

# How-To Manage Stress at Work



If you have had a job, you probably experienced work-related stress. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 40% of workers report their job at “very or extremely stressful.” In these severe situations, a person’s lifestyle can become compromised. The following are a few common reasons why Americans experience stress at work:

- Low Salaries
- Excessive Workloads
- Few Opportunities for Growth or Advancement
- Lack of Social Support
- Work that is Not Engaging
- Conflicting Demands or Unclear Expectations

Do not let stress overwhelm you. Learn to manage your stress before it takes a toll on your life.

## Take a Deep Breath

When stress chemicals overwhelm our body, we experience the “fight or flight” response. Breathing deeply relaxes your muscles and allows fresh air into your lungs that helps relax your body. Next time you feel stressed over a surprising email or overwhelming amount of projects, practice the deep breathing relaxation technique. You can practice deep breathing without even leaving your desk.

1. Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
2. Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The

- hand on your chest should move very little.
3. Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little.
  4. Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.

## **Eliminate Interruptions**

Interruptions can add hours to your work day. You may have blocked out time for an important task. However, if phone calls, emails, or co-workers interrupt your schedule, your task could take hours longer than planned. It's important to find ways to prevent interruptions from disrupting your focus.

The first step is to plan for expected interruptions. Notify coworkers that you do not want to be disturbed within a certain time period. Turn off email notifications and send all phone calls to voicemail. Eliminating interruptions can help you get your work done faster and more thoroughly.

## **Eat Right and Sleep Well**

I am sure you have heard of the phrase "stress eating" before. When we are stressed, we seek high fat, sugary, "comfort" foods. Often, these foods stress out our body chemistry leading to fatigue, trouble sleeping, weight gain, and other diseases.

While a sugar rush might be appealing after reading a nasty email, long-term rejuvenation derives from an early bedtime and tall glass of water.

## **Identify Self Imposed Stress**

Many stresses can be alleviated from simple lifestyle changes. For example, focus on your level of self-confidence rather than seeking approval of others.

Procrastination can also lead to high amounts of work stress. Make sure your perception of work is not tainting what your work actually is.

## **Prioritize Your Work**

Most jobs encounter deadlines. Prioritizing your work can help you complete difficult projects. The Liquid Planner Blog explains how to efficiently prioritize your work. Follow these steps to start meeting your goals every day. Find more information within their article.

1. Collect a list of all your tasks
  2. Identify urgent vs. important
  3. Order tasks by estimated effort
  4. Be flexible and adaptable
  5. Know when to cut
  6. You do not have to live with chronic work stress. Managing your stress can help you enjoy daily life.
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## **Simple Stretches You Can Do At Your Desk To Relieve Tension**



Sitting at the office for hours can cause extreme stress on your body. You may start to feel pain in your lower back, shoulder, and even your hands. A one hour yoga class can help relieve your body's tension. However, the class cannot repair damage from sitting for eight hours daily.

Fortunately, there are yoga poses that you can do at your desk to prevent chronic strain on your body. Try these poses at work to maintain a healthier and happier body.

## Seated Crescent Moon Pose

Do you notice that your left or right shoulder is more sore than the other? Usually the shoulder that is more sore is on the side of your dominant hand. The dominant hand usually maneuvers the mouse and performs more actions on the keyboard. Due to the overuse, your shoulder is often lifted, leading to stress.

Seated Crescent Moon Pose can help you avoid discomfort that your shoulder experiences. Lift your arms overhead and stretch your fingers wide. Relax your shoulder blades back and down. Lean to the left and take two to three breaths. Switch sides and repeat.



# Wrist and Finger Stretches

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is a serious problem for many office workers. The syndrome occurs from typing which leads to pressure in the forearm's median nerve. Hand stretches are important to prevent irritating the median nerve.

Wrist and Finger Stretched releases your fingers, wrists, and forearms. Extend one arm overhead or in front of you. Flex your hands. Clasp the fingertips with your other hand and stretch your palm open. Switch sides

Extend both arms in front of you. Make fists and release. Repeat 5-10 times.



# Chair Pigeon Pose

Tight hip flexors can wreak havoc on your body. Walking, sitting on the ground, and bending down can become more difficult. Avoid tight hip flexors with hip openers.

Chair Pigeon Pose is effective for almost every level of flexibility. Sit at your chair with both feet planted on the ground. Cross your right ankle over your left knee to create a 90 degree angle. Keep the foot flexed. Maintain equal weight between

your hips. To get a little more stretch you can lean forward in your chair. Switch sides.



## Chair Twist

Tight backs lead to a decreased range of motion. A Chair Twist can loosen and realign your back. Your spine can become more mobile to do the things you love outside of the workplace.

Sit at your chair with your feet planted. Turn to your right, using the arm rest or back of the chair to deepen the twist. Hold for three to five breaths. Switch sides.



# Ankle Rolls

We often think of the pressure that sitting has on our upper body but our lower bodies also experience stress. When you sit at a desk, your feet are often remaining in a flexed position for hours.

Many women also wear heels which deepens the damage to the tendons of your feet. If you wear heels to work, switch to flats! Great fashion is not as important as maintaining a healthy body.

Ankle Rolls are a subtle stretch that can be done at your desk. Outstretch your right leg. Point and flex your foot. Roll your ankle in both the flexed and pointed position. Switch legs.



# Shoulder Rolls

Sitting at a desk can also cause tension in your neck. A tight neck can create excruciating pain in the upper back. Use shoulder rolls to improve posture and release throat tension.

To perform shoulder rolls, sit on the edge of your chair without your back touching the back rest. Plant your feet hip width apart on the floor. Lift your left shoulder to your ear. Slowly roll your shoulder around and back. Switch sides.



## **Open Chest Stretch**

Opening your chest is not only great for your posture but can also provide you with a burst of energy. The pose opens the chest, decreasing rounded shoulders.

Sit near the edge of your chair and interlace your fingers behind your back. Lean forward slightly, lifting your arms so you feel the stretch in your chest. Hold for 10 to 15 breaths. Release and repeat three to five times.





Set aside a few minutes every two to three hours for yoga poses. Your body will thank you and you can move throughout the day more stress-free!

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## **6 Tips to Decrease Stress in the Workplace**



Stress affects everyone. The trick is learning to deal with our stress so it doesn't hinder your daily life.

If you are facing stress at work then you are not alone. The average business professional has 30 to 100 projects on their plate. Within those projects, we are interrupted seven times per hour and distracted 2.1 hours per day. Fortunately, there are methods to manage your stress to work more productive work days.

Learn how to decrease your stress level with the following tips before stress becomes a serious problem:

## **Schedule Your Day for Productivity**

Working 10 hours per day is not always the most productive method of working. We get tired, frustrated, and distracted. Your day will remain more focused if you take breaks throughout the day. Plan your work activities in 60-90 minute blocks, then take a break. This may sound contradictory but without breaks, your productivity goes down and stress level increases. You can maintain a much lower stress level if you schedule breaks.

- Take walks
- Do a breathing exercise
- Stretch at your desk

## **Sleep Well**

If you are not sleeping well then you will not receive the rejuvenation that relieves stress. The American Psychological Institute reports that the average American receives 6.7 hours of sleep which is less than the recommended 7-9 hours. Also, 42% of adults report their sleep quality is poor to fair and 43% report stress keeping them awake at night.

If you have trouble falling asleep at night, practice a breathing exercise. Inhale as you count to five and exhale as you count back down from five. This exercise can decrease your heart rate to help you relax.

## **Eat Right**

During times of stress, we often seek out “comfort foods”. Ironically, these high-fat foods can make us feel lethargic and less able to handle stress. The best

solution is to eat high-fiber, low fat foods that boost our immune systems. These foods can help keep us energized throughout our work day.

### **Foods to Include:**

- High-fiber, carbohydrate-rich foods
- Fruits and Vegetables

### **Foods to Avoid:**

- High-fat foods
- Caffeine
- Sugar

## **Eliminate Interruptions**

When your phone is ringing, mailbox is full, and voicemail light is blinking, it can be easy to get stressed. To eliminate your interruptions, you need to anticipate their occurrence. If you learn how to handle interruptions then you will probably notice an increase in productivity.

### **Tips to Eliminate Interruptions**

- Use an official ticketing/request system
- Retreat to a quieter workspace
- Overestimate the time that you will need
- Tell visitors that you only have a few minutes if they interrupt you with a question
- Write down your daily tasks

## **Laugh!**

Sounds silly? Well sometimes silliness is the best medicine. Laughter lowers blood pressure, reduces stress hormone levels, and triggers the release of endorphins. You can create a more relaxed feeling that shakes away tension.

To build up a chuckle, keep a funny photo, meme, or even favorite YouTube comedy clip on demand. Laughter is a good reminder to not take life so seriously.

# **Meditation**

“Meditation put you on the fast track to being happy” says Ronnie Newman, director of research and health promotion for the Art of Living Foundation. When our bodies are stressed, we experience increased breathing rate, blood pressure, and pulse. Meditation trains our bodies to relax in high stress environments. Achieve this state of relaxation leads to an enhanced mood, lowered blood pressure, improved digestion, and reduction of everyday stress.

## **Meditation Practice**

Sit quietly with good posture and eyes closed for 10-20 minutes, while visualization a relaxing image. You can also incorporate the breathing exercise described in the Sleeping Well section to help you relax. Do this meditation practice before work to prepare yourself for the day.

Stress does not have to control your life! Your work can be much more fun and interesting if you relieve the distress that is making your work suffer.