

Healthy ways to handle demanding workloads

If you're like most people in the workplace, you're busy figuring out how to handle more work with fewer resources.

Long before job demands create undue pressure, recognize the signs of workplace stress. Mayo Clinic behavioral medicine specialist Dr. Barbara Bruce notes signs of stress to watch for: headaches, abdominal upset, disrupted sleep, fatigue, lack of patience and loss of sense of humor.

Once you know the tension's mounting, take healthy steps to fend it off. How? Don't be a workaholic. Do take care of relationships. "So-called workaholics," Bruce says, "are 'productive' to the exclusion of other parts of their lives. Often as work demands climb, we spend less and less time with friends and family. This contributes to the increased stress and exhaustion—and ultimately decreases productivity."

Research shows that social support acts as a buffer for stress. So relationships (with spouses, co-workers and others) are very important.



Rx for Stress Relief

Other suggestions from Dr. Bruce:

Exercise. even if you seem to have no time for it. "It is an excellent stress management tool and will bring you back to the work setting with increased energy and focus."

Sleep. "It's critical, because no one is creative or generating innovative ideas if exhausted."

Relax. Practice relaxation techniques, such as relaxed breathing, meditation, yoga and prayer.

Eat a balanced diet.

Rx: Practice daily for a happier, healthier life.

Handling office "gossip"

Gossip, and the stress it may cause, can be unhealthy.

A changing company where job futures might seem uncertain is sure to fuel speculation among the staff. And when there is a lack of real information, the tongues of wondering employees will wag.

In these types of situations, says Connie Tooley, Mayo Clinic employee assistance coordinator, trust levels drop and employees fill in the blanks.

Rumors thrive in this setting. They may offer a diversion for the participants, but are often painful or destructive to the person at the center of the chatter. Tooley and her counterparts in Mayo's Employee Assistance Program say you can control gossip.

Take responsibility. For example, identify yourself in the role of a listener instead of a backbiter. If the conversation turns to rumors, say you're not comfortable with the discussion. If you overhear something, walk away. You can even resolve to say only positive things instead of sustaining the negative.