



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

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Healthy Habits Reduce Stress and Fatigue

By Matthew Barnett

Stress happens. It happens to office staff and to those who work in the shop or who drive transit vehicles. Stressful situations can initiate our “fight or flight” instinct. This reaction, also known as the “stress response,” occurs when we sense danger. This heightened state is our body’s way of protecting us.

But stress isn’t all bad. It can help you stay focused, energetic, and alert. In extenuating circumstances, stress can help save your or another’s life. It can give you that extra energy to finish a job that needs done. When it builds up, though, stress goes from helpful to problematic. Stress can materialize, especially if job requirements surpass the capabilities or resources of a worker.

Fatigue is one of the negative consequences of stress. Fatigue on the job is never helpful. This article will provide some tips to handle stress and fatigue and ways to avoid having them in the first place.

Stress and fatigue symptoms

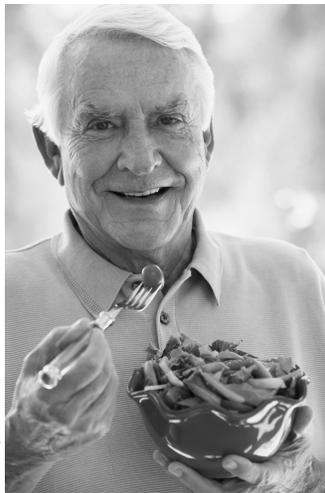
Common symptoms of stress include headache, sleep disturbance, upset stomach, difficulty concentrating, low morale, and poor personal interactions. These symptoms can affect health, moods, productivity, and overall quality of life.

When stress takes over, or you don’t get enough sleep, you can fall victim to fatigue. Symptoms can include loss of motivation, weakness, dizziness, and exhaustion. Fatigue could indicate more serious physical or psychological health issues. Severe fatigue can even cause you to pass out.

Fatigue can happen to any one of us. Here are some helpful tips to use at the workplace to help keep you on your toes and your head off your desk.

Ways to reduce stress and fatigue

It’s true that we all handle stress differently, but learning how to manage stress is key to job performance, staying safe,



and keeping mentally and physically fit. Because there is no one way to best reduce stress for everyone, here are some helpful tips to consider.

The National Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) recommends thinking over the four A’s: avoid, alter, accept, or adapt. One of the four A’s might work better than another in a given situation, or a combination might work best.

For example, if religion and politics are hot buttons for you, avoid talking with co-workers about them. If you tend to argue the same subject with the same people, avoid bringing it up, or excuse yourself when it does come up.

Some situations require you to alter or adjust your attitude and adapt to a new routine. An example would be learning a new (and initially daunting) computer program adopted by your agency.

Some situations are unavoidable, such as serious illness or death of a loved one. It’s best to cope with this stress by accepting the way things are, and adapting. A simple change in attitude can work wonders. It’s better to adapt to a situation you can’t change than to try to fight a losing battle. In these situations you may feel you’ve lost control; changing your expectations may help you to feel more calm and in control of the aspects you can control.

To relieve stress at work, listen to your doctor and try exercising. Exercise can reduce susceptibility to illnesses, speed up your metabolism, increase blood flow, and increase oxygen to your brain. Do a mix of aerobic exercise and stretching. Stretching will help keep you from feeling stiff after sitting for long stretches of time.

The website <http://www.fitness.gov> explains that individuals who engage in near-daily physical activity of 30 minutes or greater will experience fewer days of sickness with the common cold. The Web site also argues that exercise and a well balanced diet can help your body avoid

chronic fatigue. Moderate physical activity will improve physical and mental health.

Benefits to you and your agency

We all fall victim to stress at one time or another. Maintaining healthy habits will not only help keep stress more manageable and increase morale at the workplace, but it may also increase productivity. Getting enough sleep, eating healthy, and exercising and stretching are all positive ways to keep you going at work. These changes are not always easy to make, but committing to a plan of action will help you. For more information on healthy habits, check out the links in the sources below. ●

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Sources

- Healthy Habits. National RTAP. http://www.linkingcommunities.com/user_media/23608/brief-healthyhabits.pdf.
- The President's Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition. <http://www.fitness.gov>.