

# Surviving a Stressful Job

Thriving in a High-Pressure Environment

Sarah is a manager in a high-volume call center, and her job is very stressful. She interacts every day with angry, upset customers, she needs to keep her team members calm and productive, and she has to meet tough customer satisfaction goals.

Despite these pressures, Sarah is known for her professionalism and her composure. She's kind to everyone on her team, she stays cool in tense situations, and she makes good decisions, even when she's under pressure. Sarah has mastered the art of surviving and thriving in a stressful role.

Many people experience stress in their jobs. You might feel stressed temporarily because of a project deadline, or because of seasonal fluctuations in your workload. Or you might experience long-term stress due to the type of work that you do, because of a difficult boss or co-worker, or because of office politics.

In this article, we'll look at the consequences of job stress, and we'll explore strategies that you can use to manage a stressful job successfully.

## Consequences of Stress

Job stress has a number of negative consequences that, if left unmanaged, can affect your health, productivity, well-being, and career.

For example, a study conducted by researchers at [University College London](#) found that professionals who work in high-stress environments are more likely to suffer from high blood pressure, insulin resistance, and high cholesterol - all of which increase the risk of heart disease and diabetes.

Long-term, unmanaged stress can weaken your immune system, it can cause chronic muscle pain or sleeplessness, and it can contribute to obesity. It can also lead to a number of psychological conditions, such as anxiety or depression, and it may cause relationship problems with others on your team.

[Research](#) published in "The Handbook of Organizational Behavior" shows that [burnout](#) is a likely consequence of long-term job stress. Emotional exhaustion, lowered productivity, and higher absenteeism can all result from this.

### Warning:

Stress can cause severe health problems and, in extreme cases, even death. The strategies discussed in this article are for guidance only. You should take the advice of suitably qualified health professionals if you have any concerns over stress-related illnesses, or if stress is causing you significant or persistent unhappiness.

## Why You Should Control Stress

There are many good reasons why you should control workplace stress. You'll be more productive and creative at work, you'll have better relationships with family and colleagues, and [you'll produce higher-quality work](#). You'll also be healthier and more energetic as a result.

## Symptoms

When your job is stressful most of the time, stress can have a negative impact on your health and

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productivity. There are many warning signs that you're experiencing high levels of workplace stress, including:

- Frequent headaches/muscle tension.
- Persistent sleeplessness.
- Ongoing irritability.
- An upset stomach.
- Low morale/depression.
- Prolonged difficulty concentrating.
- Weight loss/gain.
- Continued loss of interest in work or hobbies.
- Social withdrawal.

**Tip:**

Use the [Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale](#) to explore your current levels of long-term stress.

## Strategies to Manage a Stressful Job

Let's look at several ways that you can manage the stress in your role.

### Identify Causes

Before you can manage stress, you first have to know what causes it. A survey by HR firm [ComPsych](#) revealed that 59 percent of professionals report a heavy workload as their leading cause of stress. Other common causes of workplace stress include:

- Workplace pace and unrealistic deadlines.
- Persistent bullying and abuse.
- A difficult boss or colleague.
- Long work hours.
- Poor management.
- A lack of autonomy.
- Poor work/life balance.
- Meaningless work.
- Career concerns (no upward mobility, or a lack of job security).
- An unhealthy work environment.
- A lack of resources.

Keep a [stress diary](#) to understand what causes you to feel stress in your job. Once you've identified the factors that contribute to your stress, you can then take appropriate steps to manage them.

### Think Positively

Your attitude plays a major role in your level of stress, no matter what kind of work you do. You can choose to approach tasks, responsibilities, and people with a negative attitude, or you can choose to

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approach your work and relationships with a positive mind-set. Although the amount of work is the same, the impact on your health and well-being is profound.

[Research](#) shows that positive thinking acts as a stress buffer. Whenever you catch yourself slipping into a negative frame of mind, make an effort to [think positively](#) instead. This might mean challenging your negative thoughts with rational, fact-based thinking, or using [affirmations](#) to boost your self-confidence.

## Calm Down

Stress can often cause you to stop breathing for several seconds, even though you may not realize it. When you're feeling stressed, practice [deep breathing exercises](#). Deep, slow breathing floods your body with oxygen, slowing your heart rate, relaxing your muscles, and helping you focus.

You might also want to practice yoga or [meditation](#) after work, both of which are effective methods of managing stress.

Frequent daily breaks and regular vacations are also important for reducing work stress. Even a long weekend can help you de-stress after a tough week. When you do take a break or go on vacation, leave work at work; taking a "working vacation" or constantly checking email while you're gone won't give you the time that you need to rest and recharge.

## Manage Your Time

Your job might be stressful because of your workload or project deadlines. You can lower your stress levels and improve your productivity by learning to manage your time and priorities more effectively.

First, take our quiz, "[How Good Is Your Time Management?](#)" to discover how well you're currently managing your time, and to get suggestions for improving your time management.

Distractions in the office can be a major source of stress. These distractions can come from well-meaning colleagues, from constant phone calls or emails, or from general office noise. [Minimize distractions](#) by closing your office door for short periods of time, by turning off your phone, or by listening to white noise to drown out people's conversations.

## Exercise

Regular exercise is one of the best ways to manage a stressful job. Daily exercise helps you cope with stress; it also boosts your memory, creativity, IQ, and productivity.

You can [fit exercise into your schedule](#) in many ways. Wake up earlier and exercise before work, take a walk on your lunch break, or use a standing desk while you're at work.

Remember, any additional movement will help you manage stress and live a healthier life.

Take frequent breaks to move around and let your mind rest. Try taking several five- or 10-minute walks during the day; it might not sound like much, but this exercise and fresh air will give you time to rest and recharge.

## Manage Priorities

Conflicting priorities can be a major source of workplace stress, especially when you have to push important work aside to focus on less important, but urgent, tasks. Use the [Urgent/Important Matrix](#) to reorganize your priorities and to ensure that you're devoting enough time to important, and not just

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urgent, work.

You also need to choose the right tasks to work on. Some tasks require a lot of time and energy, yet they have a low impact, while other tasks have a big impact, but require little effort. Use the [Action Priority Matrix](#) to identify which tasks are worth spending time on, and which you can safely delegate or drop.

If you're working on a project that seems overwhelming, break it into smaller steps. This allows you to accomplish one thing at a time, instead of trying to take everything on at once.

## Increase Autonomy

Autonomy is the freedom to decide how to accomplish your work. Professionals who work in roles with low autonomy often experience more stress and dissatisfaction than those with greater autonomy.

Speak with your boss about your current goals or projects. Where appropriate, ask for the freedom to choose how you accomplish these goals. This could include working from home one day a week, or choosing who you want to work with on your next project.

Use [job-crafting strategies](#) to reshape your role and to better use your strengths and interests. This can lead to greater productivity and less stress. You might also find that job crafting adds interest and meaning to your work.

## Assess Resources

Look at the work that you do. What are your biggest frustrations? Where are your bottlenecks? Where are you most inefficient? These situations often point to a lack of training, tools, resources, or help - all of which can contribute to workplace stress.

Make a list of what you need. Let your boss know what you're lacking, and explain how these items will help improve your productivity and effectiveness. If your boss can't provide the resources that you need, think about how you might be able to [negotiate](#) for them with others, or acquire them on your own.

## Find Meaning

What do you love most about your job? What gives your work meaning?

These questions might sound simple, but they're important. If you know what gives your work meaning, it will help you manage the stress that goes along with it. Use tools like the [MPS Process](#) and the [PERMA Model](#) to identify what you care about, and to think about how you can incorporate more of these things into your career.

## Key Points

Everyone experiences stress at work from time to time. However, if your job is consistently stressful, it's essential to find ways to manage that stress. Long-term stress can lead to a number of health problems, including high blood pressure and a weakened immune system. It can also contribute to heart disease, obesity, anxiety, and depression.

To survive a stressful job, start by identifying what causes your stress. Next, confirm that you're

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handling your priorities and time effectively. Last, get regular exercise and make sure that you have the tools and resources you need to do your job.

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