

A common and  
costly problem  
in America

# Workplace Stress

## Job Stress and Health: What the Research Tells Us

### Cardiovascular Disease

Many studies suggest that psychologically demanding jobs that allow employees little control over the work process increase the risk of cardiovascular disease.

### Musculoskeletal disorders

On the basis of research by NIOSH (The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) and many other organizations, it is widely believed that job stress increases the risk for development of back and upper-extremity musculoskeletal disorders.

### Psychological Disorders

Several studies suggest that differences in rates of mental health problems (such as depression and burnout) for various occupations are due partly to differences in job stress levels. (Economic and lifestyle differences between occupations may also contribute to some of these problems.)

### Workplace Injury

Although more study is needed, there is a growing concern that stressful working conditions interfere with safe work practices and set the stage for injuries at work.

### Suicide, Cancer, Ulcers, and Impaired Immune Function

Some studies suggest a relationship between stressful working conditions and these health problems. However, more research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

-*Encyclopedia of Occupational  
Safety and Health*



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## Stress...At Work

Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/99-101/>

The nature of work is changing at whirlwind speed. Perhaps now more than ever before, job stress poses a threat to the health of workers and, in turn, to the health organizations.

### What is Job Stress?

Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs for the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and injury.

The concept of job stress is often confused with challenge, but these are not the same. Challenge energizes us psychologically and physically, and it motivates us to learn new skills and master our jobs. When a challenge is met, we feel relaxed and satisfied. Thus, challenge is an important ingredient for healthy and productive work. The importance of challenge in our work lives is probably what people are referring to when they say, "a little bit of stress is good for you".

Some situations are different—the challenge has turned into job demands that cannot be met, relaxation has turned to exhaustion, and a sense of satisfaction has turned into feelings of stress. In short, the stage is set for illness, injury and job failure.

Job stress has become a common and costly problem in the American workplace, leaving few workers untouched. For example, studies report the following:

- One-fourth of employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives.  
- *Northwestern National Life*
- Three-fourths of employees believe the worker has more on-the-job stress than a generation ago.  
- *Princeton Survey Research Associates*
- Problems at work are more strongly associated with health complaints than are any other life stressor—more so than even financial problems or family problems.  
- *St. Paul fire and Marine Insurance Co.*



According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, workers who must take time off work because of stress, anxiety, or a related disorder will be off the job for about 20 days.

-*Bureau of Labor Statistics*



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## Watch For Warning Signs

Adapted from materials provided by the Wellness Center, Counseling Services, Teaneck-Hackensack Campus, the following list includes many of the physical and psychological signs of stress.

### PHYSICAL

Pounding Heart  
Frequent Colds  
Headaches  
Muscle Aches  
Fatigue  
Insomnia  
Restlessness  
Rash  
Teeth Grinding

### EMOTIONAL

Anxiety  
Bad Temper/Irritability  
Frustration  
Mood Swings  
Nightmares  
Depression  
Nervous Laughter/  
Crying Spells  
Worrying  
Becoming Easily Discouraged



# Stress in the Workplace: A Costly Epidemic

By Rebecca Maxon

Three out of every four American workers describe their work as stressful. And the problem is not limited to these shores. In fact, occupational stress has been defined as a “global epidemic” by the United Nations’ International Labor Organization.

While the physical effects of this epidemic are often emphasized, the economic consequences also are alarming. Workplace stress costs U.S. employers and estimated \$200 billion per year in absenteeism, lower productivity, staff turnover, workers’ compensation, medical insurance and other stress-related expenses. Considering this, stress management may be business’ most important challenge of the 21st century.

Surprisingly, stress is not always a bad thing. It can stimulate creativity and productivity. According to Robert Ostermann, professor of psychology at Fairleigh Dickinson University’s (FDU) Teaneck-Hackensack Campus, “no one reaches peak performance without being stressed, whether an athlete, an office worker or a manager.” The natural pattern of human behavior is to experience a stress-causing situation, react to it with increased tension and then return to a normal, relaxed state. The problem occurs when stress is so overwhelming or constant that this pattern is broken.

Occupational stress is not related only to what goes on at work. Conflicts between the demands of the workplace and of home life are increasingly common. According to a survey completed for the U.S. Department of Labor, 10 percent of people who are married or living with children under 18 experience severe work-family conflict, and an additional 25 percent report moderate levels of conflict.

### A HEAVY PRICE

The physical effects of excessive stress have long been recognized — from heart attacks and strokes to ulcers and other gastrointestinal disorders. Continual stress also takes a toll on the body’s immune system, causing frequent colds and other illnesses. Psychologically, stress can lead to depression, anxiety and even panic attacks. Specifically, the stress produced by aggression in the workplace has “been associated with physical and psychological distress, resulting in decreased productivity, commitment and loyalty,” says Joel Harmon, associate professor of management and chair of the management, marketing, information systems and sciences department on the Florham-Madison Campus.

Sixty percent of lost workdays each year can be attributed to stress. In addition, an estimated 75 to 90 percent of visits to health care providers are due to stress-related conditions, costing employers in increased health care costs. Stress can also have a direct effect on the way people handle their jobs. Employees under stress may make more mistakes, have trouble concentrating, become disorganized, become angry or just stop caring about their work.

### COPING WITH STRESS

Many people look for help to resolve their problems with stress, and employers are responding. “We look for support systems, things that will offset the stress,” comments Ostermann. Options include flexible work weeks, telecommuting opportunities and encouraging personnel to live balanced lives. Harmon cites the Business Work-Life Study conducted by the Families and Work Institute, which suggests that organizations adopt work-family pro-

grams, inform employees that help is available and hold managers accountable for sensitivity to their employees’ work-family needs.

Most corporations make counseling readily available, if not on site then through the health care benefits they provide their employees. Handling stress, however is a very individual matter. Alice Mills, co-director of counseling services in the Teaneck-Hackensack Campus Wellness Center, suggests “The first step is to analyze the situation to determine what is causing the stress and what techniques might best suit the individual,” she says.

Mills notes that there are many relaxation skills including the use of music, meditation, diaphragmatic breathing exercises, aerobic exercise, muscle relaxation and imagery.

Another important way to combat stress is to sharpen one’s communication skills. “You need to learn how to speak about your own needs and wants and how to give positive and negative feedback to others,” Mills explains. This is what many know as assertiveness.

“Take a break, talk with colleagues, go to the restroom, or water cooler or do breathing exercises to restore balance,” she says. And, perhaps most importantly, “Take care of yourself.”

Source: <http://www.fdu.edu/newspubs/magazine/99su/stress.html>

# Employee Empowerment: Definition and Example

Source: About.com: Human Resources



## The Definition:

Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing an individual to think, behave, take action, and control of work and decision making in autonomous ways. It is the state of feeling self-empowered to take control of one's own destiny.

When thinking about empowerment in human relations terms, try to avoid thinking of it as something that one individual does for another. This is one of the problems organizations have experienced with the concept of empowerment. People think that "someone," usually the manager, has to bestow empowerment on the people who report to him.

Consequently, the reporting staff members "wait" for the bestowing of

empowerment, and the manager asks why people won't act in empowered ways. This leads to a general unhappiness, mostly undeserved, with the concept of empowerment in many organizations.

Think of empowerment, instead, as the process of an individual enabling himself to take action and control work and decision making in autonomous ways. Empowerment comes from the individual.

The organization has the responsibility to create a work environment which helps foster the ability and desire of employees to act in empowered ways. The work organization has the responsibility to remove bar-

riers that limit the ability of staff to act in empowered ways.

Employee involvement and participative management are often used to mean empowerment. They are not really interchangeable.

## Example:

The manager of the Human Resources department added weeks to the process of hiring new employees by requiring his supposedly "empowered" staff members to obtain his signature on every document related to the hiring of a new employee.

# Over Empowering Employees



By Robert Bacal

As a result of the encouragement of management gurus in the late 1990's empowerment became a state of affairs of value in and of itself. While having employees capable and willing to make decisions and act on their own is a good situation, some managers have taken the concept too far.

Not all employees want to be involved in day-to-day decision making. Insisting on employee involvement and empowerment can cause negative fallout.

### Pitfalls To Watch For:

1. Some employees don't want more responsibility. They are content to cede responsibility to their managers or supervisors. If you are attempting to place more power in the hands of employees, watch for hesitancy, procrastination when employees are asked to take a broader role, and resistance. That may indicate, for an

individual employee, that he or she is not ready, or willing to be "empowered".

2. Managers can't expect uninformed "empowered" employees to make effective decisions. If information is not freely shared with the employees, asking them to be "empowered" will end up frustrating employees and result in poor decisions.

3. Managers who empower staff to make decisions, but then turn around and reverse or argue those decisions cause more problems than they solve.

### Prescriptions For Avoiding Employee Empowerment Mistakes:

1. Make increased responsibility available to all staff, but be aware that not all staff have the ability, or desire to exercise it. Don't push too hard.

2. Ensure staff have the information they need to make decisions properly. As a manager you have more "big picture" information, and it's easy to forget that good decisions require the decision-maker to have that information, or they will make poor decisions.
3. Give up some of your control in decision-making by accepting that some staff decisions might be different than the ones you make.

### Summary:

Empowering employees can result in better decisions, more engaged workers, and allows managers to spend less time micromanaging and dealing with day-to-day decisions that can be taken over by staff.

## Demonstrate You Value People

Your regard for people shines through in all of your actions and words. Your goal is to demonstrate your appreciation for each person's unique value. No matter how an employee is performing on their current task, your value for the employee as a human being should never falter and always be visible.

## Share Leadership Vision

Help people feel that they are part of something bigger than themselves and their individual job. Do this by making sure they know and have access to the organization's overall mission, vision and strategic plan.

## Share Goals and Direction

Share the most important goals and direction for your group. Where possible, either make progress on goals measurable and observable, or ascertain that you have shared your picture of a positive outcome with the people responsible for accomplishing the results.

## Trust People

Trust the intentions of people to do the right thing, make the right decisions, and make choices that, while maybe not exactly what you would decide, still work.

## Provide Information for Decision Making

Make certain that you have given people, or made sure that they have access to, all of the information they need to make thoughtful decisions.

## Delegate Authority and Impact Opportunities, Not Just More Work

Don't just delegate the drudge work; delegate some of the fun stuff, too. Delegate the important meetings, the committee memberships that influence product development and decision making, and the projects that people and customers notice. The employee will grow and develop new skills. Your plate will be less full so you can concentrate on contribution. Your reporting staff will gratefully shine - and so will you.

## Provide Frequent Feedback

Provide frequent feedback so that people know how they are doing. Sometimes, the purpose of feedback is reward and recognition. People deserve your constructive feedback, too, so they can continue to develop their knowledge and skills.

## Solve Problems: Don't Pinpoint Problem People

When a problem occurs, ask what is wrong with the work system that caused the people to fail, not what is wrong with the people.

## Listen to Learn and Ask Questions to Provide Guidance

Provide a space in which people will communicate by listening to them and asking them questions. Guide by asking questions, not by telling grown up people what to do.

## Help Employees Feel Rewarded and Recognized for Empowered Behavior

When employees feel under-compensated, under-titled for the responsibilities they take on, under-noticed, under-praised, and under-appreciated, don't expect results from employee empowerment. The basic needs of employees must feel met for employees to give you their discretionary energy, that extra effort that people voluntarily invest in work.

Source: About.com: Human Resources

# Up Coming Events

## Defuse Stress Through Wellness Program

July 23, 2009

Time: 8:30 AM - 11:00 AM

Where: El Segundo, CA

Join us for a morning of ideas and important information on Employee Wellness Programs.

Our wellness experts will provide you with what you need to know about these programs so that you can:

- Learn how to begin or enhance your own Wellness Program;
- Find out about the various types of programs being offered;
- Become aware of potential pitfalls when starting your own Wellness Program for your office.

In addition to our legal expert, Karen Dinino, we will have 3 to 4 wellness experts available to give you ideas, answer your questions and provide you with the tools you need to get your Wellness Program up and running!

For more information, please contact: Andrea Bossette-Johnson at (818) 676-0044

## UV Safety Month

July 1-31, 2009

American Academy  
of Ophthalmology

P. O. Box 7424  
San Francisco, CA  
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[www.aao.org/eyemd](http://www.aao.org/eyemd)



Sadly, more than 300,000 children across America must be rescued each year from dangerous home environments. Traumatized by the events leading to their rescue, these children often arrive without any of their own belongings; no favorite stuffed animal, no special "blankie".

The My Stuff Bags Foundation provides comfort and a message of hope to abused and neglected children entering crisis and foster care through its unique program, My Stuff Bags.

Please join Danone Simpson Insurance Services LLC and the My Stuff Bags Foundation in giving these children something to hold on to by donating items to put into the bags.

Did you know that right this minute there are half a million children in foster care in this country? These children need and deserve our help. With your help, thousands of children in foster care will receive individual My Stuff Bags filled with new and needed items, and a message that lots of Americans care about them.

*Michael Reagan, son of former President Ronald Reagan*

**DSI will drop off, at your company, a box for collecting items for the children and an items list with some ideas of what types of items to give. For more details please call (818) 676-0044, and ask for Andrea.**



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Wellness is a healthy balance of the mind-body and spirit that results in an overall feeling of well-being.

# Wellness

## Health & Happiness

“Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away”

Source: McKinley Health Center  
[www.mckinley.uiuc.edu](http://www.mckinley.uiuc.edu)

Stress is NORMAL but we need to maintain “manageable” levels of stress.

Learn which stress reliever’s work for you and consistently do them.

Be flexible, patient, and open to change or at least be willing to compromise.

Keep learning - don’t allow yourself to get into a rut and not try something new.

A positive attitude can change everything; be optimistic.

Go for your goals and live your dreams.

Be realistic about your goals and expectations.

Be true to yourself and others.

Experience what is around you & become aware of events and the people you see each day.

Take a “personal timeout” when things seem to be overwhelming.

Deep breathing exercises can slow your pace and help you think clearly before you react.

Cherish your health - take care of your overall wellbeing.



June 2009

## The Hierarchy of Health and Wellness Needs

Source: HealTalk.com

Health and Wellness is about providing to your being what it **needs** in the correct order.

### Introduction

The hierarchy of needs, which was first defined by Abraham Maslow in 1943 as an article in his publication Theory of Human Motivation, very well explains the steps in which we should go through to achieve a state of well being.

When our needs are not being met, stress is produced in the body which is a contributing factor to disease. Dis-ease has been said to be a state of mind which is not at-ease.

According to Maslow, a higher need cannot be fulfilled until a lower need is met. To the being in question, these needs have to appear to be satisfied in order to feel at-ease.

### Physiological

The first step to health and wellness is to be able to obtain the basic things which our body needs to function in the proper manner in which our body was designed to be.

Some of the things which a person needs to start attaining and staying healthy is being able to

provide the self with proper breathing, food, water, sleep, and the like.

### Safety

The next level of need which the body needs is the safety of these physiological parts from external and internal stimuli which may cause them to malfunction or dysfunction.

Safety of the body is needed after being able to provide the same with the necessary starter supplements. Keeping the body safe from harm and by keeping a proper form of hygiene would definitely help in maintaining safety of the body.

### Love

Love is the affection and concern received by the self from the different social constructs surrounding him. Staying healthy would also need a form of affirmation and care from the others as we are social creatures. A lack of proper affection may lead to complications in the next two higher levels of needs, going towards the psychological area of existence.

### Esteem

Esteem has to be the desired effect of the individual after the

immediate acquisition of the previous aspect of love. A person with esteem may be able to do more things beyond his known personal limit. It manifests a person’s will to fight and the urge to carry on with things to overcome challenges. Sometimes, esteem is based and dependent on the people believing in him.

### Self Actualization

After all the previous physiological needs have been met, the final and most important need of self actualization is required. The psychological need of self-actualization is needed to finalize and solidify the four other levels of needs of every individual.

In this aspect, the brain is the focal and controlling factor in holding all the other four together to achieve homeostasis. No matter how capable the body is to do healthy tasks, if the mind is unhealthy, then everything else will deteriorate afterwards.



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## Chicken Linguine with Chunky Tomato Sauce

Serves 4-6

- 1 (16 oz.) pkg. dried linguine
- About 5 qts. of water

### For the chicken:

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 4 chicken breast fillets
- 2 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp granulated garlic
- kosher salt and pepper

### For the sauce:

- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 shallot, minced
- 1 (28 oz) can dried tomatoes
- 1/4 cup dry white wine
- 1/8 tsp crushed red pepper
- 1tbsp chopped fresh basil

1. Bring the 5 qts. of water to a boil. Cook pasta about 7-9 minutes. Strain and rinse with cold water to stop the cooking process (*Note:* It will be slightly undercooked and that is what you want because it will continue to cook in the sauce and you don't want it to get too mushy).

2. Meanwhile, heat olive oil in a pan over medium heat. Season chicken breast on both sides with granulated garlic, dried oregano, salt and pepper. Cook until chicken is cooked through, about 5 minutes, per side. Cover and set aside.

3. In the same pan that you cooked the chicken, reserve the pan drippings, cook garlic and shallots over medium heat until translucent, about 3 minutes. Add wine and cook for 5 minutes. Add diced tomatoes, crushed red pepper, salt and pepper to taste. Bring to a boil and continue to boil until sauce reduces by 1/3, about 10 minutes. During this, time slice your chicken, into bite size pieces.

4. Once the sauce has thickened, reduce heat to low, add linguine and chicken and toss to coat (*Note:* If the linguine sticks together in the strainer, rinse with water. Make sure all of the water is drained from the pasta before adding it to the sauce).

Let stand 5 minutes, toss with basil and serve.

# The 10 Essential rules for Slowing Down and Enjoying Life More

By Leo Babauta

It's an irony of our modern lives that while technology is continually invented to save us time, we use that time to do more and more things, and so our lives are more fast-paced and hectic than ever.

Life moves at such a fast pace that it seems to pass us by before we can really enjoy it. However, it doesn't have to be this way.

A slower-paced life means making time to enjoy your mornings, instead of rushing off to work in a frenzy. It means taking time to enjoy whatever you're doing, to appreciate the outdoors, to actually focus on whoever you're talking to or spending time with—instead of always being connected to a Blackberry or iPhone or laptop, instead of always thinking about work tasks and emails. It means single-tasking rather than switching between a multitude of tasks and focusing on none of them.

Slowing down is a conscious choice, and not always an easy one, but it leads to a greater appreciation for life and a greater level of happiness.

Here's how to do it:

**1. Do less.** It's hard to slow down when you are trying to do a million things. Instead, make the conscious choice to do less. Focus on what's really important, what really needs to be done, and let go of the rest. Put space between tasks and appointments, so you can move through your days at a more leisurely pace.

**2. Be present.** It's not enough to just slow down—you need to actually be mindful of whatever you're doing at the moment. That means, when you find yourself thinking about something you need to do, or something that's already happened, or something that might happen...gently bring yourself back to the present moment. Focus on what's going on right now. This takes practice but is essential.

**3. Disconnect.** Don't always be connected. If you carry around an iPhone, Blackberry or other mobile device, shut it off. Better yet, learn to leave it behind when possible. If you work on a computer most of the day, have times when you disconnect so you can focus on other things. Being connected all the time means we're subject to interruptions, we're constantly stressed about information coming in. It's hard to slow down when you're always checking new messages coming in.

**4. Focus on people.** Too often we spend time with friends and family, or meet with colleagues, and we're not really there with them. We talk to them but are distracted by devices. We are there, but our minds are on things we need to do. We listen but we're really thinking about ourselves and what we want to say. None of us are immune to this, but with a conscious effort you can shut off the outside world and just be present with the person you're with. It means we really connect with people rather than just meeting with them.

**5. Appreciate nature.** Many of us are shut in our homes, offices, cars, and trains most of the time, and rarely do we get the chance to go outside. And often even when people are outside, they're talking on their cell phones. Instead, take the time to go outside and really observe nature, take a deep breath of fresh air, enjoy the serenity of water and greenery. Exercise outdoors when you can, or find other outdoor activities to enjoy such as nature walks, hiking, swimming, etc. Feel the sensations of water, wind and earth against your skin. Try to do this daily—by yourself or with loved ones.

**6. Eat slower.** Instead of cramming food down our throats as quickly as possible leading to overeating and a lack of enjoyment of our food—learn to eat slowly. Appreciate the flavors

and textures. Eating slowly has the double benefit of making you fuller on less food and making the food taste better.

**7. Drive slower.** Speedy driving is a pretty prevalent habit in our fast-paced world, but it's also responsible for a lot of traffic accidents, stress, and wasted fuel. Instead, make it a habit to slow down when you drive. Appreciate your surroundings. Make it a peaceful time to contemplate your life, and the things you're passing. Driving will be more enjoyable, and much safer. You'll use less fuel too.

**8. Find pleasure in anything.** This is related to being present, but taking it a step farther. Whatever you're doing, be fully present...and also appreciate every aspect of it, and find the enjoyable aspects. Life can be so much more enjoyable if you learn this simple habit.

**9. Single-task.** The opposite of multi-tasking. Focus on one thing at a time. When you feel the urge to switch to other tasks, pause, breathe, and pull yourself back.

**10. Breathe.** When you find yourself speeding up and stressing out, pause, and take a deep breath. Now, take a couple more. Really feel the air coming into your body, and feel the stress going out. By fully focusing on each breath, you bring yourself back to the present, and slow yourself down. It's also nice to take a deep breath or two.



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