

Health Awareness: Stress, Anxiety and Anxiety Disorders in the Workplace

While stress and anxiety is a normal part of life for American employees, persistent and excessive anxiety may be an indication of something else.

Not surprisingly, the majority of American workers suffer from stress and anxiety in their daily lives. However, according to a new survey, close to half of U.S. employees report experiencing daily anxiety that is persistent and excessive. And while only 9 percent have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, one quarter have taken prescription medication to manage stress, anxiety and related disorders.

A certain amount of stress and anxiety is normal — at work and at home. A looming deadline, an unpaid bill or other pressures can cause anyone to suffer physical and mental symptoms of anxiety, which usually subside after a short period of time or after the problem is resolved. However, persistent, excessive and irrational anxiety that interferes with everyday functioning is often an indication of an anxiety disorder.

Affecting approximately 40 million American adults, and twice as many women as men, anxiety disorders are serious medical conditions that fill people's lives with overwhelming anxiety, worry and fear. They include generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), social anxiety disorder (SAD) and specific phobias. These disorders can affect almost all aspects of life, including workplace performance, career success, and the ability to form and maintain personal and romantic relationships. Although serious conditions, these disorders are treatable.

The Annual Stress & Anxiety Disorders Survey is released during National Stress Out Week — an awareness week being held this year on November 12-18, 2006. Sponsored by the ADAA and co-sponsored by INSERT YOUR ORGANIZATION NAME, the goal of the week is to educate Americans about the difference between normal, everyday stress and anxiety and an anxiety disorder.

Key findings from the study include:

- Almost three-quarters of people who have daily stress and anxiety say it interferes with their lives at least moderately.
- One in four employees reports persistent stress or excessive anxiety has impaired their ability to function in the past six months.
- Almost half of people diagnosed with an anxiety disorder say their condition affects their performance, quality of work, and relationships with people at work, causing them to avoid participating in meetings, avoid social situations with co-workers such as parties and become short-tempered.

Stress Management at Work

The demands of the workplace, including deadlines, presentations, problem-solving and interactions with many different people, are major sources of stress for everyone. However, for

people with anxiety disorders, these demands can make their symptoms worse. The ADAA offers these tips for everyone for managing workplace stress and anxiety:

- **Keep working!** Apart from the obvious financial reason, employment is important for enhancing your self-esteem.
- **Practice time-management.** Make to-do lists. Prioritize your work. Schedule time for each task. Take a time-management course if necessary.
- **Plan, prepare and don't procrastinate.** Get started on major projects as early as possible. Set mini-deadlines for yourself. Anticipate problems and do what you can to prevent them.
- **Be realistic.** Don't over commit yourself by volunteering for projects or work you don't have time for.
- **Communicate with your boss.** Speak up — calmly and diplomatically — if you have too much on your plate. Your boss may not realize you're overextended.
- **Practice healthy habits.** Eat right, sleep, exercise regularly and avoid caffeine. Adhering to the basics will keep your body and mind in shape to handle challenging situations.
- **If you have an anxiety disorder, tell a trusted co-worker.** Knowing that someone at work is aware of your condition, and accepting of it, can be comforting. It can help with both anticipatory anxiety and if you are experiencing symptoms.

For more tips on managing stress and anxiety at work, visit www.adaa.org/stressoutweek.

If you feel overwhelmed by stress and anxiety, and stress-reduction methods are not working, speak to your doctor or a mental health professional. To learn more about anxiety disorders, visit www.adaa.org.