MANAGING ANXIETY AND STRESS AT WORK

There will be times when we all experience some feelings of stress. We all experience stressful situations at some point in our lives and this article aims to help us manage high levels of stress and discuss ways of dealing with the feeling of stress or anxiety.

Feelings of anxiety can be triggered by a variety of different situations, such as encountering large groups of people, feeling overworked/overwhelmed, financial worries, interpersonal/relationship conflicts and stress, health worries and uncertainty about the future.

Some of us might be feeling anxious at the moment, due to the current change in circumstances, whether that’s working from home, caring for family or friends or trying to adjust to the ‘new normal’.

Below are a handful of simple tips to help you manage feelings of anxiety or stress at work. This is not to say that they will work for everyone; however, they are practical things that you can try either while you are at work or in your free time.

1. **Get Away From Your Computer**

   Our workdays can consist of sitting in front of our computers, often without even getting up to move.

   Consider setting a timer for yourself, so that at least once an hour you do get up and walk around. Social distancing permitting go for a walk; or, if this is not possible and/or you’re being ‘shielded’ or are in self-isolation, go for a walk in your space. Even just getting up and walking around can help with the physical and mental release. There is such a thing as ‘email anxiety’, take some screen time rests, away from your laptop or device and take a break from mailbox management you need to let some of that stress burn off.

2. **Try Gentle Stretching**

   There may be some days when opportunities to physically move about may be limited: this is where gentle stretching can improve your posture, reduce stress and body aches. Research tells us that bodily movement can increase blood flow to muscles, calm your mind and improve focus. Try out some gentle movements to help relieve anxiety, psychologists tell us that 10-minutes of stretching can be just as helpful as 45-minute full body workout.

   Here’s a simple exercise: Look at the top left corner of your computer screen; then the top right corner; look at bottom right corner of screen; then bottom left. Let your head and neck move slowly as you do this. This is a gentle, easy stretch that can relieve the tension from too much staring at a screen.

3. **Reach out to other people**

   Humans are, largely, social animals: interactions with other people can be an effective way of managing one’s anxiety. It’s important to have a work friend during this time. This is someone with whom you can share and express your anxiety. Research tells us having at
least one trusted person in the workplace, to talk through your successes and challenges improves overall wellbeing and productivity.

Sometimes, just verbalising your anxiety can ease the pressure on yourself. For example, saying, “I’m worried I won’t get this done by 5 o’clock”, can relieve some of your pent-up tension – and thus help you get through your day.

If you’re feeling stressed or worried about work, speak to your manager. Managers will appreciate that this is a challenging time for everyone and can make adjustments to your workload and any deadlines as needed.

Alternatively talk to an HR advisor or seek a mentor or a coach to explore how others might be adjusting to these testing times.

4. **Stay hydrated**

Drinking a lot of water can help to keep you feeling centered, healthy, and make it easier for to concentrate on the task at hand – without blowing your stack. Some of us are not aware of our high caffeine intake throughout the day; try counteracting the dehydration by drinking at least 2 litres of fluids per day – flavour your drink with citrus fruits to help increase your vitamin C intake (lemons, limes, oranges slices always work well).

If you’re an anxious person, taking care of yourself can so easily go by the wayside. Evaluate what your body needs. When did you drink water last? When did you eat last? Do you have a headache? Looking after your body will help you look after your mind too.

5. **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness can be way of helping you manage your feelings of anxiety. Simple exercises such as breathing have been highlighted in our article ‘How to Promote Positive Mental Health.’

*It should be noted that these are suggestions and tips for people who have may have these feelings, but who are not managing chronic anxiety disorders. In those instances, please speak to a GP or your local mental health services as medication and therapy can be effective for anxiety disorders.*

**Additional Resources**

If you would like further information on coping and managing feelings of anxiety:


If you are interested in reading more about support and treatments for mental health conditions:

- See [www.reading-well.org.uk](http://www.reading-well.org.uk)

*How do you manage feelings of anxiety? Would you like to share your tips with colleagues? If so, please write to hr-equality@qmul.ac.uk.*