

## **Handling stress at work**

Are you stressed at work? Do you have more tasks to do than you have time to do them in? Do you ever feel that you are further behind at the end of the day than you were at the beginning? If so, you're not alone. Stress-related sickness costs industries million of dollars every week.

Of course we all have the odd day where everything seems to go wrong, but if you're constantly feeling stressed out by the pressures of the office, what can you do?

### ***Here are some coping strategies:***

- Don't try to do too much. Often we place completely unreasonable demands on ourselves. This just adds to the pressure and actually makes us less effective. Remind yourself that it's ok not to be perfect all the time.
- Prioritise. First thing every day, make a list of what you MUST get done that day – and then get on with it! Tackle the task you're dreading most first – once you've done it, you'll feel so pleased with yourself that you'll breeze through the rest of your work. At the end of the day, take 10 minutes to update your to-do list and plan for the next day.
- Learn to say 'no'. Often we end up taking on work that isn't our responsibility because we're scared of upsetting someone by saying no. There is a limit to what you can do and you shouldn't be afraid to say so. If your boss is making too many demands, calmly explain that you can't do everything at once and ask which tasks are the priorities – it is your boss's responsibility to prioritise too!
- Get organised. Clear the clutter from your desk. If you don't have one already, put in place a straightforward filing system. Set aside time every day to clear routine emails and paperwork. Try to handle each piece of paper only once – deal with it straightaway if you can. And resist the temptation to keep checking your email – that's one of the biggest time drains!
- For bigger tasks, be clear what your deadlines are and plan accordingly. Don't leave a big project until the last minute – that just gives you unnecessary extra stress. Break it down into smaller chunks and do a little every day. That makes the task less daunting and means that you won't end up panicking and having to work flat out at the last minute.
- Take regular breaks. Always have a lunch break and, if you can, get outside for some fresh air. It will clear your head and help you to focus better. If you find yourself regularly working very long hours, book an appointment at least once a week – a gym class, massage or just arrange to meet friends – so that you are forced to leave work on time. And don't allow yourself to get drawn into the "I must be the first to arrive/last to leave" competition that often happens in an office environment. As long as you've done what you need to do, don't be afraid to get up and go home at the normal time. Other people will thank you for it!
- Make sure, too, that you take your full holiday entitlement. No one is indispensable – the company will NOT fall apart if you are not there for a few days. And no one ever wished on their deathbed that they'd spent more time in the office! The key is to get the balance right so that you enjoy, rather than dread, going to work and can switch off effectively when you leave.