

REDUCING STRESS FOR CAREGIVERS

I'm so stressed out! How many times have you heard someone say that...or, perhaps, have said it yourself? Stress is very personal; situations and events that are distressing for you might not bother someone else in the least. Nevertheless, stress – including workplace stress – can affect every aspect of your life and can even alter your physical well-being.

Stress is a tension you feel and a reaction you have to a situation or event. Some stress can be “healthy stress” – the kind that challenges you and energizes you psychologically and physically – while many times it is “unhealthy,” leaving you feeling overwhelmed and anxious, i.e., “stressed out.”

According to the [American Institute of Stress](#), numerous studies show that job stress is the major source of stress for Americans. Health care workers in particular, due to the nature of their work, often suffer from workplace stress. In fact, ComPsych, the world's largest provider of employee assistance programs, reports that health care workers are responsible for the largest number of stress and anxiety-related calls to their helpline.

Can you control your stress...Or is stress controlling you?

Many people experience unhealthy workplace stress – the perception of having little control but lots of demands. Let's look at some of the many ways unhealthy stress can manifest itself:

Signs and Symptoms:

- Anxiety and irritability
- Apathy, loss of interest in work
- Sleep problems
- Fatigue
- Trouble concentrating
- Muscle tension or headaches
- Social withdrawal
- Coping with alcohol or drugs
- Digestive problems

Compassion Fatigue: When caring too much is making you ill

Health care workers and caregivers can experience a special kind of stress called Compassion Fatigue. Over time, the ability to feel and care for others becomes eroded through overuse of their skills of compassion. Because they care so deeply about their patients or loved ones, health care professionals and caregivers who listen to stories of fear, pain, and suffering can find themselves empathetically experiencing similar emotions.

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It's important to understand that these feelings are normal and that the symptoms of and treatment for Compassion Fatigue are similar to that of most kinds of stress. Here are some practical ways to prevent stress from overtaking your life at work and at home.

10 Tips for Reducing Stress:

1. **Don't Pull the Trigger on Stress.** The very first step in taking control of your stress is to recognize your personal triggers, helping you to avoid a stress response altogether.
2. **Manage your work-life balance.** Make time for interests you enjoy outside of your job. Whether they are active, like playing a sport, or quiet, like reading, it's important to engage in activities you find enjoyable, relaxing, or fulfilling.
3. **Take care of you.** Don't underestimate how much your physical condition affects how well you handle stress. Develop healthy habits like regular exercise, good nutrition, adequate sleep, and minimal or no alcohol and tobacco use.
4. **Manage your time.** There are few things that add more stress than running late. Plan ahead. Leave earlier. Do whatever it takes so you're not always feeling like you're playing "Beat the Clock."
5. **Get and stay organized.** Do you often find yourself searching for something you misplaced, forgetting appointments, or accomplishing less than you intended? Organization will help you overcome these issues, allowing you to be more efficient and productive – and less stressed.
6. **Resist perfectionism.** Life isn't perfect, so don't try to be. If you feel you can do things better, then work on improvement, not perfection.
7. **Adopt a positive attitude.** Experts at the Mayo Clinic say that positive self-talk will improve your outlook, and when your state of mind is generally optimistic, you're able to handle everyday stress in a more constructive way.
8. **Talk it over with a trusted listener.** Talking over a problem with someone who is both supportive and empathetic can be a great way to let off steam and relieve stress. But keep it productive – don't get caught up with just complaining and gossiping.
9. **Ask for help.** Talk to your supervisor and let him know what's bothering you and work together to develop a plan to relieve some of your stressors.
10. **Take a time-out.** Sometimes all you need is a few minutes to disconnect from your environment to prevent your stress level from topping out. If possible, step away and do some deep breathing exercises or take a short walk. And don't forget that a little humor does wonders to diffuse a stressful situation.

Mother Teresa Understood Compassion Fatigue

One of the greatest, best-known caregivers, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, wrote in her plan to her superiors that it was mandatory for her nuns to take time off from their duties to allow them to heal from the stressful effects of their caregiving work.