctional."

You might not have control over what time you take your lunch, but you can control how you use that time. Decide how best to use that time to re-energize.

Be intentional with your time. Look hour by hour at your day and identify what energizes you during the day and what saps your energy.

Then ask yourself, "Is there a way to do more of the things that give me energy?" When you find those energy-rich activities or tasks, try to do more of them. If collaborating with colleagues on Thursdays at 10 a.m. is positive and energizing, take a look at your schedule and see how you can add more collaboration time to your week.

Make a manageable to-do list. How often have you made a to-do list but weren't able to check things off? That's frustrating and can increase your level of stress.

Gold believes making a more "doable" to-do list by breaking down a large job or project into smaller tasks is the answer.

These are bite-sized tasks that can be completed in one sitting or one day. Place these smaller tasks on your to-do list and check them off when you're finished.

Checking tasks off a to-do list is satisfying and increases effectiveness. This is a real stress-buster.

Practice saying "no." Learning to turn down extra responsibilities or new projects is another way to reduce stress.

But saying "no" isn't as easy as it sounds, Gold acknowledged.

Understand that saying "no" to added responsibilities doesn't mean

you're less dedicated or hardworking than anyone else. What it does mean is you're putting self-care first.

Practice saying "no" to something small first, and build up to bigger requests as you become more confident.

Schedule time for yourself. During a stressful workweek, if something isn't on your calendar it probably won't get done. So add activities you enjoy to your schedule, Gold advised.

Write it down or set an alarm, but make yourself a priority by scheduling activities that bring you joy.

Reach out to a professional. Consider therapy if you want to explore your work stress on a deeper level. It helps to "have an external observer giving advice and helping you work through specifically what it is about work that's the problem," Gold explained.

Therapy will clarify why a certain person or situation at work triggers you. You will also learn strategies for coping with those triggers.

Work-related stress is a reality that can't be denied. Prioritizing stress management will lead to a better relationship with your job and improved work-life balance.

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