FREE YOURSELF FROM WORK STRESS

Is stressing about work keeping you from living your best life? Then it's time to tackle it and let go of worry – it's unproductive.

We are fortunate to live in a country that guarantees our freedoms and yet many of us find ourselves trapped by work stress. Work-related stress and mental health have overtaken physical injury as the cause of the longest absences from work. However, having a job actually provides freedoms, including the ability to put food on the table at the end of the day or the opportunity to shape your future.

HOW YOU CAN DO IT ALL, BUT WITHOUT WORK STRESS

Check in with yourself

The first step to becoming free of stress is realising and acknowledging that you are stressed in the first place. Stress is such a broad term that it may be hard to realise just how much of an impact it's having on your health. It's time to get a handle on stress levels if you are experiencing any of the following symptoms: low energy, headaches, a change in appetite or an upset stomach. Low esteem and a loss of sex drive can also indicate something needs to change.

Create a happy space

Take a look at where you work. Is it a small, grey cubicle or a neglected space like a desk in your back room? Simple things like adding a little colour to your desk, funky wallpaper, a potted plant or flower or framed pictures can boost your mood.

Keep moving by being active at work

Find ways to get more movement into your day. Try taking the stairs instead of the lift, cycle to work, walk to a colleague's desk instead of calling them, or take a 10-minute walk during your lunch break to stretch your legs, get fresh air and sunlight on your skin. Finding ways to get active at work is a wonderful way to release tension and refresh your mind.

Exercise and healthy eating

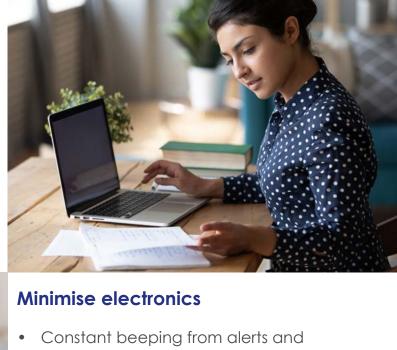Avoid turning to unhealthy eating habits, drinking too much alcohol or smoking to relieve your stress. Instead, fuel your body with what it needs to stay strong and carry you through the rough patches. Pack in healthy snacks like unsalted nuts, carrot sticks, hummus, unsalted popcorn and fresh fruit.

Honour your downtime

Slow down and prioritise yourself and your downtime. Find easier ways of doing things and purposely reduce unnecessary pressures in your daily routine. Quite often work stress is caused by the feeling that we are not up to the tasks at hand because we're low on energy and inspiration. You might try and cope by putting in longer hours, however, long hours are absolutely devastating to our health and work performance. Try to leave work or log off at a reasonable time and use your personal hours to hit the gym, walk the dog or meet up with friends – whatever recharges your batteries.

Find support

The work environment contributes to how stressed you may feel and how you manage work stress. If you are feeling overwhelmed, it's important you speak to those around you, evaluate your resources and start building a culture of support within your team.

Get organised

Rather than dive straight into work when you sit down at your desk, take a moment to plan your day. Try a strategy like *chunking* – this is where you group similar tasks together, for example, setting time aside to answer a bunch of emails. Another organisational approach is to make a list of things you need to do that only take a few minutes, and quickly do them. You will find your list is now significantly shorter and appears more manageable.

Minimise electronics

- Constant beeping from alerts and notifications fraying your nerves? Control or turn off notifications on your smartphone to restore calm.
- Block out your calendar and switch off your phone and electronics to reset your frazzled mind with a few minutes of tech-free meditation.

It's time to get a handle on work stress to prevent burnout. If you are overwhelmed by stress, reach out to our employee health and wellness programme for support.

References
BetterUp
The Heart and Stroke Foundation of South Africa
International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health
The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG)
Verywell Mind

Education department toll free:
0800 111 011

Send a USSD to:
*134*664*38#

Email:
wced@mhg.co.za

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