



Addressing Stress To Increase Success

Stress impacts lives and healthcare costs. Half of all adults suffer adverse health effects from stress. 75-90% of all doctor's office visits are for stress-related ailments. Stress contributes to many physical and emotional symptoms such as headaches, high blood pressure, cardiac problems, diabetes, depression and anxiety. Shockingly, stress costs American industry more than \$300 billion annually in lost time, lowered performance/productivity/morale and increased medical expenses. Stress that is left unmanaged – **distress** – can be challenging and unhealthy. When we are constantly reacting to small or large stressful situations without making physical, mental, behavioral and emotional adjustments, we can experience symptoms that can hurt our health and well-being.

Common symptoms of stress:

- **Physical** (headaches, tightness in the chest, stomach problems, frequent illness, aches and pains)
- **Behaviors** (sleep problems, eating more/less, isolating, procrastinating, nervous habits)
- **Emotional** (anxiety/depression, irritability, moodiness, inability to relax, being overwhelmed)
- **Cognitive** (memory problems, lack of concentration, poor judgment, negativity, constant worry)

Common “warning signs” can show up as changes in work performance, communication problems, low morale, conflict with others, lack of motivation, unrealistic expectations of self or others, reactivity, controlling or demanding behaviors and operating in “crisis mode.” Stressed employees begin impacting a company's bottom line; which is one of the many reasons most companies today have an Employee Assistance Program.

There are many things people can do to proactively address their concerns about the stress in their lives.

Seeing an expert available through EAP is one of the best ways of addressing these concerns and moving forward successfully. EAP assessment and coaching is confidential and provided at no cost to covered employees and family members.

Stress is basically a normal and natural state of being in response to real or imagined stressors. While we often think of stress as negative, it's a fact of life and when managed properly can even be useful, healthy and positively motivate us. The key is to recognize that we are experiencing symptoms of stress and determine what is causing it.

EAP can help people figure out a best response to their stressors, including one of the “Four A's”:

- **A**voiding unnecessary stress
- **A**ltering the situation
- **A**dapting to the stressor
- **A**ccepting the things you can't change

These **A**'s can help people learn to say “no,” avoid situations that “distress” them, take control of their environment, avoid hot-buttons, express feelings, increase willingness to compromise, be more assertive, manage time more effectively, reframe problems as challenges, adjust standards, be more positive, let go of control, be more realistic of expectations, and learn relaxation techniques. These are few of the options available to help individuals better cope with stress, but many other options exist, including proper health care, emotional support, setting priorities, positivity, exercise, and stress coping programs. By talking with an expert who can be objective and supportive, better decisions can be made that help the individual as well as their worksite, and “distress” can be turned into “success.”

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