



## Building better coping strategies

A competitive global marketplace, uncertain economies, continued technological change, and tighter corporate budgets mean employees around the world are experiencing more stress than ever before. The World Health Organization has identified workplace stress as a global epidemic. Six out of ten employees in major economies worldwide feel stressed and that's costing us all. The annual expenditure for stress-related health care and missed work worldwide is \$300 billion! And we're also paying a personal price.

### The high price of stress

Some stress is good – it sharpens our senses, helps us focus, and prepares our bodies to meet challenges. However, continual stress can make us less productive, and physically and mentally ill. It can cause gastrointestinal complaints, sleep problems, chronic pain, anxiety and depression. There's even research that says extreme, long-term stress plays a role in the development of chronic illnesses such as cardiovascular disease and some cancers. Globally, 77 percent of us regularly experience physical symptoms caused by stress and 73 percent of us experience psychological symptoms.

We can't change our stressful world **but we can all develop** better coping skills to stay physically and emotionally healthy and productive at work and at home.

### Building coping skills

Coping refers to the thoughts and actions we use to deal with a threatening situation. Unfortunately, many of us cope in unhealthy ways that can actually increase our stress and further damage our physical and mental health – drinking too much alcohol, overeating, reliance of prescription medication or illegal drugs, withdrawing from friends and family, irritability and anger, gambling and even excessive shopping.

So how can we build healthy coping skills that will help increase our efficiency, enhance our relationships and help us enjoy our lives? Here are some tips:

Let us help. Access your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) 24/7 by phone, web or mobile app.

Visit [workhealthlife.com/global](http://workhealthlife.com/global) for worldwide access numbers or call your local operator and request to place a collect call to Canada at 905.886.3605.



- **Find healthy ways to cope with stress.** Listen to music, exercise, read, meditate, pray or treat yourself to a massage. Take a break and go for a walk or simply close your eyes and breathe deeply.
- **Learn from failure.** Use setbacks to develop better coping, problem solving or people skills. Be willing to take risks and learn from setbacks – what you did right, what you could have done better and what you will do next time. We can't become wiser, more capable people if we don't learn from experience.
- **Take care of yourself.** Value your physical and emotional health. Eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, get enough sleep and find time to do things you enjoy.
- **Keep things in perspective.** Try not to over-react. When faced with a crisis or problem, learn how to reflect on the situation and come up with healthy solutions. Stay calm and remain focused on the problem instead of getting upset and lashing out at others.
- **Talk to a friend or family member.** Opening up and sharing your problems with another person can help put problems into perspective. You'll also receive support and helpful advice from people who have your best interests at heart.
- **Accept change.** We can't fight change. It's part of life. It may be disruptive but if you adapt rather than resist, you'll feel happier and less stressed.
- **Develop a sense of humour.** Being able to laugh at yourself or the situation you're in helps keep things in perspective. Laughter also triggers the release of endorphins that create a sense of well-being. It's hard to feel anxious, frustrated or angry when you're laughing.
- **Take control.** Sometimes we increase our stress by fretting about a problem instead of doing something about it. For example, instead of worrying constantly about financial difficulties and watching our stress levels continue to soar, we could set up an appointment with a financial advisor.

Lastly, don't hesitate to ask for help. A support system is great, but it's important to know when to reach out for professional support. If you're feeling overwhelmed by a problem or situation, contact your family doctor or your Employee Assistance Program and ask to speak to a counsellor.

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