

# How to Reduce Stress at Work



by Nora Bass

Regardless of your job, chances are good that you experience stress from time to time in the workplace. According to Dr. Barry J. Jacobs, a clinical psychologist and American Heart Association spokesperson, there are several reasons that people feel stress at work.

“Having too much responsibility and too little authority can be very stressful,” he says. “It can also be difficult if you feel that the

expectations of your job are beyond what you are able to deliver.”

Americans are also working more hours than ever before, especially over the past 20 years, says Jacobs. This intense amount of work causes many people to feel like they are never able to catch up on work duties, no matter how many hours they put in, compounding their level of stress.

If this sounds like you, take note of the following tips to help you manage stress in the workplace.

## Think ahead

Practicing effective time management is key to lessening stress in the workplace. Jacobs recommends starting projects far ahead of deadlines to guard against scrambling at the last second. Take note of how long tasks or projects take you to complete so you can best manage your own expectations and those of your colleagues. Avoid the stress of being late to meetings by setting your watch five to 10 minutes ahead.

## Focus on one thing at a time

Instead of trying to deal with everything at once—answer emails, make calls, organize your desk, finish a report—focus on accomplishing one thing at a time. For example, answer emails for an allotted amount of time, then stop and focus on something else, like the report you need to finish. This helps minimize stress by allowing you to focus on the objective at hand instead of feeling scattered.

## Take a break

“We all need to build in rest periods during the day,” Jacobs says. “Working through lunch is a terrible way of managing stress. Try taking 30 to 60 minutes to step away from your desk and decompress. You will come back with a sense of replenishment.”

## Adjust your expectations

While it is important to challenge yourself at work, taking on more than you can handle can create a tremendous amount of stress.

“If you have no chance of meeting expectations in the workplace, it can cause feelings of demoralization,” Jacobs says. “Find ways to decrease the demands made upon yourself, if that means being less self critical or having a frank conversation with your superior about adjusting your workload.”

## Use emergency stress stoppers

Emergency stress stoppers help you deal with stress on the spot. These can be extremely effective in the work environment when you’ve got a lot on your plate, your mind is racing and the stress is mounting. You may need different stress stoppers for different situations and sometimes it helps to combine them.

- Count to 10 before you speak.
- Take three to five deep breaths.
- Ask for time to handle a stressful situation, so you can accomplish it to your liking and on your terms.
- Go for a walk.
- Don’t be afraid to say, “I’m sorry,” if you make a mistake.

