



DON'T LET WORKPLACE STRESS RUIN YOUR LABOR DAY HOLIDAY

The Ontario Psychological Association Offers Strategies for Managing Work Stress



In today's connected world people are finding it increasingly difficult to switch off from the stresses of the workplace, according to the American Psychological Association (APA). This year, many will still be at work, either at their workplace or by answering e-mail, phone calls or faxes while at home or on vacation. According to a 2006 APA survey almost one-third of Americans have trouble balancing their work and family lives.

Originally intended as a day for relaxation and celebration of the worker, Labor Day today is very different from the first Labor Day in 1882. Back then, a largely industrial and agricultural workforce could disconnect from work on Labor Day without the possibility of being disturbed by work-related cell phone calls, reading e-mails on-the-go or being summoned to rush back to the office. In today's 24/7 society, work frequently intrudes in to employee's personal lives during evenings, weekends, vacations and holidays. In fact, 83 percent of email users admit to checking their email daily while on vacation. Increasing work demands on employees have a significant impact on employers too -- job stress costs U.S. businesses an estimated \$300 billion per year through absenteeism, diminished productivity, employee turnover and direct medical, legal and insurance fees.

"Research shows that stress, and the unhealthy behaviors people often use to manage it, contribute to some of our society's biggest health problems such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes." says Dr. Margaret Weiser, President of the Ontario Psychological Association. "So it's imperative to learn how to manage stress at work and truly balance home and workplace demands even if that means switching off from e-mail this Labor Day."

The Ontario Psychological Association offers these strategies for managing your work-related stress:

Know yourself. Be aware of your stress level and know what stresses you out. People experience stress in different ways. You may have a hard time concentrating or making decisions, feel angry, irritable or out of control, or experience headaches, muscle tension or a lack of energy. Learn your own stress signals.

Recognize how you deal with stress. Do you engage in unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, drinking or eating poorly to cope with your stress? Do you lose patience with your children or spouse or coworkers when you feel overwhelmed by work pressures?



Turn off and tune in. Communication technology can take you to productivity heights never imagined, but it can also allow work to creep into family time, dinner and vacations. Set rules for yourself, such as turning off your cell phone or BlackBerry when you get home, or establishing certain times when you return calls. Be sure to communicate those rules to others, so you can manage their expectations. Let technology be a tool that works for you, rather than the other way.

Keep a "To-Do" list. Worried that you'll forget something important? Constantly thinking through all the things you need to get done? Clear your head and put those thoughts on paper (or in an electronic task list) by creating a list of work and personal tasks and marking those with the highest priority. Not only will you reduce the risk of forgetting something, you'll also be better able to focus on the task at hand.

Take short breaks. Stay energized and productive by taking a minute or two periodically throughout the day to stand up, stretch, breathe deeply and shake off the accumulating tension. Short breaks between tasks can be particularly effective, helping you feel like you've wrapped up one thing before moving on to the next. Take a 10-15 minute break every few hours to recharge and avoid the temptation to work through lunch. The productivity you gain will more than make up for the time you spend on break.



Find healthy ways to manage stress. Work to replace unhealthy coping strategies, such as eating junk food, smoking or drinking alcohol with healthy behaviors, like exercise, meditation or talking with friends and family. Keep in mind that unhealthy behaviors develop over time and can be difficult to change. Take it slow and focus on changing one behavior at a time. Some behaviors are very difficult to change and may require the help of a licensed professional such as a psychologist.



Take care of yourself. Eat right, get enough sleep, drink plenty of water and engage in regular physical activity. Ensure you have a healthy mind and body through activities like yoga, taking a short walk, going to the gym or playing sports that will enhance both your physical and mental health. Take regular vacations. No matter how hectic life gets, make time for yourself—even if it's just simple things like reading a good book, listening to your favorite album or enjoying a leisurely Sunday brunch at your favorite café.

Ask for professional support. Accepting help from supportive friends and family can improve your ability to manage stress. Your employer may also have stress management resources available through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), including online information, available counseling and referral to mental health professionals, if needed. If you continue to feel overwhelmed by work stress, you may want to talk to a psychologist, who can help you better manage stress and change unhealthy behaviors.

To learn more about stress and mind/body health, visit the American Psychological Association at www.APAhelpcenter.org

The Ontario Psychological Association: www.psych.on.ca
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