



Veterinary Wisdom[®]

for practice teams

10 Ways to Manage Stress at Work

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Your job can be hard! In any given day, you may deal with emergencies, complaints about your fees, disagreement between staff members, and even patient death.

It takes enormous energy to 'switch emotional gears' several times a day. No wonder you feel exhausted and depleted by 5:00!

When stress takes over, it's helpful to slow down, take a deep breath, and use one or more of the following strategies to replenish yourself. And (*I don't really have to tell you this, do I?*) it's important to slow down **several times a day!** After all, the more you take care of yourself, the more able you are to care for others.

1. Schedule an appointment with yourself. Seriously!

Ask your receptionist to write **your name** in at least one of your appointment blocks each day and keep the appointment with yourself. Use the time to catch your breath and to do something that is relaxing for you. Research shows that people who pace themselves and take breaks are, overall, more productive.

2. Breathe. Deeply.

Stop for 30 seconds between each appointment, procedure, or meeting and take several, deep cleansing breaths. What's a cleansing breath? Breathe in through your nose, filling your lungs until you feel them expanding your chest. Hold the breath for a moment and then exhale forcefully and completely through your mouth. Empty your lungs and collapse your ribcage. You might even pull in your abdomen to squeeze the last bit of remaining air out.

Repeat the process. You'll feel calmer. Really, you will!

3. Drink water as often as you can.

Health care researchers say it's common for people to be dehydrated while they're at work. Dehydration leads to irritability, fatigue, and the inability to think clearly. If you don't have a water cooler at work, consider installing one. If that's not possible, bring bottled water with you and drink one every hour.

4. Smile often and take time to help your co-workers.

Watch and listen for ways you can be helpful to and friendly with others. In one study, participants who helped others, even with small tasks like opening a heavy door, experienced what's known as the "helper's high," reporting a reduction in their symptoms of stress, as well as friendlier feelings towards others.

5. Ask for help when you need it.

Let others reap the benefits of helping you! And be sure to thank them for their efforts.

6. Coordinate your personal and professional lives.

If you know you need to leave work early one day, make arrangements well ahead of time for another staff member to cover your responsibilities. Don't expect last minute assistance!

7. Deal with disagreements or complaints ASAP.

Find a private place and speak directly with whomever you are in conflict. And don't gossip about it first or attempt to get others 'on your side.' Let the disagreement stay between the two of you. On the other hand, if you've offended or hurt someone, do the right thing and offer an apology. And make it a sincere one.

8. Build relationships with your co-workers.

Eat lunch together now and then. Share information about your personal life. Then, when disagreements do arise, it'll be easier to forgive and forget because you're friends.

9. Allow yourself to let off a little steam now and then.

Holding your feelings in for long periods of time can be damaging to your physical and mental health. Find someone unrelated to your work place with whom you can 'vent' your feelings and frustrations. Isn't that what spouses, therapists, hairdressers, and even pets are good at...just listening and being there?

10. Remind yourself often about why you wanted to work in a veterinary clinic (or animal related business).

It's easier to remember the love you have for your work when you slow down (there's that concept again!) and take time to truly connect with the animals who come into your workplace. Pet them. Talk to them. Gaze deeply into their eyes until you can almost sense what they are saying to you. No, this isn't weird...we all do it, we just don't admit it!

Enjoy the trust the animals have in you. Feel proud of what you do!



(photo from dreamstime.com)