



## STRESS AT WORK – REAL OR IMAGINED?

Have you ever stopped to consider why your heart is racing, you feel panicky, your mind is constantly overloaded and life just feels hard? Chances are you're stressed!

Shocking as it may seem, many people experience this on such a regular basis, that they just accept it and carry on as normal. The problem is, it can take a 'shock' such as experiencing burnout - before they accept that behind all of these worrying symptoms is a condition known as 'stress'. The good news is there are many solutions to this global problem, but regardless of what you choose to do – know two things:

1. You don't have to suffer any longer, and
2. You do have to take some action.

If you are seriously stressed, you should be seeking some kind of medical or therapeutic help. If you struggle with doing that, just consider what you would be telling your colleague or close friend if they were describing the same symptoms to you. You would probably be encouraging them to seek expert help. The fact is these symptoms won't disappear by themselves but at least with some intervention you can do something about it. Whatever you decide, know that you cannot keep on like this as it won't just be affecting you. Your colleagues, staff at work and your family/friends will all be hugely affected by your stress levels and resultant behaviours. These exhibit themselves in a number of ways, but some of the key ones are –

- \*Being short tempered and snappy
- \*Feeling little enjoyment in life
- \*Experiencing extreme tiredness
- \*Struggling to focus on other than work issues
- \*Increased addictive behaviours, e.g., smoking/drinking/eating
- \*Repeated headaches and/or heart palpitations (See your doctor if these persist)
- \*Inability to relax physically
- \*Disrupted sleep patterns – constant wakefulness around 3am

These are just a few of the types of behaviour you will be exhibiting on the emotional, physical and intellectual level. There are many many more. If they are left unchecked, they can lead to serious illness.

What is becoming more recognised now is that many illnesses are stress-induced. Keep in mind that as the stress took some time to build up; it will take some time to dissipate. You can, however begin today to take some action to lower your stress levels. Try some or all of the following –

1. One minute tension breakers 6 times a day, which involves quieting the mind, breathing in deeply and as you are doing so thinking *relaxation* then breathing out and thinking *release*. Do this for one minute six times a day - completely clearing the mind as you do so.

2. Take a ten minute break every 2 -3 hours. This means grabbing a newspaper/magazine and switching your mind onto a completely different train of thought.
  3. At lunchtime take the 30-60 minutes allocated, and leave the building – try to get some fresh air, and again switch your mind off the workplace and onto something different.
  4. Compartmentalise your work load. Decide which has greatest priority. Then get 3 folders. Label these *Work to Do*, *Work Done* and *Work in Progress*. Have all papers filed into these folders, so there is nothing visible on your desk apart from the piece of work you are concentrating on. This will be in your *Work in Progress* file.
  5. Interruptions – the best way to manage these is to give yourself a minute to write down six or so words to remind yourself of exactly where you were before the interruption began. That way you will know exactly where you were, when you get back to it.
  6. Prioritising – This begins with a ‘to do’ list. On that list you write everything you need to do, and then cover the page so you can only see the top 3 items. That is what you focus on. When those 3 things are done, cross them out and move down to the next three, complete those and cross them out and repeat the cycle.
  7. As you finish each day, write out tomorrow’s ‘to do’ list and leave it at work!
- These are some simple techniques to get you started. If you persist with them, they will start to have an effect on your thinking and how you manage stress at work.

The main thing to remember is that you are no good to anyone – whether at work or home – if you remain stressed. The quality of your work will be inferior and you will feel overwhelmed and inadequate. Do not ignore what your body and mind are trying to tell you as this can lead to disastrous consequences like burnout, depression and other related mental and physical illnesses. Instead start to work with the symptoms you are experiencing, so that you can become de-stressed both at work and at home. Imagine how good that would feel!

By Gloria Masters  
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References – Stress Busters @ Work by Iris Barrow

Please contact us if you would like the workshop outline on this topic.