

Managing Stress and Anxiety in the Workplace



Featuring: Joanne Chua, Mental Health & Leadership Coach

Ready to conquer work stress and anxiety? Here are some tips from mental health and leadership expert [Joanne Chua](#).

With her practical wisdom and insights, you'll unlock your full potential and thrive in your professional journey.



Managing Anxiety and Burnout

1. What are some practical tips for managing anxiety and avoiding burnout in a busy work environment?

Everyone of us react to stress to a certain degree. However, some people may assimilate stress symptoms into their system without realizing it. Overtime, the person may experience prolonged fatigue, negative emotion (rumination, anxiety) or undesired behaviour such as binge eating.

Some tips to manage anxiety:

Be aware of your growing symptoms in these areas:

- Cognitive: forgetful, foggy mind, making more mistakes at work, etc
- Emotion: anxiety, impatience, snappy, impulsiveness, lack of joy, etc
- Physical: constant fatigue, stomach issues, migraine, headache, chest pain, nausea, etc
- Behaviour: sleep longer, insomnia, binge eat, increase in substance such as cigarette, alcohol, drugs.

Time Out

Time out is a simple technique to interrupt the building up of stress. You create intermittent time break to distract yourself whenever you are experiencing stressful moment. (Time out to make a drink, refresh yourself, get yourself out of the chair for 5-10 minutes to help you feel differently, practise deep breathing to calm your system)

Practise deep breathing daily

Deep breathing, also known as diaphragmatic or abdominal breathing, has numerous benefits for your physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Deep breathing reduces stress and anxiety, it activates the body's relaxation response, as it triggers the parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes a sense of calm and relaxation. It also lowers heart rate and blood pressure promoting better blood circulation.

Refine Your Morning Routine

Morning routine sets the energy for the day. If you can add sometime for self care, it will rejuvenate your mind and energise you to accomplish your challenges ahead. A positive morning routine can be setting time for exercise (jog/brisk walk), meditation/deep breathing/ listen to podcast to cultivate positive thinking habits, visualise what you need to accomplish for the day)

Weekly Rejuvenation

Every week, spend time doing activities with your friends or love ones. Engaging your time over a meal or a bonding activities like sports, karaoke, dancing, gym work, etc. These activities help you to take time off from the screen, it rejuvenates and revitalise the mind. It also provides a space for you to diffuse negative emotion.

Practice gratitude

Reflect on the positive aspects of your life and express gratitude for them. Write down or verbally acknowledge the things you are thankful for each week. It is helpful to keep a journal to write down 5 things you are thankful weekly. Research has shown that regularly practicing gratitude can increase feelings of happiness and overall well-being. By acknowledging and appreciating the good things in your life, you enhance your positive emotions.

2. How can individuals prioritize self-care and set boundaries to prevent anxiety and burnout at work?

Prioritizing self-care and setting boundaries at work is crucial for preventing anxiety and burnout. Here are the strategies:

Recognize the importance of self-care: Understand that self-care is not selfish but essential for your well-being and productivity. If a person is not loving herself, it is not possible to love others and have a fulfilling life. Making effort for self-care allows you to show up as your best self in both your personal and professional life.

Set clear boundaries: Establish clear boundaries between work and personal life. Define specific times for work and non-work activities, and stick to those boundaries as much as possible. Avoid checking work emails or engaging in work-related tasks during your designated personal time.

Communicate your boundaries: Clearly communicate your boundaries with your colleagues, superiors and clients. Let them know your availability, preferred methods of communication, and the times when you are not available for work-related matters. Assertively communicate your need for personal time and space.

Prioritize self-care activities: Make self-care activities a priority in your schedule. Dedicate time to activities that recharge and rejuvenate you, such as exercise, hobbies, meditation, spending time with loved ones, or engaging in activities that bring you joy and relaxation. Treat self-care as non-negotiable and as important as any work task.

Practice time management: Effectively manage your time by prioritizing tasks and setting realistic goals. Avoid overcommitting and learn to say no when necessary. Delegate tasks when possible and ask for help when needed. By managing your time effectively, you can reduce stress and create more space for self-care.

Take regular breaks: Incorporate regular breaks throughout your workday. Step away from your desk, stretch, or engage in activities that help you relax and recharge. Use your breaks for activities that support your well-being, such as taking a walk, practicing deep breathing, or listening to calming music.

Limit technology usage: Set boundaries with technology to prevent constant connectivity and information overload. Consider implementing designated technology-free periods or "digital detox" days where you disconnect from work-related devices and focus on non-work activities.

Develop a support system: Build a support system at work by connecting with colleagues, mentors, or friends who understand and support your need for self-care and work-life balance. Surrounding yourself with individuals who prioritize self-care can provide encouragement and accountability.

Practice stress management techniques: Learn and incorporate stress management techniques into your routine, such as mindfulness, meditation, yoga, or deep breathing exercises. These practices can help reduce anxiety, improve focus, and promote a sense of calm amidst work pressures.

Regularly assess and reassess: Regularly assess your workload, stress levels, and overall well-being. Reflect on what is and isn't working in terms of self-care and boundaries. Adjust and adapt your strategies as needed to ensure they align with your evolving needs.

3. How can individuals effectively communicate their needs and concerns to create a supportive work environment that addresses anxiety and burnout?

Effective communication is a two-way street. Be open to listening to others' perspectives and finding common ground. By openly expressing your needs and concerns, you contribute to creating a work environment that supports mental well-being, addresses anxiety and burnout, and fosters a culture of understanding and empathy.

Self-awareness: Understand your own needs, triggers, and boundaries related to anxiety and burnout. It is important that you know and reflect on what specific support or accommodations would be helpful for you. This self-awareness will enable you to communicate your needs more effectively.

Speak up : You need to learn to speak to your superior your boundaries and your needs. This will help you to manage your stress symptoms, communicate with an “I” instead of a “YOU”, an example will be “ I am overwhelmed by the number of projects that I need to complete by this month.” Instead of “You are giving me too many projects to complete.” This helps your superior understand your needs and your expression, it allows a chance to disrupt your stress patterns. You are giving yourself an opportunity to ask for the support and resources you need to manage anxiety and prevent burnout. This can include requesting additional training, flexible work arrangements, access to mental health resources, or workload adjustments.

Tapping into resources

Familiarize yourself with any existing employee assistance programs, counselling services, or wellness initiatives provided by your organization. Refer to these resources when discussing your needs and concerns, emphasizing the value they can bring to both you and the company.

4. What are some common signs that indicate increasing anxiety or burnout levels?

The common signs that indicate an increase anxiety or burnout is the change of functionality level in an individual. If you find a surge in negative emotion such as noticing yourself getting more impatience with colleagues and family, seeing an increase in weight gain or loss over the months, a decrease in energy to engage people or self care , finding life meaningless the way it is, these are “red flag” signs that your are on a verge of burnout.

And what can individuals do to address these signs proactively?

Managing the signs of burnout requires a comprehensive approach that addresses physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Here are some ways for managing the signs of burnout:

Know your triggers

Most people know their causes of anxiety. If you can manage your triggers, it will reduce your anxiety level. If you feel speaking in a meeting gives you anxiety, you may want to practise some deep breathing before the presentation, prepare your script in advance, get your team member to support you during the presentation or seek a mental health coach to help you overcome anxiety.

Prioritize self-care

Make self-care a top priority. Ensure you are getting enough restful sleep, eating nutritious meals, and engaging in regular physical activity. Incorporate activities that help you relax and recharge, such as hobbies, mindfulness, or spending time in nature and green walk.

Learn to reject.

It is important to reject demands and tasks that drain your energy. This is to help you reduce your anxiety level for holding too many incomplete tasks in hand and feeling stressful to complete over a given time frame.

Seek Support

We often see EGO gets in the way in a work organisation. It seems to be a societal norm that you need to be a SUPERMAN at all times. It is permissible to seek support and explore your resources, sometime, we have resources that we never use to help us function at work.

Hijack your work routine

The longer you sit in the office, the more you find that you cannot finish your work. As such, you find yourself still not able to complete your work at 9pm. Hijacking your work routine means disrupt your normal pattern of working. If you always end your day in the office at 8-9pm, try finishing at 6pm on 3 days to manage self-care and notice your stress level.

5. The best piece of advice you could give for an individual experiencing anxiety and burn-out.

Life is not about one single task (work), you can live a more fulfilling life without the experience of anxiety and burnout if you allow yourself to live life differently.