

Coping with stress



Sometimes, work can feel like it's slipping out of our control. Impossible deadlines are looming. Project budgets are blowing out. Clients are switching to competitors. Most of us are affected by these types of pressures at some point in our careers. If left unchecked, however, these little stresses can grow into big ones, with negative consequences for the individual (poor health, depression and marriage problems) as well as their employer (low productivity, absenteeism and high staff turnover).

Most people associate work-related stress with having too much work to do. It might feel like there are not enough hours in the day to get through that pile of work in our in-tray.

Being overloaded with work is a common stress factor, but it is not the only one. Unhappy work environments can also cause stress, such as having a manager who is rude or doesn't listen to you. Another source of stress for many people is not having confidence in their own skills and abilities. For example, newly promoted managers often feel stressed because they have no experience in managing projects or other people. They often feel out of their depth.

Also, in today's uncertain economic times, people feel stressed about whether they will lose their job. The news headlines are filled with stories about large-scale retrenchments - particularly overseas but also here in Cambodia.

In the past - and even today in some organisations - admitting to feeling stressed was

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considered a sign of weakness. The attitude was to ignore the stress and get on with the job. As a result, we sometimes miss the early warning signs of stress. It is only when we look back that we realise how stressed we really were.

Are you suffering from stress? Ask yourself these questions:

- Do you dread going to work each morning?
- Do you lie awake at night thinking about work?
- Do you often feel tired, depressed or angry?
- Do you suffer from headaches or are you getting sick quite often?
- Do you consume too much caffeine, alcohol or other drugs?
- Are you losing too much weight, eating irregularly or lost your appetite?

Many of us would answer "yes" to at least a few of these questions. However, if you answered "yes" to all of them, then you might be suffering from genuine stress.

Here are some pointers that can help you to reduce your stress levels:

1. Pinpoint the source of your stress - rather than blaming everything on "work", go one step further and identify precisely what is stressing you and why.

Are you afraid?

Is it too much work?

Is it your social life?

Is it the work environment?

Is it someone in the office?

Address the specific challenges you face.

2. Get plenty of sleep and regular exercise. Exercise is important to ensure that your body is fit and healthy.

Take five minutes to meditate or do some yoga during the day.

Sufficient sleep, at least 8 hours per day, helps you to be fresh, concentrate better as well as get the most out of your day!

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3. Maintain a healthy diet - eat healthy food and cut back on alcohol, caffeine and other recreational drugs. Eat regularly. Eating a healthy meal once a day is not good enough! Your body needs energy to be able cope with your daily routine. Drink a lot of water during the day especially in hot season as your body loses energy and vital vitamins just walking up the stairs!

4. Maintain a genuine work-life balance - pursue interests outside of work and spend quality time with family and friends. Don't let work creep into your personal life via your mobile phone or laptop.

5. Take a break during the work day - it is important that you are not working consistently for too many hours. It is important that you take a break at least every 2 hours. Stretch your arms, do some eye exercises, twist your body! Try to do creative things such as putting on some music during lunch time that you and your colleagues enjoy. Make it a priority to take little breaks during the day.

6. Manage your time and workload effectively - make daily and weekly plans, prioritise your tasks, don't over-promise and learn to delegate work to others. Time management is a very important skill to master. Make sure you take notes, you cannot remember everything!

7. Improve your skills - if you don't think you have the skills necessary to do your job properly, ask for additional training. Improving skills is a life long development - even if you are a senior manager or business owner!

8. Remember to take a holiday - if you can't remember when you last took a holiday, then it's probably time for your next one!

9. Think about your career - is this job the right one for you? Be open to the possibility that your skills or personality might be better suited to something else.

10. **Last but not least - don't try to hide it** - after all, a problem shared is a problem halved! Talk to friends and colleagues about how they cope with stress.

If none of this seems to help, then don't be afraid to seek professional help from a counsellor or psychologist. There is no shame in suffering from work-related stress - it is a common challenge that professionals around the world face. The important thing is to take steps to get back on track.

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