

## FEATURE

## Stress at Work: Is It Always Negative?

[By Monisha Bhat]

For many individuals, a certain amount of pressure is necessary for strong performance. But when the amount of pressure one is dealing with becomes intolerable or remains consistently high over a long period of time, it can turn into stress.

Unlike pressure, which helps us perform better, stress can turn us off mentally. Depending on its source, stress can bring negativity to any activity, place, or person. It also has direct effects on productivity; a person will suffer from health problems and have to bow out of working altogether, or s/he will lose interest in work, resulting in errors that would normally be avoidable.

### Busy Lives

There is no running away from the fact that we lead busy lives. Even leisure time is strictly scheduled. However, these factors by themselves do not lead to stress. Stress is the result of several factors, including not giving our bodies enough time to rest and rejuvenate.

Working hours fluctuate widely, and the concept of a natural biorhythm is fast disappearing as more and more people keep irregular hours, affecting both mealtimes and sleep patterns. This weakens the body, making it susceptible to stress.

### Recognizing the Signs

Stress is a very non-specific condition; the physical manifestations of stress differ widely among sufferers. However, a stressed-out person may have trouble falling asleep, back and neck pain, headaches, and other non-specific pain. Stress-tolerance

levels vary among individuals, and there is no single, specific indicator of stress.

Pressure, such as the anxiety one feels when facing an important presentation or during an evaluation process, can manifest itself as a dry mouth, excessive perspiration, or general unease or weakness. But these conditions remedy themselves as soon as the source of tension is removed. Almost everyone is familiar with the rush of relief that follows the completion of a difficult exam or an important interview.

A good way to check for stress-inducing factors is to identify issues that routinely cause you to worry. Some issues that commonly cause stress in the workplace include perceptions of being kept out of important projects, constant criticism, and being the object of degrading humor of a personal nature.

### Avoiding Stress

When it comes to the working world, no career is truly devoid of stress. The focus on teamwork in workplaces today also means that no one is a solo worker. Conflicting interests, differences of opinion, or lack of interest can lead to decreases in productivity. Possessing good people skills can help you complete work on time and receive more projects, but no effort involving a large team can be entirely devoid of stress.

On the other hand, good people skills do not automatically insulate a successful professional from stress. Dealing with habitual troublemakers can be very taxing, particularly when compounded by deadlines and other job demands.

### Pressure or Stress?

Is it fair to blame stress for everything? Or do we tend to confuse pressure with stress? The difference is that pressure drives us to perform better and rise up to meet challenges, while stress drives us to give up. It is important to recognize this difference.

In reality, every single decision involves some amount of stress because we must eliminate and consider options. Stress is woven into every decision-making process.

Setting goals and creating a schedule that clearly allocates blocks of time for specific tasks is helpful. Physical notes act as reminders and inform you of whether you are in control of a particular project or are running out of time. Taking control of your tasks is a very effective way to control stress at work.

### Using Pressure Effectively

If, after creating your schedule, you find that you have very little time to complete tasks or projects, you should consider

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discussing your situation with the person(s) concerned. If you feel that you are unable to meet a deadline or lack the ability to complete a project, be honest about your limitations. If it is a particularly important task, initiate a discussion and see if you can get more time or resources. An increase in work need not result in stress; judicious planning can help you generate productivity even under tight deadlines.

There is a very thin line dividing stress from pressure that leads to productivity. Although the two are not interchangeable, we can take

steps to ensure stress from work does not seep into our personal lives. Conversely, if our personal lives generate stress, we need to create harmony in order to achieve work-life balance.

### ON THE NET

Stress Management in the Workplace:  
Handling Work Stress  
[ezinearticles.com/?Stress-Management-In-The-Workplace:-Handling-Work-Stress&id=115473](http://ezinearticles.com/?Stress-Management-In-The-Workplace:-Handling-Work-Stress&id=115473)

How to Make Decisions with Less Stress  
[careerintensity.com/blog/2007/02/03/how-to-make-decisions-with-less-stress](http://careerintensity.com/blog/2007/02/03/how-to-make-decisions-with-less-stress)

Stress Management  
[www.pp.okstate.edu/ehs/links/stress.htm](http://www.pp.okstate.edu/ehs/links/stress.htm)