

DON'T LET STRESS AT WORK LEAD TO DEPRESSION



According to a study in the latest *American Journal of Epidemiology* (I read it each month, after I finish *The Fortean Times* and *Entertainment Weekly*), reducing on-the-job stress may help lower the risk of depression. Canadian researchers found a correlation between levels of work stress and incidence of major depression. The study is based on data from a Canadian National Population Health Survey of 4,866 people. In any given month, 4.4% of US workers suffer major depression. Such depression can severely affect productivity and employability. It's just common sense that work stress can cause illness, which in turn creates more stress. **Some advice for employees:**

- Learn to firewall your work life from your home life. In other words, try not to take your work stress home with you.
- Set aside a few minutes during the work day to just relax and breathe -- maybe at your desk, maybe in an empty conference room or out in your car. Don't think you have the time? You'll be far more productive -- it's worth the time.
- Talk to HR about your stress issues. They might be able to help you out, depending on why you are so stressed out.
- Exercise, maybe before work, maybe at lunch, or after work. Go jogging or join a gym. This will help immensely.

Some advice for employers: Some managers think the best way to motivate people is to put the fear of God or the dole queue into them. The theory is that a good employee will benefit from stress, working harder and faster. Someone too "weak" to handle the stress must not be good at their job. You are wrong. Your employees are overworked and unhappy -- and they get sick. A lot. They either miss work entirely, or work from home, or come to work and make everyone else sick. Whatever happens, you are losing productivity, not gaining it. Also, ability to handle stress does not correlate to talent. By driving away employees who can't take the abuse, you may be losing the people who are best at their jobs, and hanging on to those who aren't. Some workplace environments cannot help but cause stress. But if you're not the boss of an emergency room or air traffic control tower, or the teacher of an eighth grade classroom, perhaps you can tone down the stress a bit. Healthy, happy, relaxed employees do better work, and more work, than a cube farm full of stress cases. And maybe your health benefits costs will go down.