Work related stress? Advice from a BACP counsellor on how to manage stress at work

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The working week can bring with it a lot of stress and strain, and when these levels of stress in the workplace become unmanageable, it can have a dramatic negative affect on mental wellbeing. Many of our 42,000 members provide workplace counselling, some from their private practice, and others via employee assistance programmes or through in-house counselling services. This gives them a unique insight into the pressures employees face.

We spoke to BACP's Lead Advisor for Workplace Counselling, Rick Hughes, who offered the following advice on managing stress at work:

Schedule your time "When work becomes hectic, it is important to manage your workload effectively. If certain tasks are more time consuming or stressful, get them out of the way first so that they're not playing on your mind for the rest of the day. Schedule your time carefully and make sure to take regular breaks."

Don't over-commit yourself "Don't bite off more than you can chew. Over-stretching yourself by agreeing to do work you haven't got time for is an unnecessary way of adding extra strain to your day. Sometimes you've just got to say "no" and prioritise the work that really needs doing."

Take regular breaks "Make sure you take regular breaks from your desk. Staring at a computer screen all day doesn't just hurt your eyes, it can also make you feel tired and sluggish. Take a short walk around the building or get some fresh air to stretch your legs and help clear your mind."

Eat well "Skipping meals during a busy working day can become a bad habit, but it's important to maintain a healthy diet and make sure you eat and drink well to maintain your energy levels."

Don't bring work home "It is vitally important to maintain a healthy work-life balance that allows you plenty of time to switch off and relax. Sometimes it's not possible to stay away from work issues when out of the office, but try to avoid checking emails and doing any unnecessary work outside your contracted hours."

Keep things in perspective "Work is important, but it's not the be all and end all. If you are struggling with the stresses of your job, don't suffer in silence – there will be people around you who you can go to for advice and support.

Communicate with others "Open up about any work issues you may be having, whether that be with workmates, your manager or HR. Together you may be able to find ways to improve your working environment to decrease stress-inducing issues and make your work life more efficient and effective."

Talk to a professional "If you're struggling to cope, talking to a qualified counsellor who can help you work through your problems in a safe and confidential environment may be beneficial. Many organisations provide staff with access to counselling through an in-house counselling service, referral to a local approved workplace counsellor or via an employee assistance programme that can help with both work and non-work related issues. Speak with your HR department about how to access these services."

Therapy may be available for free through your workplace. Check with your human resources or occupational health department or via your intranet. Alternatively, you can get access through local charities and voluntary organisations, your GP for free, or privately. BACP's public website, It's Good To Talk, features a 'Find a Therapist' directory which will locate private counsellors in your area, as well as containing information on counselling and psychotherapy.

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