

April Is Stress Awareness Month

By Dr. Joel Axler,
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April is not only a month of blooming flowers, but it is also a time to bring attention to a prevalent aspect of everyday life—stress. Stress is the body’s natural response to pressure, which a variety of situations and events can cause. When people experience stress, the body releases hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, which can lead to a range of physical and emotional symptoms, such as increased heart rate, muscle tension, anxiety, and irritability. Employers focused on improving the well-being of their workforce need to understand the many causes of stress and then take action to help address it.

Causes of Stress

The COVID-19 pandemic, global conflicts, racism and racial injustice, inflation and climate-related disasters are all weighing on the collective consciousness of Americans.¹ It is important for employers to recognize, however, that everyone’s experiences are unique, and what may cause stress for one person may not for another. However, some common situations, like those outlined below, can cause stress for many adults:

- 1. Work-related stress:** Deadlines, long hours, demanding bosses, difficult colleagues, job insecurity and financial pressures.
- 2. Financial stress:** Financial difficulties, such as debt, unemployment, unexpected expenses and living paycheck-to-paycheck.
- 3. Relationship issues:** Marital problems, divorce, difficult family members and breakups.
- 4. Health issues:** Dealing with chronic illnesses, injuries and caring for sick family members.
- 5. Life changes:** Major life changes, such as moving, starting a new job, having a baby or dealing with the death of a loved one.
- 6. Social anxiety:** For some adults, meeting new people, public speaking and other social situations can cause anxiety.
- 7. Personal and emotional issues:** Struggling with low self-esteem, anxiety, depression or other emotional issues.
- 8. Time management:** Balancing work, family and personal responsibilities.

1. *Stress in America 2023: A nation recovering from collective trauma (apa.org)*



Employers Role in Reducing Employee Stress

Employers have an essential role to play in addressing stress in the workplace. Here are some strategies that employers can use to help reduce stress levels among their employees:

- **Foster a positive work environment:** Creating a positive work environment by promoting positive communication, encouraging teamwork, recognizing employee accomplishments and creating a supportive culture.
- **Offer workplace wellness programs:** Wellness programs, such as fitness classes, mindfulness training or stress reduction workshops, can help employees manage stress and improve their overall health and well-being.
- **Encourage breaks and time off:** Employers can encourage employees to take regular breaks throughout the day to help prevent burnout and reduce stress levels. They can also offer flexible schedules, paid time off or mental health days to give employees time to recharge and address any stressors in their personal lives.
- **Provide clear expectations and support:** Set clear expectations for job duties and responsibilities. Employers can also provide support through regular feedback, mentoring and professional development opportunities.
- **Address workplace issues promptly:** Employers should promptly address any issues or conflicts to prevent them from escalating and causing undue stress among employees.
- **Manage workload and deadlines:** Employers should manage workloads and deadlines by setting realistic goals, prioritizing tasks and providing additional resources or support when needed.

By implementing these strategies, employers can help create a healthier and more productive workplace environment, reducing stress levels among employees and ultimately benefit the organization.

Tips for Employees

In addition to company policies and programs, here are some tips employers can share with their people about addressing stress-related issues:



Exercise regularly: Physical activity is a great way to relieve stress and improve overall health—exercise releases endorphins, which are natural mood-boosting chemicals in the brain.



Practice mindfulness: Mindfulness involves paying attention to the present moment without judgment, helping you become more aware of your thoughts and feelings.



Get enough sleep: Sleep is essential for mental and physical health—it can help reduce stress, improve mood and increase energy levels.



Connect with others: Social support can be a powerful tool in managing stress. Spending time with loved ones, joining a support group or reaching out to a mental health professional can provide valuable support.



Practice relaxation techniques: Techniques like deep breathing, meditation or yoga can help reduce stress and promote relaxation.



Manage time effectively: Prioritizing tasks and creating a schedule can help keep you from becoming overwhelmed.



About the Author

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Dr. Axler is a board-certified child, adolescent and adult psychiatrist with more than 30 years of experience in academic, private practice and insurance settings. He is a Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. He serves on several executive committees and organizations, including the Georgia Psychiatric Physicians Association and the Georgia Council on Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.



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