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Too Much Stress: Warning Signs

Small amounts of positive, short-term stress can propel you to do your best. However, negative stress that lingers for weeks or months can increase your risk for several health problems, including high blood pressure, obesity, depression, heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

Pay attention to these telltale signs of stress:

- Frequent headaches.
- Muscle tension and pain, especially in the back and neck.
- Chest pain and rapid heartbeat: if this continues, seek immediate medical attention.
- Sleep problems.
- Feeling unfocused, forgetful and distracted.
- Being irritable and short-tempered.
- Eating too much or too little.
- Frequent fatigue.
- Gastrointestinal problems.

If you're experiencing any of these symptoms, talk to your health care provider about healthful ways to manage stress. Some of these symptoms can result from other, underlying conditions.

Watch Out for Signs You're Over-Planning

Do you achieve great joy by creating spreadsheets — for everything? Does doing something on short notice make you anxious? Are you inflexible if something doesn't go as planned? These are some signs that you may be an over-planner.

Here are some other signs:

- » You take a long time getting started on projects.
- » You have abandoned projects or not started projects.
- » You feel anxious when you aren't in control.
- » You are a perfectionist with impossibly high standards.
- » You have a hard time making decisions because you get caught up in the details.
- » You have difficulty adjusting when things don't go as planned.
- » You feel anxious and hyper-focused on negative outcomes.
- » You stick to a timeline that no longer makes sense.



Here's how to stop overplanning:

- » Set a time limit on making plans. Try one hour for weekly planning and 15 minutes daily to develop a planning routine.
- » Think of planning as a road map; know that you may have to take a detour or reroute.
- » Be goal-oriented, not goal-obsessed.
- » Set a main goal and then set small steps toward achieving that goal.
- » Accept change as part of the process. If you accept in advance that you may have to modify plans, it can be much less stressful.
- » Take a deep breath when things don't go as planned.
- » Create a mantra to keep away anxious thoughts. Some ideas: "I can only control myself" and "my way isn't the only way."
- » Embrace good enough. Don't be overcritical of yourself.

On the Job with Your Phone

Your smartphone is a powerful tool, smarter than a traditional computer. Turn your mobile device into a productivity booster at work with these strategies:

First, be aware of security and privacy rules. Know and follow your employer's policies for using mobile devices. You may be able to bring your own device (BYOD), or you may need to use a designated phone to access company information.

If you do BYOD, know that your employer may need to access it or even wipe your data if you leave your job or a privacy concern arises. Always follow your employer's policies.

Other options: Consider using separate phones for work and personal tasks, or store and access work and personal files in separate accounts. Also, make sure all files you create or store on your smartphone are backed up to a cloud or hard drive, or using another storage method.

Next, find the right tools to enhance mobile productivity. Many apps are available to help you schedule and organize large projects, videoconference, collaborate on documents, take notes, voice record and even create presentations.

Research apps, especially before you buy, and look for those that will help you save time and increase flexibility in your work.

Daily Time Stretchers

Do you often run short of time on the job? Daily or hourly? Do you feel you're always trying to catch up or need extensions on project deadlines? If so, it's time to assess how you can gain better control of your days.

Check the habits that most often apply during your typical work day:

- I set aside time weekly for planning and scheduling.
- I know how to avoid interruptions during critical tasks.
- I manage to avoid or control most distractions.
- I stay organized to complete tasks on schedule.
- I have specific routines for checking email, scheduling tasks, taking breaks, etc.
- I identify and plan tasks according to high, medium or low value.
- I confirm my priorities with my boss.
- I avoid procrastination to address tasks of the highest priority.

If you checked fewer than three of the time-saving habits above, hopefully this list gives you some insight into better work management. Best starting points: (1) Always allow time for weekly planning — identify how and when you will complete the tasks ahead. (2) Be ready for unexpected daily detours that can easily derail and consume your day. Both steps can save you hours of unexpected delays and frustration.



Minimize Jet Lag

By Elizabeth Smoots, MD

Traveling across multiple time zones may trigger jet lag.

Common symptoms include fatigue, trouble sleeping, difficulty concentrating, mood changes and constipation or diarrhea. While jet lag is temporary, some travelers may require about one day to recover for every time zone you have crossed.

The symptoms usually abate once your sleep-wake cycle gets back in sync with your new locale. To minimize jet lag:

- **Adjust before leaving.** For a few days before departure, go to bed an hour earlier if you're traveling east. Go to bed an hour later if you're heading west.
- **Change to local time.** After arrival, schedule your meals and bedtime at the appropriate local times.
- **See the light.** Get exposure to sunlight in the morning if you have traveled east, or in the evening if you have traveled west. Walking while enjoying the sunlight will help even more.



Protect Your Personal Life

Having a rich, satisfying personal life outside of work is good for you mentally and physically. While keeping work separate from home life can seem difficult, these strategies can help:

Unplug. Even if it's just for an hour, turn off all devices and completely separate from work. Use this time to reflect, practice a hobby, experience nature or enjoy time with loved ones.

Mentally separate. When away from work, create cues that signal absolute downtime. You might look at a special family or vacation photo, relax in a favorite chair or take a walk around your neighborhood. These provide a shift from work into personal time.

Create an active personal life. Spend time with activities and people you enjoy. Learn a new sport. Join a club or organization that shares your interests. Or volunteer for a local cause.

When you cultivate a fulfilling personal life, you will be more likely to protect it.



Note: Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date information, visit [coronavirus.gov](https://www.coronavirus.gov).



The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, **Getting Forgetful?**, is at personalbest.com/extras/23V6tools.

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