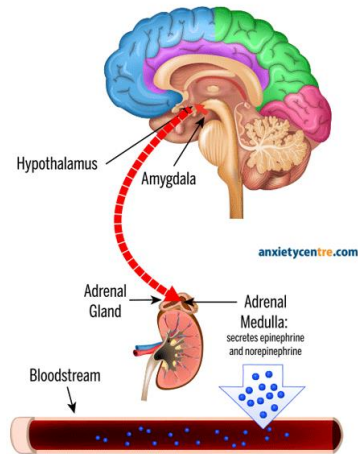




Sympathetic Adrenomedullary System (SAM)



Coping with Stress

Work-related stress

Work-related stress is a growing problem in today's digital world that affects not only the health and well-being of employees, but also the productivity of organizations.

According to APA's (American Psychological Association) Stress in America Survey, work is cited as a significant source of stress by a majority of Americans.

According to the National Health and Safety Commission in Australia, work-related stress is the second most common compensated illness/injury, after musculoskeletal disorders and accounts for the largest stretches of absenteeism.

Work-related stress arises when work demands of various types exceed the person's capacity and capability to cope. But when work stress becomes chronic, it can be harmful to both physical and emotional health; it often causes anxiety and can potentially lead to burnout.

When you encounter a perceived change or "threat" the body's stress response system (which includes the hypothalamus—located at brain's base, a combination of nerve and hormonal signals and the adrenal glands—located upon the kidneys) is activated to release hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol.

Adrenaline increases the heart rate, elevates blood pressure and boosts energy supplies, while cortisol—the primary stress hormone—increases glucose in the bloodstream, enhances the brain's use of glucose (fight or flight response), alters the immune system responses and suppresses the digestive system, reproductive system and growth processes.

This complex natural alarm system also communicates with brain regions that control mood, motivation and fear. If the communication between the brain and the adrenal gland is functioning correctly, the body should be able to increase and reduce cortisol and adrenaline production as necessary.

However, when stressors are always present the fight or flight response stays turned on, the long term activation of the stress response system and the overexposure to cortisol and adrenaline can have a negative impact on health and may create several health problems.



Symptoms of work-related stress can be physical, psychological and behavioral.

Physical symptoms are:

- Headaches,
- Heart palpitations,
- Muscular tension or pain,
- Dizziness/Fatigue, feeling tired all the time
- Sleeping difficulties/Insomnia
- Gastrointestinal upsets, such as: stomach pain, eating too much or too little, diarrhea or constipation
- Dermatological issues
- Nervousness

Psychological symptoms are:

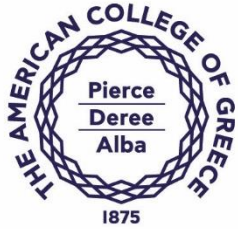
- Racing thoughts/Irritability
- Constant worrying/Feeling anxious or fearful/Anxiety
- Feeling of being overwhelmed and unable to cope
- Discouragement
- Lacking of self-esteem/Pessimism
- Cognitive difficulties, such as: difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Depression

Behavioral symptoms are:

- Drinking or smoking more, increased caffeine intake/Abuse of drugs and alcohol
- An increase in sick days of absenteeism/Exhaustion
- Mood swing and irritability/Short temper
- Aggression/Snapping at people
- Lower tolerance of frustration and impatience
- Disinterest/Diminished creativity and initiative
- Refusal to do work, because of fear (such as being afraid to speak in front of a group)
- Problems with interpersonal relationships (such as: difficulties working with others, avoiding things or people you are having problems with)
- Reduced performance
- Isolation/Cynicism

Symptoms of Chronic stress are:

- Anxiety/Depression
- Insomnia/Sleeping problems
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Back pain
- Obesity/Weight gain
- Digestive problems
- Memory and concentration impairment
- Diabetes
- Weakened immune system



Know the Facts

Health



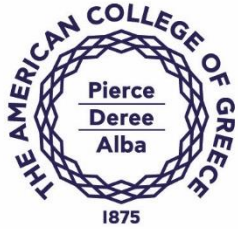
Sources of work-related stress

- Working long hours/Doing too much overtime
- Excessive/heavy workload
- Tight/unreasonable deadlines
- Low salaries
- Few opportunities for growth and advancement/Few promotional opportunities
- Lack of control over job-related decisions
- Unclear performance expectations/Conflicting demands/Changes to duties
- Insufficient skills for the job
- Lack of autonomy/Over-supervision
- Experiencing self-doubt
- Monotonous, boring work or work that isn't engaging or challenging or work that is too challenging
- Job insecurity/Changes within the organization
- Lack of social support at work or outside work
- Poor relationships or conflict between colleagues or bosses
- Inadequate working environment/Lack of proper resources or equipment
- Incompatible values between the employer and the employee
- Harassment
- Discrimination
- Crisis incidents (such as death at workplace)
- Lack of work-life balance

Work-related stress is also a management issue, therefore companies and employers should take steps to ensure the health and safety of their employees:

- Ensure a safe working environment
- Make sure that everyone is properly trained for their job
- De-stigmatize work-related stress by recognizing that it is a genuine problem
- Discuss issues that may arise and take appropriate actions when possible
- Encourage an environment where employees have more to say over their duties, promotional prospects and safety
- Cut down on overtime by reorganizing duties or employing extra staff
- Take into accounts the personal lives of employees and recognize that the demands at home will sometimes clash with the demands at work
- Seek advice from health professionals, if necessary
- Be empathetic and compassionate and keep in mind that employees performance increases, when they feel understood and appreciated





Know the Facts

Health



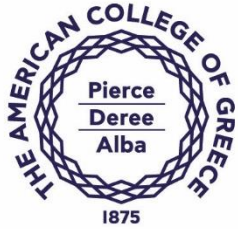
Stress management techniques/Coping mechanisms

Although work-related stress and anxiety are unpleasant feelings, it does not necessarily mean that stress can lead to burnout or stressed individuals have to change career paths. There are several coping mechanisms and strategies people can learn to reduce and manage stress at work.

- **Identify the cause: Track your sensors by keeping a stress journal**, which can help you to find patterns among your stressors and your reactions to them.
- **Act rather than react** and make changes over the things you can change and accept the things that you can't change. *Being in control of your situation* builds emotional strength and is self-empowering.
- **Prioritize your priorities and be well organized.** Prioritize what needs to get done, make time for it and leave the least important tasks to last. *Staying on the top of your to-do list* by focusing on those projects that are best aligned with your goals, can help ward off procrastination-related stress.
- **Eliminate interruptions and practice monotasking over multitasking.** According to Forbes magazine, modern workers are interrupted 7 times an hour and distracted up to 2.1 hours a day (by emails, phone calls, instant messages and urgent daily deadlines). Also *learn to say "no"* to things that will unnecessarily add to your workload, as switching between tasks can be stressful itself.

- **Practice positive self-talk and think positively** to identify self-imposed stress and address non-productive thinking patterns. Try to shift your focus from others' perception of your work to the work itself. Say "I can do this" instead of "I can't do this", look at the positives in life and things for which you are grateful. Encouraging thoughts build your own self-confidence and will motivate you to achieve your goals and inspire others.
- **Talk over your concerns with your supervisor or human resources manager and try to find a solution.** *Come up with suggestions for managing the stressors you've identified. These may include:* improving your skills in time management, clarifying what is expected of you, getting necessary support from colleagues, including more meaningful tasks, making changes to your physical workplace to making it more comfortable, and asking for employed sponsored wellness resources





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Take care of yourself and develop healthy responses, such as:

Eat a healthy/balanced diet with low sugar and high protein intake. *Eat foods that may help to keep cortisol levels stable* like: dark chocolate, bananas and pears, green tea, lemon balm, probiotics in food like yogurt or probiotic supplement, omega-3 fatty acids, and drink plenty of water.

Exercise: any form of physical activity is beneficial, such as: yoga, walking, dancing, rock-climbing. *Regular exercise* can help lower your body's stress hormones by releasing endorphins, which are the chemicals that improve your mood and thus it can help improve your sleep and self-image.

Get enough quality sleep and build healthy sleep habits by limiting caffeine intake late in the day, minimize stimulating activities, such as computer and TV use at night, maintaining a good bedtime routine.

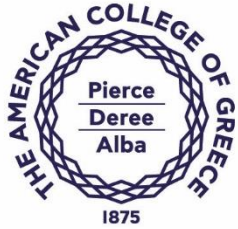
Avoid unhealthy habits, such as alcohol and smoking

Challenge yourself: setting your own goals and challenges helps build confidence. Learn a new language or a sport instead of watching TV all the time.

Establish work-life boundaries and know when to disconnect, so that you don't feel pressure to be available 24 hours a day. Don't take out your stress on your loved ones, instead ask for their support and suggestions.

Take time to recharge and unwind: and return to pre-stress level of functioning. This recovery process requires *having periods of time, when you are not thinking about work*, but instead you are focusing your attention in non-working activities. For instance:

- **Have some "quality me time" away from work.** Schedule breaks throughout the day (to walk, stretch at your desk, do a breathing exercise to rejuvenate the mind), make sure you have enough time to yourself every week, take a break or holiday.
- **Make time for hobbies and favorite activities and do things that bring you pleasure** like reading a book, going to concerts or listening to relaxing music, playing games with your family, spending time with friends or watching a comedy show. *Having fun or a sense of humor is a stress reliever*; laughter can improve your immune system and mood.
- **Socialize and spend time with friends and family.** **"Tend and befriend"**, helps release oxytocin, a natural stress reliever. Fostering healthy relationships and *having a good support network* of colleagues, friends and family can ease your work troubles, help you see things in a different way and gives a sense of belonging and self-worth.



Know the Facts

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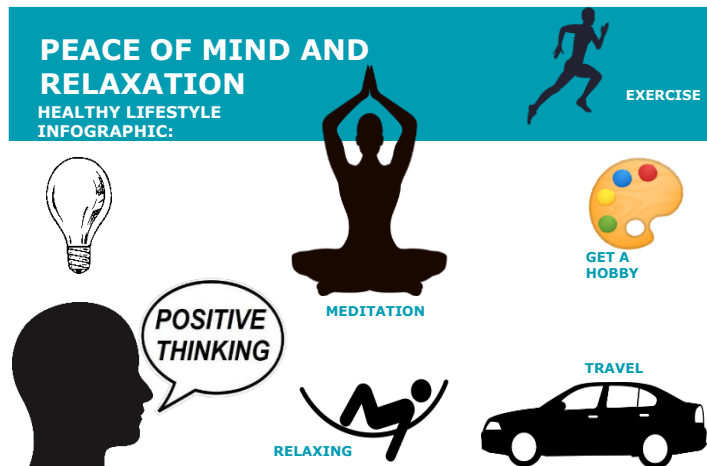
Learn how to relax with techniques, such as: *meditation*, calming *deep breathing exercises*, like: diaphragmatic, abdominal breathing and paced respiration and *mindfulness*--the aim is to develop a skill of being able to focus on a single activity without distraction. Mindfulness can help the effects of negative thinking and increase self-esteem.

Seek professional support from a career counsellor, a psychologist or a therapist, if you continue to feel overwhelmed by work stress.



Other coping mechanisms that will help to eliminate work-related stress are:

- Help other people by **volunteering or community work**: helping other people who are in situations worse than yours help put your problems into perspective.
- Get a pet or **spend time with your pet**: is relaxing, giving you a sense of purpose, keeping you active and providing companionship
- Aromatherapy, essential oils, massage and **positive physical contact** like cuddling, kissing and hugging may help by releasing oxytocin and lower cortisol



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