

Stress overload can affect your safety

Everyone has it and it isn't all bad. But when we suffer from stress overload it can affect our health, and even our ability to work safely.

A reasonable amount of stress can motivate us to work better and faster. But excessive stress can cause many problems such as health difficulties. It can also keep us from concentrating on working safely.

Here are some of the symptoms of too much stress:

- Sleeping difficulties.
- Feelings of anxiety and of being overwhelmed.
- Being short-tempered and uptight.
- Physical sensations such as tense muscles, headache or upset stomach.
- Abuse of substances such as food, cigarettes, alcohol or drugs.

These suggestions might give you some ideas of how to cope with stress:

- Maintain general good health. Eat nutritious meals regularly each day. Your diet should consist largely of healthy food such as whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables. Foods which are high in fat, salt and sugar should be kept to a minimum. It is important to get adequate sleep and rest. Exercising daily or at least several times a week will also help you to stay strong enough to cope.
- Avoid drugs. When we are under stress, it is tempting to turn to this kind of relief. However, the abuse of drugs such as alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, prescription drugs, over-the-counter remedies and street drugs will eventually just add to your problems.
- Special relaxation techniques might prove helpful. You can obtain more information about these methods from



books and tapes which are widely available, as well as community programs, self-help groups and some therapists. One of the most simple of these techniques is taking a number of deep, slow breaths and exhaling completely. Another involves deliberate progressive relaxation of different muscle groups.

- Find someone to talk to. Problems become more manageable when you discuss them with a friend, a member of your family, a clergy person or a counselor. Your company might have an employee assistance officer who can point you in the right direction.
- Give some thought to your priorities. You can't do everything and you can't be responsible for everything. Decide what is really important in your life and focus on that.
- Other problems can perhaps be

ignored. Many of the things we worry about are beyond our control or never actually affect us.

- Learn to relax on your time off from work and other responsibilities, even if it is very short. Every day do something you enjoy.
- Learn to set realistic goals. If you are working toward specific goals, day-to-day difficulties are easier to handle.
- Learn to manage yourself to make the most of the time which you have each day. You might find it useful to get up a little earlier each day or leave for work a little earlier so that you don't feel rushed.

Excessive stress is a common problem in today's hectic world. Learn to manage stress to maintain your health — and your safety.

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