

# 1 Million Workers Missed Work Today

IN THE U.S. THE SAME THING HAPPENED YESTERDAY AND THE DAY BEFORE

THAT. IT WILL HAPPEN AGAIN TOMORROW. THE CAUSE? WORKPLACE STRESS.

STILL THINK YOU DON'T NEED TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT GOOD MENTAL HEALTH?

**Anxiety-related disorders cost the U.S. \$42 billion a year in work-related and medical losses.**

**Work related stress can double a person's risk of dying from heart disease.**

**Absenteeism due to depression costs U.S. businesses between \$33 billion and \$44 billion per year. Employees used about 8.8 million sick days in 2001 due to untreated or mistreated depression.**

**In a typical workplace, four out of every 20 employees will likely develop a mental illness this year, probably depression.**

Mental health, like physical health, is essential to a productive and enjoyable life—something all of us want. It can be defined as peace of mind, and includes the way we balance our needs, ambitions, relationships and feelings to meet everyday challenges. Many of us don't give much thought to our mental health, yet it affects the way we get along with family, friends, and coworkers.

It's easier than you might think to care for your mental health. Here are some ways to get started:

**Treat your body right.** The things you do to protect your physical health will also help your mental health. Eat sensibly and healthfully. Cut down on alcohol and eliminate tobacco and other drugs that can affect your ability to control your actions and emotions. Most important, be physically active.

Exercising just 30 minutes a day will improve your energy level, sleep patterns and even your self-esteem. At work, take periodic breaks, including getting out of your chair and stretching and walking a bit to help you avoid burnout and feel more refreshed.



**Talk it out.** When you're faced with a problem, talking with someone else about it will help you release pent-up emotions, see things more clearly and feel a sense of companionship.

**Take one thing at a time.** When you're feeling overwhelmed, make a list of tasks that absolutely must be done. Rank them in terms of importance, and work on them, one at a time.

**Get your mind off your troubles.** Do something you find relaxing—read, play, take a hot bath, listen to music, work a crossword puzzle, take up a hobby. Making time for enjoyable activities is important.

**Use positive visual imagery.** Use pictures in your "mind's eye" to help you feel rejuvenated and relaxed in just a few minutes. Sit in a comfortable chair, close your eyes, and imagine a place where you have felt at peace, such as the beach.

**Be honest about your limitations.** It's essential that you learn to say "no." When you have the option, eliminate things that are

not crucial for you to do—or to do immediately.

**Give yourself a break.** No one is perfect. Striving to be the best in all things leads to worry, anxiety and, eventually, burnout and failure. Allow yourself to be human.

**Give your coworkers a break.** Excessive competition can be dangerous, both physically and emotionally. Looking at a situation from the other person's viewpoint can reduce your stress and improve your outlook.

**Manage your anger.** Retreat before you lose control. Allow time for you and the other person involved to calm down. You'll both be better able to handle the problem constructively later.

**Keep a journal to identify the stressors in your life.** Just identifying the causes of frequent stress in your life can help you cope and gain a sense of control. Some stress is unavoidable—the key is to reduce the stressors that you can control.

**Get help.** Asking for help when you need it is a sign of strength. Sometimes we can get completely overwhelmed by feelings that do not go away or are so intense that they get in the way of our daily life. If this happens to you, seek help and referrals from your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or your primary health care provider.

**To learn more, visit [www.norfolkcsb.org](http://www.norfolkcsb.org), call the Norfolk Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness at 623-1929, call Mental Health America at 800-969-6642, visit [www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net).**

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# Mind Your Stress— On the Job



Most of us have felt “stressed out” at one time or another. When this feeling persists day after day, stress becomes chronic. Chronic stress can take a toll on our careers, on our quality of life and on our bodies, making us susceptible to a host of illnesses. In fact, what many of us don’t realize—and what medical researchers are confirming in study after study—is that our stress levels are directly linked to our physical well-being. Seventy-five percent of our visits to the doctor’s office concern stress-related ailments.

## Common Sources of Stress

For many of us, stress is at an all-time high level. Some common sources of stress include financial worries, concerns about job security, heavy workloads and responsibility, job burnout, personality conflicts at work, the demands of work and family, troubled relationships, as well as caregiving for a sick loved one or an aging parent.



## How Stress Affects Us at Work

We all know that stress affects us at work. In fact, one in four people say they’ve missed work due to work-related stress. When we are under chronic stress, we often have trouble meeting deadlines, concentrating and making decisions. Our productivity and performance decrease as our stress levels increase. We also may become easily irritated and overwhelmed, and have relationship problems with colleagues. Many people who are over-stressed at work are unable to leave their job-related issues behind at night or they feel immobilized on the job. Stress can also mean more headaches, backaches and colds—and more sick days.

**Did you know that one in four people report they’ve missed work as a result of work-related stress?**

## How Stress Affects Our Health and Wellness

Almost half of us suffer physically due to stress. Chronic stress can affect the body in a number of ways: It weakens the immune system, which can cause fatigue and make us more susceptible to colds and flus. It can also trigger a variety of ailments from gum disease to osteoporosis; cause premature aging; and lead to life-threatening illnesses like diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

## Strategies for Managing Stress

Whether the stress originates at the office or at home—or a little of both—we take it with us wherever we go. The good news is that we now know that caring for our minds as well as our bodies can keep us healthier, happier and more productive in all aspects of life. Here are some strategies you can use to better manage stress. These tips may seem like

common sense, but few of us apply them to our daily lives. They will help if we use them.

- **Treat your body right.** Eating right and exercising can increase your tolerance to stress.
- **Set realistic goals.** Do what's possible and carry on.
- **Set and re-set your priorities.** Take care of important and difficult tasks first, and eliminate unessential tasks.
- **Take one task at a time.** Divide large projects into smaller tasks, and make "to do" lists.
- **Take five.** Taking a short break can help slow down your mind long enough to improve your ability to deal with stress later.
- **Learn to relax or meditate.** Studies show that just 10 to 20 minutes of quiet reflection or meditation a day can bring relief from chronic stress and increase your tolerance to it.
- **Give yourself a break.** No one is perfect. Striving to be the best in everything will lead to worry, anxiety and failure.
- **Learn to say "no."** Slow down and be honest about what you can comfortably do.
- **Be flexible.** Make allowances for other people's opinions and be prepared to compromise.
- **Avoid excessive competition.** Excessive competition can be dangerous emotionally and physically—not to mention damaging to your job.
- **Go easy on criticism.** You may expect too much of yourself or others. Try not to feel let down or frustrated when your expectations aren't met.
- **Manage your anger.** Retreat before you lose control. Allow time for you both to cool down. You'll both be better equipped to handle the problem constructively later.
- **Be honest with colleagues.** Make it plain you feel you're in a bind. Chances are others feel the same. Don't just complain—make practical suggestions for improvement.
- **Talk it out with a loved one.** Talking it out can help you see things more clearly, release negative feelings and get emotional support.

### Did you know that chronic stress can:

- Double your heart attack risk?

- Increase your likelihood of developing serious illnesses like diabetes and cancer?

### When to Seek Help

If you experience some or all of these signs of stress, and they persist, it may be time to seek help. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness—taking care of yourself is a sign of strength.

- Constantly overwhelmed
- Strained relationships
- Poor work performance
- Overly emotional
- "Little things" set you off frequently
- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Headaches and backaches
- Rise in blood pressure



### Where to Get Help and Resources

- Employer-sponsored mental health or employee assistance benefits
- Your primary care provider, or a spiritual or religious leader
- Norfolk Community Services Board Outpatient Counseling Services at 757-823-1617
- Norfolk Chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill at 623-1929
- Mental Health America at 800-969-6642
- [www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)