



# HOW TO DEAL WITH ANXIETY AT WORK

Not everyone is able to effectively manage and cope with their anxiety at work. Many people struggle with excessive worry about a variety of everyday problems related to work or their personal lives while trying to get their job done.

This type of anxiety is typically disproportionate to the situation and can be debilitating. It often also results in physical symptoms like fatigue and muscle tension that can cause problems in your professional and personal life.

## WHAT IS WORKPLACE ANXIETY?

Workplace anxiety involves feeling stressed, nervous, uneasy, or tense about work, which could include anxiety about job performance, interactions with co-workers, or even public speaking.

Workplace anxiety is common - around 40% of people report feeling stressed during their workday. While a little bit of work-related stress is normal, excess anxiety may negatively affect your overall health and well-being and cause problems both in your personal and professional life if you're not able to address it.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

People with workplace anxiety may worry about:

- Driving to work.
- Financial problems.
- Interacting with colleagues.
- Participating in meetings.
- Performance reviews.

- Giving presentations.
- Meeting deadlines.
- Other work-related tasks.

These worries may translate into the following problems at work (among others):

- Failure to meet deadlines or taking too long to do things.
- Forgetfulness.
- Inability to concentrate.
- Inability to focus or excessive self-focus.
- Sick days or lost productivity.
- Spillover effect on family life.
- Somatic (body) problems like tension, headaches, feeling of pressure, dizziness, and upset stomach.

## WHAT CAUSES WORKPLACE ANXIETY?

You may feel anxiety at work for a variety of reasons. These may be directly related to your job, especially if you:

Are experiencing interpersonal conflicts with your co-workers.

Don't feel like you have the ability to control your work.

Lack of job security.

Often face deadlines that are too short.

Regularly have days that are unpredictable.

Work in a particularly fast-paced and competitive environment.

Work on daily tasks that are too difficult or ambiguous.

Workplace anxiety can also occur due to someone's individual characteristics or circumstances. For example, you

may experience anxiety at work if you:

- Are distracted by other concerns, like problems at home.
- Don't feel motivated to achieve your goals at work.
- You don't feel valued when you do achieve your goals.
- Feel like you lack the skills or knowledge needed to do your job.
- Have an anxiety disorder or another mental health condition.
- Have difficulty understanding and managing your emotions.

## TIPS FOR COPING

Coping with anxiety at work is possible. Below are some tips to help you manage anxiety while on the job.

### Speak to Your Manager

Not everyone feels comfortable doing this, but speaking to your manager or supervisor about your anxiety may help. They may be able to offer you accommodations to help you do your job more effectively.

Some people may not want to disclose their anxiety to their supervisor or HR department for fear of appearing weak or unwilling to work, losing out on promotions, or having it on your permanent record. While these fears are valid, it's important to know your rights: You cannot legally be discriminated against because of your anxiety.

### Tell a Co-Worker

If you tell a trusted co-worker how you are feeling, they may



be able to help keep you on track. Having someone at work who knows what you are going through may help you feel more socially supported, which could lower your stress levels.

## Work Within Your Limits

Get to know your limits and learn to work within them. That may mean:

- Focusing on a single task at a time and trying not to think ahead to everything that needs to get done.
- Working with your supervisor to prioritize your tasks so you know that what needs to get done versus what can wait until tomorrow or next week.
- Listening to music at work if you are allowed and if it helps you cope.
- Setting small, frequent deadlines to keep yourself focused and on track.
- Setting aside 5 minutes during the day to do a short-guided meditation.
- Taking time off to recharge when you need to.
- Walking during lunch or a break.

## Use Quick Coping Strategies

In addition to tackling larger issues that are contributing to your work-related anxiety, it may also be helpful to practice quick-working coping strategies that you can use in moments when you begin to feel especially anxious. These in-the-moment strategies could include:

- Going outside for a few minutes.
- Listening to a calming song.
- Practicing a brief breathing

exercise.

- Taking a short break to chat with a colleague.
- Try visualization.
- Watching a funny video.

Grounding is another technique that can help positively shift your attention in the moment. Grounding involves using your senses to connect to your physical surroundings. This might involve:

- Holding on to a hot cup of tea or a cold glass of water.
- Listening to sounds that you find calming.
- Noticing specific things, you can see in your environment.
- Smelling a candle, perfume, or essential oil.
- Tasting food with a strong flavour, like a lemon or lime.

## Practice Good Health Habits

While anxiety can cause insomnia, try your best to stick to a regular sleep/wake cycle. If you're sensitive to caffeine, cut down and avoid consuming it past mid-morning when it's most likely to disrupt your night-time sleep. In addition to getting adequate sleep, fuel your body with nutrient-dense foods and getting regular exercise can also help you manage your stress.

## Be Mindful

If you find yourself losing concentration or focus and becoming wrapped up in worry, practice mindfulness. Become observant of your surroundings and refocus on the present moment. Try mindfulness meditation or any other practice that teaches you how to bring yourself back to the present.

## WHEN YOU CAN'T COPE

Are you still finding that you can't cope with anxiety at work? If so, you have additional options to get help.

Your first option is to seek treatment from a mental health professional. If you only have a vague notion that something is wrong but haven't seen a doctor, now may be the time.

Obtaining a diagnosis and treatment—like in-person or online therapy or medication—should always be your first step if severe anxiety is interfering with your life, including your ability to work.

Getting a diagnosis may also help if you are considering applying for disability benefits. Disability benefits or unpaid leave can offer you the time you need to work on your anxiety and then re-enter the workforce from a stronger position.

## SUMMARY

Feeling anxiety at work can be a common and disruptive problem. It can happen for a number of reasons, like having a stressful job, problems at home, or even an anxiety disorder. It can impact your work performance, making it harder to meet deadlines and concentrate on your tasks, and may cause spillover issues in other areas of your life.

Coping strategies may help you deal with anxiety at work, as can speaking with your manager or HR department about what you're experiencing. Seeking professional help may also help you better manage your symptoms and address the underlying issues.

