GuidanceResources®

Resiliency Resources

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Resiliency During Tough Times

Of the many factors that go into successful change, whether personal or business-related, the most important may be resiliency. Resilience is the measure of our ability to welcome challenges, overcome adversity and get back on track to achieving our goals. With that in mind, here is some information on resilience amid changing times.

What is resilience?

Resilience is more than coping; it's about confronting crises and difficult situations without getting overwhelmed by them. Resilient people are better able to handle life's stressors and to adapt to changing situations. Being resilient can help protect you from depression, stress and anxiety, too.

Some of the characteristics of resilient people include:

- Strong relationships
- Self-motivation
- A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities
- Skills in communication and problem solving
- Self-awareness
- Emotional control

Resiliency in the Workplace

All business involves some inherent risk. Anyone in management understands that–or if they don't, they soon will. That's why resilience is such a useful tool in today's business world. Resilience means controlling your ego, not panicking in the face of a setback, and having the patience and ability to stay focused on long-term goals. Resilience can help you weather storms, remain steady and make rational decisions instead of being driven by emotion.

How can you cope with the regular changes inherent in business today?

There will always be periods of large growth, times of relative stability and times where the economy slows or recedes. To thrive, businesses must respond to these waves appropriately. While workplace upheaval can be stressful, there are things you can do to cope with this challenging environment:

Find a healthy balance. Your work is important, but it's unhealthy for you mentally, physically and socially if you live, breathe and sleep your job. Get off the rollercoaster and away from the stress and uncertainty by surrounding yourself with friends and family and finding positive outlets to spend your free time.

Be positive. There is only so much you can control. How you feel about your situation is one of those things. Look for the silver lining and practice positive self-affirmations–it can change your mood and outlook on life.

Look for the gray. Even though it may seem so, not everything is black and white or gain and loss. Search for the middle ground. It can be a far less stressful place.

How to Manage Anger and Stress

A new boss. A drop in headcount. A change in procedure… When facing change, it's fairly common for those in the workplace today to feel anger and stress. It's important, however, to remember that allowing such emotions to run you leads to mental, physical and social consequences.

If anger is getting the best of you, there are a number of steps you can take to manage it in a healthier way:

- **Relax and calm down.** Take deep breaths. Count to 10 and let the tension escape from your body. Try relaxation techniques such as meditation, yoga and progressive muscle relaxation.

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- **Remove yourself from the environment.** If a person or situation is causing you to feel extremely angry, or if you feel that you cannot talk about your emotions or express your anger positively, excuse yourself and walk away.
- **Identify the source.** What exactly is making you angry? When you recognize the cause, approach it in a positive, productive way.
- **Think before taking action.** Carefully consider the consequences of your response. Will you regret saying what is on your mind? Is there a better way to express your anger than the first impulse that came to you? Do not overreact. Avoid making assumptions or guesses; know the facts before you speak out about someone or something.
- **Assert yourself appropriately.** If you feel strongly about something, do not hold back from saying what is on your mind. Let the other person know what you want. Be clear and direct in your message.
- **Divert your attention.** If there is nothing you can do to change the situation, (e.g., you are stuck in a terrible traffic jam that is making you increasingly irritated), think of something else. Focus on a pleasant thought, an upcoming vacation or a happy memory.
- **Find humor in the situation.** When appropriate, learn to laugh at life and conflicts with others. Break the tension and defuse the situation with a smile, a joke or a funny (but not sarcastic) comment.
- **Be patient.** Try to be tolerant and empathetic of others. Attempt to understand their situations and behaviors.
- **Find a substitute outlet for anger.** Instead of acting on an aggressive urge, find a creative outlet for your energy. Start an exercise program. Take up a physically challenging new sport like kickboxing. Try a new hobby or artistic endeavor such as painting.
- **Get advice from others.** If you simply do not know how to deal with an angry feeling or situation, ask friends or family for suggestions on how they got through similar situations.

There are also a number of ways you can alleviate stress in your day-to-day life. Here are 10:

- **Get enough sleep.** If necessary, use an alarm clock to remind you to go to bed.
- **Schedule a realistic day.** If you can't avoid back-to-back appointments, try to at least give yourself a few moments for a breathing spell.
- **Do not rely on your memory.** Write down appointment times, assignment due dates, etc. As an old Chinese proverb states, "The palest ink is better than the most retentive memory."
- **Be prepared to wait.** A paperback, crossword puzzle or cell phone game can make a wait in a post-office line almost pleasant.
- **Procrastination is stressful.** Whatever you want to do tomorrow, do today; whatever you want to do today, do it now.
- **Relax your standards.** The world will not end if the grass does not get mowed this weekend or if the sheets have to be changed on Sunday instead of Saturday.
- **Learn to say 'no.'** Saying no to extra projects, social events and activities you do not have the time or energy for takes practice.
- **Eliminate destructive self-talk**. "I can't ..." or "I'm too inexperienced to ..." are negative thoughts that can increase stress levels.
- **Take time for yourself.** Develop a belief that everyone needs quiet time every day to relax and be alone.
- **Turn off your phone.** Want to take a long bath, meditate, sleep or read without interruption? Drum up the courage to temporarily disconnect.

Get Support

If you would like to learn more about resilience and how it can help you deal with anger or stress, contact your Employee Assistance Program for free and confidential support, resources and information. Help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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Resilience in Stressful Times

Keep in mind that stress doesn't always get better on its own. You may have to actively work on it, especially if the stress you have been facing is prolonged or intense. The following stress management techniques may help:

- **Scale back:** While it may seem easier said than done, take a close look at your daily, weekly and monthly schedule and find meetings, activities, dinners or chores that you can cut back on or delegate to someone else. If news reports or social media posts are contributing to your stress, try turning off the TV and the Internet until you feel better able to deal.
- **Prepare:** If you are feeling edgy already, try to stay ahead of additional stress by preparing for meetings or trips, scheduling your time better, and setting realistic goals for tasks both big and small. Stress mounts when you run short on time, so build a cushion into your schedule for traffic jams or slow public transportation, for example.
- **Reach out:** Make or renew connections with others. Surrounding yourself with supportive family, friends, co-workers, or clergy and spiritual leaders can have a positive effect on your mental well-being and your ability to cope. Volunteer in your community.
- **Take up a hobby:** It may seem cliché, but an enjoyable pastime can calm your racing mind and heart rate. Try reading, gardening, crafts, tinkering with electronics, fishing, carpentry or music–things that you don't get competitive or more stressed out about.
- **Relax:** Physical activity, meditation, yoga, massage and other relaxation techniques can help you manage stress. It doesn't matter which technique you choose. What matters is refocusing your attention to something calming and increasing awareness of your body.
- **Get enough sleep:** Lack of sleep affects your immune system and your judgment and makes you more likely to snap over minor irritations. Most people need seven to eight hours a day.
- **Avoid alcohol and caffeine:** While momentarily calming, both can contribute to stress and anxiety.
- **Get professional help:** If your stress management efforts aren't helpful enough, see your doctor or contact your Employee Assistance Program. Chronic, uncontrolled stress can lead to a variety of potentially serious health problems, including depression and pain.

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Fostering Resilience

How resilient are you? During a personal crisis, some people are more resilient than others. Resilience is more than coping; it's about confronting crises and difficult situations without getting overwhelmed by them. Resilient people are better able to handle life's stressors and adapt to changing situations. Being resilient can help protect you from depression, stress and anxiety, too.

Resilience can be strengthened and nurtured in adults and children by improving self-esteem, developing a strong system of social support and taking care of your physical and mental health.

Maintain Strong Connections With Family and Friends

Having strong, positive relationships with others provides a cushion of acceptance and support that can help you weather tough times.

Avoid Viewing Problems as Insurmountable

You have probably handled and survived difficult situations in the past. Learn from these experiences and be confident that you will get through a current crisis, too.

Accept That Change is Part of Living

The reality is that certain things cannot be controlled. What's important is how you respond to the situation. Accepting the change makes it easier to move forward with your life.

Keep a Long-term Perspective and Hopeful Outlook

Even though your feelings may be overwhelming at times, try to stay positive. Set goals for yourself so that you can feel productive and purposeful every day, and create longer-term goals so that you have a direction for your future.

Take Care of Your Physical and Mental Health

It's especially important when you are feeling stressed to continue to eat a healthy diet and get adequate sleep and regular exercise. Alcohol and caffeine can increase stress levels; avoid or reduce consumption.

Get Support and Resources From Your Employee Assistance Program

If you need help dealing with a personal crisis, or would like additional resources and strategies for improving your resilience, contact your employee assistance program for confidential counseling and other services.

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Identifying and Coping With Job-related Stress

If you, your co-workers or employees seem to be more hurried, strained, tense or nervous than in the past, there is a good chance the cause of the anxiety is work-related stress. A recent study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) states that 40 percent of workers thought their job was "extremely" or "very" stressful. In addition, 25 percent of respondents felt their job was the No. 1 source of stress in their lives and that they felt "often or very often burned out or stressed by their work."

Stress causes a variety of physical and emotional changes in people. Managers (and employees) should be trained to recognize the common signs of stress and burnout in other people. If you are aware and conscious of these signs you can implement specific changes in day-to-day activities to minimize (or even eliminate) job-related stress from your workplace.

Causes of Work-related Stress

A conflict with a supervisor… feeling overwhelmed with tasks and responsibilities… a noisy air conditioning unit… a longer-than-normal commute... There are number of things, from seemingly minor to undeniably large, that can cause a person to feel stressed-out in the workplace.

Causes of stress will vary form person to person and not everyone will feel anxiety from the same stressors (causes of stress). For example, some people thrive in work environments where they have to meet fast-approaching deadlines each day, such as in the news industry. Other people would find working under these conditions to be extremely stressful.

Sources of work-related stress commonly cited by employees include:

- Long or difficult commutes to work
- Disagreements with co-workers or supervisors
- Having disagreeable or difficult co-workers
- Experiencing verbal abuse
- Feeling overworked
- Feeling unappreciated
- Having difficult deadlines to meet
- Feeling underpaid
- Job insecurity
- Having to take work home to complete
- Diminished benefits
- Feeling tasks are monotonous, repetitive or redundant
- Working long hours
- Fear of physical violence in the workplace

Signs of Stress

Stress can manifest itself in a multitude of different physical or emotional changes in a person.

Physical signs of stress include:

- Headaches and migraines
- Stomachaches and ulcers
- Back and muscle pain
- Grinding teeth
- Feeling lightheaded
- Trouble sleeping
- Fatigue
- Poor appetite
- Panic attacks
- Difficulty concentrating
- Rashes, itching and hives
- Weight gain or loss
- A weakened immune system
- Increase in drinking, smoking or drug use (making it harder for the body to fight viruses and bacteria)

Emotional signs of stress include:

- Forgetfulness
- Excessive nervousness, anxiety and worry
- Increased anger and hostility
- Mood swings
- Depression
- Difficulty communicating
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Withdrawal from social interaction

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Ways to Manage or Eliminate Stress

If you feel minor stress from your job or you are getting ulcers from the constant strain, there are things you can do to minimize the stress and anxiety your job is causing in your life. Here are some suggestions for coping with job-related stress:

- **Exercise before going to work:** Physical exertion is a great way to relieve or reduce stress, so try exercising a little before you go to the office. Put in some time on the treadmill or sign up for a morning spin class.
- **Take breaks during the workday:** If you have a job where you are at a desk all day get up and walk around for five minutes. Stretch your legs with a walk around your floor or building to clear your mind. Think about something besides work-related tasks while walking.
- **Smile:** It seems too easy, but simply having a smile on your face can help reduce stress levels. Think about how you interact with other people; do you not enjoy being greeted more by a smiling person than by somebody who is frowning or who looks mad? Give people a smile when you see them and watch your work environment slowly brighten up.
- **Avoid confrontational situations:** If there is a specific person you are having difficulty with at your job, try to avoid having interactions with them. Ask to work on a different team or on different tasks. Include other people in all conversations you have with the person so you do not feel isolated and alone with them.
- **Delegate tasks:** Many people try to do too much, even though they work in a "team" environment where many people are supposed to pull equal loads. Allow other people to do some of the tasks you enjoy less, so you can spend more of your time doing the work-related functions you enjoy.
- **Talk with your supervisor:** Employers do not want to have a burned out workforce. High job-related stress levels lead to high job turnover rates. Job turnover cost employers money. Your supervisor or HR department may have some suggestions for minimizing the stress you are feeling at work.
- **Take a vacation:** How long has it been since you were away from the office for more than a three-day weekend? There is a reason you get vacation days every year, and that is so you can take an actual vacation where you are not checking your e-mail or voicemail every two hours for messages. Go someplace, leave your work behind and spend time doing things for yourself, not for your employer.
- **Seek the assistance of a therapist or mental health counselor:** The stress and anxiety we feel can be minimized by our own efforts, but sometimes it is necessary to seek the assistance of a professional. They will have ideas and possible solutions you can use to reduce and eliminate work-related stress.

Resources

- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health www.cdc.gov/niosh/.

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Tips for Coping With Stress

Stress is an inevitable part of our lives. We have all experienced it to some degree: during an argument with a parent or sibling; while speaking to a large group; while trying to finish a school project. Our experiences in an increasingly complex world constantly require us to adapt to changes and cope with stressors. Learning how to identify and manage stress can help prevent physical and psychological problems, increase your chances of future success and promote a longer, healthier life.

The way we think and respond to life's challenges promotes stress. For example, the more impatient, demanding, controlling or submissive we are, the more we are bound to experience stress. Stress can be a learned response to everyday life events.

Effects of Stress

To a certain degree, feeling stressed is a normal, healthy response to life's events and challenges. The ability to react under stress is crucial for human survival. Many experts define stress as the body's reaction to change. It is natural for our bodies to trigger a fight-or-flight response to potentially dangerous situations. A stressful stimulus promotes a chemical reaction that produces adrenaline and increases energy.

However, over time the body's continued response to regular stress can lead to an increase in blood pressure and heart rate, heightened anxiety and an overall strain on the system. Unrelieved tension builds up and may cause unhealthy symptoms.

Immediate physiological symptoms of stress include:

- Hyperventilation (rapid, shallow breathing)
- Profuse sweating
- Rapid heartbeat
- Increased urination
- Dizziness and lightheadedness
- Fatigue

Conditions linked to stress include:

- Musculoskeletal pain (e.g., backaches, neck pain)
- Migraines and headaches
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Gastrointestinal disorders (e.g., chronic heartburn, ulcers)
- Skin diseases
- Cardiovascular disorders (e.g., high blood pressure)
- Colitis
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Diabetes
- Asthma

Behavioral symptoms of stress include:

- Irritability
- Social withdrawal
- Anxiety
- Bad habits (e.g., biting your nails or grinding your teeth)
- Forgetfulness
- Inability to act due to fear or indecision
- Lack of concentration
- Substance abuse

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Ways to Cope with Stress

Seek support. Do not wait until you reach your breaking point. If you begin to feel stressed, talk to your parents, your guidance counselor or your friends. They may be able to provide new ways that you can try to help alleviate stress. It is important to recognize and admit that you are feeling anxious and stressed. Pay attention to your body's physical signs of stress (e.g., headaches, stomach discomfort). If the stress becomes overwhelming, talk to your parents about getting some professional help.

- Try to identify the causes of stress. By recognizing the real reasons behind your tension, you can learn to feel more in control and change the source of the stress. If you are not sure why you feel stressed, retrace your steps: perhaps it stems from a forgotten event from yesterday or last night's disturbing dream.

Ask yourself these five questions:

1. What is the worst thing that can happen?
2. Is there anything more I can do to improve the situation?
3. How will this outcome affect my life in the long run?
4. What can I learn from this?
5. What advice would I give to someone else in this situation?

- Accept stress as an everyday part of life. Often the best way to cope is to "go with the flow", to accept those stressors that you can not currently change.
- Laugh and learn. Instead of getting irritated, laugh at life's annoyances and learn from your mistakes. Humor is a powerful tool in helping build resilience, the ability to bounce back from negative events.
- Nurture those relationships that matter. More interpersonal contact with the right people can help relieve stress. Open up to others about your problems, and accept help when it is offered. Spend less time with negative, stress-inducing friends or acquaintances.
- Develop a timeline of short- and long-term goals. List challenging but realistic objectives for yourself. Analyze and update these goals over time. Avoid setting unrealistic expectations and too many lofty goals. Attempt challenges that are doable, and tackle the easiest first.
- Focus on the positives. Recognize that for everything that may go wrong, there may be multiple things that go right. Be proud of your accomplishments, and celebrate your successes.
- Break from routines at school and at home. Monotony also can cause stress. Remember you can change the script of your life.
- Examine your thought patterns. Often it is our thoughts that determine whether we interpret a situation as stressful. Listen to your inner voice to discover thought patterns that may be contributing to your overall stress level. Write down responses to that inner voice so that you can access these responses the next time you feel stressed.

Personal Life Tips

- Get enough rest. Doctors recommend getting at least eight hours of sleep a night.
- Exercise regularly. Swimming, running, brisk walking, aerobic exercises and other repetitive fitness activities are especially beneficial.
- Engage in fulfilling activities. Take a little time each day for something you like to do: a hobby, a walk with the family dog, an hour with a good book, a fun outing with friends, etc.
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine and other stimulants. These common drugs actually can induce stress and anxiety. A simple step like switching to decaffeinated coffee can have a real effect on your stress level.
- Avoid alcohol, tranquilizers and recreational drugs. These may contribute to anxiety and depression and an increased sense of loss of control.

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School Tips

- **Try to exercise during lunchtime or if you have a free period during the day:** Simple steps like taking the stairs or walking for 15 minutes after lunch can have a positive effect on your stress level (and on your waistline too!).
- **Tackle one task at a time if possible:** List your assignments in order of priority, and complete one at a time. Tackle the easiest ones first. This can make you feel more organized and in control, leading to a sense of greater accomplishment.
- **Do not procrastinate:** Putting important tasks off can lead to increased worry. It is more important to get started than it is to complete the assignment perfectly. You can always use the first attempt as a rough draft.
- **Get organized:** Rearrange your locker and assignment notebook for maximum efficiency. Make sure you have a quiet area at home where you can study without interruption. Create lists and schedules to help you meet deadlines.

Relaxation 101

Try these techniques to help you relax and reduce stress:

- **Breathing exercises:** Drawing slow, deep breaths from the diaphragm (the spot just under your ribcage) promotes a more efficient exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide than chest or shoulder breathing. Exhale slowly and evenly. If you are highly stressed, try this while lying on your back.
- **Yoga and stretching exercises:** These can relieve tension, make your body more limber and flexible and produce an overall calming effect.
- **Meditation and imagery techniques:** By sitting in a comfortable, quiet environment, closing your eyes and freeing your mind from its many concerns for even a few minutes each day, you can learn to achieve relaxation quickly. Try concentrating on an image that symbolizes your stress, such as a giant ball that slowly begins to shrink; alternatively, let your mind go blank. Do not fight stressful thoughts. Instead, think of these thoughts as floating in one ear and out the other and being replaced in your mind by calmer images.
- **Progressive muscle-relaxation techniques:** These involve systematically tensing, relaxing and visualizing each major muscle group. For example, make a fist and hold it tight for at least five seconds. Feel the tension in your hand and arm. Finally, relax your hand, and visualize the tension escaping your body. Do the same with your other hand, your neck, your face, limbs, etc.

Resources

- The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH): www.nimh.nih.gov
- National Institutes of Health (NIH): http://health.nih.gov
- Mental Health America: www.nmha.org
- What is post-traumatic stress disorder?

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How well do you cope with stress?

Do you frequently feel frustrated and exhausted from too much responsibility and too little time? Do you have trouble sleeping or finding time to relax? You may be having difficulty handling the stress in your life. Take this quiz to find out how well you cope with stress.

1. I feel I have a supportive social network.
   - ☐ Yes (10 points)
   - ☐ No (0 points)
2. I actively pursue a hobby.
   - ☐ Yes (10 points)
   - ☐ No (0 points)
3. I participate in at least one social activity per month.
   - ☐ Yes (10 points)
   - ☐ No (0 points)
4. I am within 10 pounds of my ideal body weight.
   - ☐ Yes (15 points)
   - ☐ No (0 points)
5. I practice some form of deep relaxation at least three times a week. (Deep relaxation includes meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, imagery and yoga.)
   - ☐ Yes (15 points)
   - ☐ No (0 points)
6. On an average, I exercise 30 minutes per day.
   - ☐ No (0 points)
   - ☐ One day a week (5 points)
   - ☐ Two days a week (10 points)
   - ☐ Three days a week (15 points)
   - ☐ Four days a week (20 points)
   - ☐ Five days a week (25 points)
   - ☐ Six days a week (30 points)
   - ☐ Seven days a week (35 points)
7. I eat two nutritionally balanced meals per day. (A nutritionally balanced meal is low in fat and high in vegetables, fruits and whole-grain products.)
   - ☐ No (0 points)
   - ☐ Once a week (5 points)
   - ☐ Twice a week (10 points)
8. Every week, I do something that I really enjoy.
   - ☐ Yes (5 points)
   - ☐ No (0 points)
9. I have a place in my home which I use for relaxation and/or solitude.
   - ☐ Yes (10 points)
   - ☐ No (0 points)
10. I practice time management techniques daily. (This includes planning ahead, keeping a calendar, prioritizing and setting deadlines.)
    - ☐ Yes (10 points)
    - ☐ No (0 points)
11. I smoke daily.
    - ☐ Yes (0 points)
    - ☐ No (30 points)
12. I can stop drinking after two alcoholic drinks.
    - ☐ Yes (35 points)
    - ☐ No (0 points)
13. I take medication (over the counter/prescribed) to fall asleep on a regular basis.
    - ☐ Yes (0 points)
    - ☐ No (35 points)
14. On an average, I bring my work home during the week.
    - ☐ No (25 points)
    - ☐ One day a week (20 points)
    - ☐ Two days a week (15 points)
    - ☐ Three days a week (10 points)
    - ☐ Four days a week (5 points)
    - ☐ Every day of the week (0 points)

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Your Score

Add up your points to find out how well you cope with stress. To learn effective ways to reduce stress and improve your work-life balance using your employee assistance program, talk to the GuidanceResources representative at the ComPsych® table today, or call GuidanceResources at your toll-free number. Services are confidential and available at no cost to you.

145 points and above

Congratulations! You have an excellent score. You are able to handle stress in an effective and healthy manner.

101-144 points

You are able to cope with stress in an effective and healthy manner. Be sure to keep exercising, eating a healthy diet, relaxing and avoiding alcohol and tobacco.

51-100 points

You have adequate skills to cope with common stress. You can improve the way you handle stress with the following suggestions:

- Exercise for 30 minutes, at least three times per week.
- Take some time each week for an activity you enjoy such as pursuing a hobby, going for a walk, listening to music, reading a book or playing with a pet.
- Eat regular, well-balanced meals full of vegetables, fruits and whole grains.
- Avoid using medication, alcohol or other substances to help you sleep or relax.
- Stop smoking cigarettes.
- If possible, leave your work at the office.

0-50 points

You may not be effectively coping with stress. Your employee assistance program is a good place to learn healthy strategies for managing stress, learning to prioritize and finding resources to help you balance your work, family and personal relationships.

In addition, you can improve the way you handle stress with these suggestions:

- Exercise for 30 minutes, at least three times per week.
- Carve out some time for yourself each week to do the things you like to do, such as pursuing a hobby, going for a walk, listening to music, reading a book or playing with a pet.
- Eat regular, well-balanced meals full of vegetables, fruits and whole grains.
- Avoid using medication, alcohol or other substances to help you sleep or relax.
- Stop smoking cigarettes.
- If possible, leave your work at the office.

For more information on this and other topics contact GuidanceResources or your HR department.

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Tips to Relax and Reduce Stress

It is important to relieve your stress because it can lead to mild health problems such as insomnia and headaches. It can lower the body's immune system, increasing susceptibility to illness. It also may worsen or contribute to some more serious health conditions.

Some people are better at managing stress than others. Those people all cultivate the same habits:

Ten Habits of Effective Stress Managers

1. They know how to relax.
2. They eat well and exercise often.
3. They get enough sleep.
4. They don't worry about the unimportant stuff.
5. They don't get angry often.
6. They are organized and their life is not cluttered.
7. They manage time efficiently.
8. They have and make use of a strong social support system.
9. They live according to their values—their goals are aligned with what's important to them.
10. They have a good sense of humor.

None of us can escape the stress of daily living, but we can learn to manage it better and become better stress managers. Try the following tips to protect your physical and mental health from the strain of stress:

- **Try some deep breathing.** Take a slow deep breath—hold it for five seconds—then slowly exhale.
- **Learn and practice meditation.** Create peaceful mental images.
- **Take a mental health break.** Make some time each day to devote to yourself—sometimes even 10 to 30 minutes really can help.
- **Strive for balance in your life.** Make time for activities and people you enjoy.
- **Use your support system.** Share your feelings with a caring friend or family member.
- **Just say no.** Remember that it's OK to say no to requests that push your beyond you limits.
- **Take one thing at a time.** Focus on the task at hand and do it well.
- **Don't demand perfection.** Ease up on yourself and those around you.
- **Take care of yourself.** Be sure to exercise regularly, eat a well-balanced diet and get enough rest.
- **Plan ahead.** Factor in time for traffic or other delays so that you're more relaxed when you get to work or your appointments.
- **Develop a positive attitude.** Try to view negative situations in a positive way.
- **Remove the clutter in your life.** Clean your house, garage or workspace regularly.
- **Laughter is the best medicine.** Find what makes you laugh. When you're laughing, you don't have time to be stressed out. And, don't take yourself too seriously.
- **Curb Caffeine.** Stimulants such as tobacco and caffeine can rev up your nervous system, which increases stress.
- **Seek help.** At times, you may feel that your stress is difficult to cope with, or is interfering with your daily life. If the stress in your life becomes overwhelming, don't hesitate to seek professional help from your EAP.

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How to Stay Motivated

Motivation is essential to setting and attaining goals. Research indicates that you can influence your own levels of motivation and self-control. To do so, you must figure out what you want, power through the challenges and start trying to be who you want to become.

Set Smart Goals

Having a roadmap for the future is a key element to well-being and success. Goals provide focus as well as a measuring tool for progress. They enhance productivity, bolster self-esteem and increase commitment so you are more likely to achieve whatever you set out to conquer. The simple fact is that when people have goals to guide them, they are happier and achieve more than they would without having them.

- Putting your goals in writing helps you to define them in detail. Be specific, use action verbs, have measurable outcomes and specify completion dates.
- Make a list of obstacles by thinking of everything that might stand in your way then decide what you can do about each obstacle. Shield yourself from distractions and temptations that may arise along the way.
- List the benefits of achieving your goal – list exactly what you hope to gain after achieving your goals.
- Identify subgoals. Be specific, defining exactly what you are going to do and when. Make sure each step is challenging but attainable.
- Get prepared and organized. When information is scattered about, you feel out of control and this undermines your motivation.
- Leave some room for mistakes and have backup strategies in place to attain your goals. Do not expect perfection.

Monitor, Feedback and Reward

Do not forget to chart your progress, whether it is with a high-tech online tracker or an old-fashioned fitness journal. Seeing incremental improvements can boost your motivation and help you make important changes in order to be successful.

Reward yourself for every successful step you take toward achieving your goal. Treat yourself to rewards that will motivate you to continue moving forward.

Enlist others for help if you need it and try to find someone with whom you share a common goal. Also, look for someone who has already achieved the goals you seek to reach and ask them for their insight on how to accomplish them.

Practice Makes Perfect

Do not give up easily. The closer you get to achieving your goals, the easier it gets. Self-control functions similar to a muscle becoming stronger with use. If you keep practicing self-control, you will eventually become better at it.

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What is resilience?

Resilience is more than coping; it's about confronting crises and difficult situations without getting overwhelmed by them. Resilient people are better able to handle life's stressors and to adapt to changing situations. Being resilient can help protect you from depression, stress and anxiety, too. Some of the characteristics of resilient people include:

- Strong relationships
- Self-motivation
- A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities
- Skills in communication and problem solving
- Self-awareness
- Emotional control

Resiliency in the Workplace

All business involves some inherent risk. Anyone in management understands that—or if they don't, they soon will. That's why resilience is such a useful tool in today's business world. Resilience means controlling your ego, not panicking in the face of a setback, and having the patience and ability to stay focused on long-term goals. Resilience can help you weather storms, remain steady and make rational decisions instead of being driven by emotion.

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Learning to Accept Change

Learning to roll with change will lead to a happier and more fulfilling life. That doesn't mean ignoring feelings of sadness, anger, frustration or stress. These are normal responses to major life changes. But once you have acknowledged those feelings, it is important to move forward and focus your energy on what's possible.

The following are some simple, solid steps you can take to turn unexpected transitions into positive outcomes:

- **Reflect and refocus.** Take stock of your personal assets and express gratitude, such as, "I can deal with this. I still have my ability to think, my special talents, my skills and my aspirations. I'm grateful for relationships and for my family."
- **Ask yourself some important questions.** "How do I want to feel three months from now? What will it take to get there? What does my ideal week look like? What can I do to realize that? Who can help with that?"
- **Choose.** Decide what you want as the next chapter of your life. Simply choosing doesn't guarantee you'll get it, but the power of your intentions makes a huge difference.
- **Take action.** Start by visualizing how you want to feel or where you want to be three months from now. Work back from this goal until you find something small enough that you can do today, tomorrow or next week.

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Why Mindfulness Matters

Stress is an inevitable part of our lives. We have all experienced it to some degree: during an argument with a partner; while speaking to a large group; while meeting a deadline at work. Our experiences in an increasingly complex world constantly require us to adapt to changes and cope with stressors. Learning how to identify and manage stress can help prevent physical and psychological problems, increase your chances of future success and promote a longer, healthier life.

Mindfulness, which is best described as the practice of being more aware in the present moment, is an effective way to respond to life's stresses. Examples of mindfulness include:

- Becoming aware of breath and feeling the stomach rise and fall with each breath
- Feeling the various physical sensations of an emotion
- Paying attention to all of the sounds in a room
- Noticing what happens in the body when there is stress
- Watching the thoughts that arise when there is boredom

It can be difficult to get your mind to slow down, but focusing on the now can help improve your physical, social and mental health. Practicing mindfulness can result in:

- Improved organizational skills
- An increase in self-esteem
- A sense of calmness, relaxation and self-acceptance
- A better quality of sleep
- A decrease in depression
- A decrease in overall anxiety and test anxiety
- A decline in negative emotions
- Fewer conduct and anger management problems

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Depression Warning Signs

Depression is a treatable medical illness involving an imbalance of brain chemicals called neurotransmitters and neuropeptides. What are the symptoms?

- Prolonged sadness or unexplained crying spells
- Significant changes in appetite and sleep patterns
- Irritability, anger, worry, agitation, anxiety
- Loss of energy, persistent lethargy, and others

If you are feeling depressed, don't wait. Get help from your Employee Assistance Program today.

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Guidance Now™

Creating a Self-care Plan

To feel your best, it is important to take care of yourself, especially when your job demands so much from you emotionally. Maintaining emotional resilience requires eating well, exercising, keeping work and home life balanced and maintaining good relationships. But there are times when even these things can't prevent stress and anxiety from creeping in. That's why self-care is so important. Taking a small amount of time out of your busy schedule just for yourself is key to handling all your duties while getting the most out of life. Try these tips to give yourself the attention you need to be your best.

Deep Breathing. Deep breathing focuses on using the diaphragm (the spot just under your rib cage) to draw slow, deep breaths into the lungs and to release them slowly. Take a couple of minutes every hour to practice some deep breathing.

Stretching. Stretching exercises can relieve tension, make your body more flexible and produce a calming effect. Even just shrugging your shoulders, stretching your arms and rolling your neck a few times a day can have positive effects.

Meditation and Visualization. Meditation involves "quieting the mind" by blocking out sensory input and distraction, while visualization involves using the brain's creative capacity to create a stress-free experience, much like daydreaming. Try to carve out 15 minutes daily to quiet you mind and body.

Muscle Relaxation. Progressive muscle-relaxation techniques involve systematically tensing, relaxing and visualizing each major muscle group. It is best to practice these techniques when you have about 20 minutes and are able to find a quiet place where you can lie down without being disturbed.

Calming Thoughts. Our thought patterns often cause or contribute to the stress that we are feeling. The next time you encounter a stressful situation, take a moment to tune into your thoughts and feelings. Write these thoughts down and then write down a more positive replacement.

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Mental Benefits of Exercise

The physical benefits of exercise are numerous. But did you know that exercise also has mental benefits? These include: lower stress levels, better mood, increased self-esteem, more energy and better sleep patterns. Exercise can also help you to develop a more positive outlook on life as well as help you look better and feel good about yourself. For more tips, talk to your Employee Assistance Program.

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Guidance Now™

Rising to Everyday Challenges

Of the many factors that go into navigating change, whether personal or business-related, the most important may be resiliency. Resilience is the measure of our ability to welcome challenges, overcome adversity and get back on track to achieving our goals. With that in mind, here is some information on resilience amid changing times.

What is resilience?

Resilience is more than coping; it's about confronting difficult situations and rising to challenges without getting overwhelmed by them. Resilient people are better able to handle life's stressors and to adapt to changing situations. Being resilient can help protect you from depression, stress and anxiety, too.

Some of the characteristics of resilient people include:

- Strong relationships
- Self-motivation
- A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities
- Skills in communication and problem solving
- Self-awareness
- Emotional control

Resiliency at Work and Home

Resilience means controlling your ego, not panicking in the face of a setback, and having the patience and ability to stay focused on long-term goals. Resilience can help you weather storms, remain steady and make rational decisions instead of being driven by emotion. No doubt upheaval can be stressful, but there are things you can do to cope with challenging environments:

- Find a healthy balance. Your work is important, but it's unhealthy if you live, breathe and sleep your job. Take time to get away from stress and to find positive outlets for your free time.
- Be positive. There is only so much you can control. How you feel about your situation is one of those things. Look for the silver lining and practice positive self-affirmations–it can change your mood and outlook on life.
- Look for the gray. Even though it may seem so, not everything is black and white or gain and loss. Search for the middle ground. It can be a far less stressful place.

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Finding Your Resilience

The death of a loved one, loss of a job, serious illness or being a victim of violent crime are all challenging life events. People react to these types of events differently. Some have difficulty adapting to these experiences and may even become temporarily incapacitated. However, some individuals are able to successfully adapt to these kinds of stressors and even thrive in spite of them. These individuals possess what is known as "resilience."

What are the characteristics of resilient people?

- Strong relationships
- Self-motivation
- A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities
- Skills in communication and problem solving
- Self-awareness
- Emotional control

Ways to Build Resilience

- Make connections
- Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems
- Accept that change is a part of living
- Move towards your goals
- Take decisive actions
- Look for opportunities for self-discovery
- Maintain a hopeful outlook
- Take care of yourself

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Tips for Increasing Energy

Often, people turn to caffeinated beverages and energy drinks to give them the boost they need to get through the day. However, many of these drinks can result in a short burst of energy followed by a rapid crash. These lifestyle strategies can help eliminate this rollercoaster effect while boosting energy throughout the day.

Get a Good Night's Sleep. Getting between seven and nine hours of sleep per night is optimal. Aim to go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even on the weekends.

Get Moving. A brief bout of exercise (as little as 10 minutes) can improve energy levels and a person's mood. Physical activity, even walking, is a great energy booster.

Eat a Healthy Breakfast. People who skip breakfast are essentially running on empty. Keep breakfast healthy by incorporating sources of lean protein, healthy fats and whole grains, such as whole-wheat toast with peanut butter and a banana.

Stay Hydrated. Even slight dehydration can leave a person feeling tired and lethargic. Keep a tall glass of water or a water bottle with you throughout the day.

Reduce Stress. Stress has a major impact on energy levels. Try to take 20 minutes for yourself every day just to relax.

Opt for Whole Grains, Limit Sugar. Eating whole grains provides a slow and steady release of fuel (carbohydrates) into the bloodstream, keeping energy levels consistent and balanced throughout the day.

Turn Coffee into a Protein Drink. Put skim or reduced-fat milk in coffee instead of creamer. The protein in milk helps sustain energy levels, as well as providing some bone-building calcium.

Choose Healthy Snacks. Have a couple of snacks throughout the day that combine protein, fiber and a little fat, such as an apple and string cheese or yogurt and nuts. This helps to sustain energy levels throughout the day.

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