

# Stress Reduction in the Workplace

By Vicky Kotab



Stress is a common health concern for many decades now because of our busy lifestyles. Up to 75% of all illnesses can be attributed to chronic stress such as: high blood pressure, heart disease, lowered immune system function which means more colds and flues, digestive disorders, and the common discomfort of muscle tension in the neck and body. Our biological system does not know the difference between a true physical threat and a psychological threat (the worry in our own minds). Therefore we are wallowing in a bath of corrosive hormones if we are stressed most of the time. We are continually turning on our stress response for purely social and psychological reasons all the time; we worry and worry and worry. We worry over our finances, job security, deadlines, our children and their needs, our relationships to our spouses, what our boss or co-worker think of us etc...

Unfortunately most of us do not have control over our workplace environment or the people we work with. Therefore it is up to us to learn new ways of responding differently to reduce our levels of stress so that you are more productive and can go home to your loved ones in a better state of mind. Here are a few natural stress reduction techniques you can use to give yourself a mini break throughout your workday.

- One technique is to practice abdominal breathing at your desk many times a day; use a sticky note as a reminder. Sit up straight and breath in paying attention to your navel expanding outward as you inhale through your nose and pull it inward towards your spine as you exhale through your nose. Repeat for 3-10 breaths.
- Another skill is through mindful awareness. Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment, on purpose, non-judgementally. Try practicing mindfulness during one of your daily routines such as washing your hands. Focus attention on all of your senses. Begin by *watching* yourself turning on the facet, then *listen* to the sound of the water running, gently reach for the soap while also sensing the *smell* of the soap, then rub your hand together *visually* observing the bubbles forming and their change from coloured soap to white foaming bubbles. *Feel* the temperature of the water as you rinse off the soap from your hands and turn off the tap slowly. Now take a deep abdominal breath as you reach for the paper towels while still in a state of presence. As you open the bathroom door breath once more deeply knowing that you just gave yourself a wellness gift of practicing a mini meditation.

Practicing meditation regularly has many health benefits including increased concentration, a deeper sense of well-being but most importantly it reduces stress and

improves heart health. Remember always, that personal wellness is a conscious choice, moment by moment.

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