

10 Workplace "9-5" Stress Busters (April 2012)

Feeling frazzled at work? Harvard researchers have found that those with highly stressful jobs are 40 per cent more likely to develop heart disease than their less-stressed colleagues.

Manage work-related stress with these lunch hour stress busters:

1. Turn off technology. Create personal boundaries to protect your lunch time from technology. Refrain from checking emails, answering texts or voice mails during lunch. Lunch time is "your" time, not company time.
2. Grab a bite. This may sound silly, but "eat" during your lunch break. And by eat, we don't mean wolfing take-out food at your desk while you continue to work. If you purchase your lunch, make healthy choices and avoid fast foods, MSG-laden foods and junk foods. Nourish your brain with foods such as fish, cheese or tofu, which contain amino acids that boost both memory and mood. Lean meats, whole grain breads or pastas and lots of veggies and fruits will round out a mid-day meal. So, try bringing your lunch and packing healthy snacks you can eat throughout the day. You will quickly feel the difference at work, in your waistline and in your wallet.
3. Distract yourself from work. Socializing, for many, offers a distraction from the work at hand (providing you avoid high-stress topics) and offer connectedness to your workplace community. For others, escaping into a good book, completing a crossword puzzle, running errands, window shopping or simply taking a walk alone is the rejuvenating break that allows them to return to work refreshed and ready to tackle the afternoon with greater clarity, perspective and creativity. Find ways to remove yourself – physically and mentally – from work for the duration of your 30 or 60-minute lunch break.
4. Move your body. To oxygenate your muscles and release tension, take a brisk walk around the block and benefit from the change of air, too. Even a 15-minute stroll has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety and depression. Start a lunch-hour walking club for the added benefit of being with others and being accountable to each other. Walking in nature can be invigorating. In inclement weather, find ways to walk indoors: a nearby mall, a commuter indoor "path" network of passageways, up and down the stairwells of your building or around the complex in which you work. Find excuses to use your feet and lunch and throughout the day.

Manage work-related stress with these "during work" stress busters:

5. Breathe. When we feel under pressure, stressed or anxious, we tend to take shallow breaths without realizing it which is short-changing our body and mind of valuable oxygen. Practice taking slow and deep belly breaths (inhale to the count of four and then exhale to the count of five) and repeat these deep breathes a minimum of 6 times. If you can deep breathe like this for one- or two-minute spurts throughout the day, you are sure to help keep your anxiety and stress in check.
6. Break it up. Peel your eyes off that computer screen for five to ten minutes every hour. Look at a point across the room or if possible out a window and rest a bit. You can also stand up and stretch a little. Take frequent short breaks rather than infrequent longer breaks. You will feel more energized and refreshed throughout the day.
7. Tackle one thing at a time. When you're stressed, even a normal workload seems intolerable. Pick one urgent task and work on it. When that's done, choose another. "Ticking off" tasks one at a time is empowering; running around like a chicken without a head definitely isn't!
8. Practice optimism. Pessimistic thoughts sap energy and can become self-defeating. Studies even indicate that someone who looks on the bright side gets sick less often than a gloomy Gus who's always expecting the sky to fall. Catch yourself harbouring negative thoughts and avoid co-workers who are harpy.
9. Do your best and then stop. Resist the temptation to be perfect. Too often the desire to be perfect puts you under undue stress and causes worry and extra time to complete a task where an excellent deliverable was what was requested. Learn to know when "good" is "good enough".
10. Hydrate. Keeping a full water bottle within your reach during the day will help you stay hydrated. The body and brain need sufficient liquid input to stay mentally and physically supple. And, by increasing your water intake throughout the day will increase your trips to the bathroom. More frequent trips to the "loo" not only increase your physical movement during the workday, but they help to flush away the toxins that build up in your body that contribute to sluggishness and lack of clarity.