

Workplace Stress and Reactions and How to Find and Show Gratitude

Do you know how you are scrolling through email or something of that sort, then click on a link and end up down a rabbit hole of links and you don't idea how you got there?? Well, that happened to me this morning. I don't know how I got to this Psychology Today article, but I did. It caught my attention, because it discussed a survey of ~2,000 employees that now work from home. In this survey they discovered that more than 74% of those polled "indicated that their mental health is tied to how well they feel appreciated at work."¹ They also discovered that "63% confessed to feeling like they're carrying all the weight with chores and no one cares [at home]"¹ or expresses appreciation. Let's face it. It is *so hard* to separate work life from home life now, since we are WORKING AT HOME!

In this remote work environment tensions between team members or employees and bosses, may be a new barrier to work productivity and a new form of stress. Granted, prior to COVID, there's plenty of team tensions that existed, and this could further exacerbate it. On top of all that, we have our home life to deal with too.

As mere mortals, how do we react to stress? Usually one or more of the below:

- stress/mindless eating
- excessive eating
- not eating
- excessive alcohol intake
- excessive exercising
- avoidance of physical activity

Most of the time, these scenarios are how we cope with (or avoid dealing with) certain situations or emotions. This can lead to depression and anxiety not to mention physical or chronic diseases.

While there are many facets of dealing with stress, I will only discuss ones that are within my scope of practice.

As a yoga instructor, I usually have to remind my yogis, that my class is for self care, mental clarity and emotional wellbeing. It's not meant to be used as means to kill yourself. I've been known to say something along the lines of "If you want CrossFit, then this is not your class." Don't get me wrong, there is a level of exercise in yoga, just not to extremes. I might push you to hold a pose a little bit longer than you think you should, but its all out of love.

Yoga focuses on your breath and being present. Those are 2 ways that you can deal with all of these new pressures. Stopping to take a breath give you that moment to prevent an outburst; bring you calm and/or re-centers your focus. It can also sum up courage to have a difficult or uncomfortable conversation or to do a difficult or uncomfortable thing. When you

take a pause to breathe, you are taking that time to be present and to really think about what you are thinking, saying or doing.

As a dietitian, I'm fine with you eating the foods you love. Even if you consider them "guilty pleasures" or "bad food" or something that "I shouldn't eat". It's all about portion control, being mindful and loving to yourself. The sooner you take the stigma off of all food, the healthier of a relationship you will have with it. Eating should be to nourish, not to punish. Fasting should be done reverently, not out of compulsive control or punishment either.

I'm not sure how many of you watch "This Is Us", but I am so proud of this show for tackling the eating disorder spectrums. From Kate and Toby's overeating and their weight struggles to Madison's bulimia and distorted body image issues. So often, people hide with these disorders and stresses, *it's so nice to finally see people talking about it!* Know that you are not alone! If you do have any of these concerns or thoughts, please take the time to talk to someone. It can be a friend, family member, colleague, nurse, doctor, dietitian or mental health counselor. I do *strongly* suggest that if you seek out help for any eating disorder, you go to **both** a dietitian and a mental health professional as they go hand in hand. The STAR campus has a nutrition clinic and there is a bounty of mental health resources and counselors at your disposal through the University. Call the Nutrition Clinic at 302-831-3195 and Employee Assistance Program 1-800-343-2186 for further information.

What can you do for your teams' and at home relationships?

In the polls I mentioned at the beginning of this blog, those surveyed mentioned that just receiving a "Thank you" from colleagues, higher-ranking co-workers/managers, family or with whomever you live, would boost their confidence and make the work or home environment more positive.

Some days it may be challenging to find gratitude or thanks, but give it a try. It doesn't have to be a grandiose gesture or awareness, it can be just one little thing. We are unique individuals with our own talents and contributions. We all shouldn't expect to have great relationships with every co-worker or those we live with all of the time, but there is always a way to "get along". Maybe you have a co-worker that is Type A and OCD (saying this lovingly). Let's say that their methods help to make meetings flow better Or help you to stay on task? Or makes your day easier? Maybe the way they do things triggers you?

Here's what I want you to do:

1. Stop and BREATHE.
2. Take a moment to fully analyze the situation.
3. Ask yourself: why is this triggering/aggravating or annoying me? Does this really bother me or is there something else going on that's factoring into my feelings? (a fight last night with a family member may be weighing on you; or you have financial stress; or you are having a tough day with the kids; or you maybe you feel isolated, unhappy, or emotional)

4. Find the good in the situation. You can say: "Hey, thank you for helping the meeting stay on task." Maybe you can look at something as your weakness and their strength and that's how, as a team, the best outcomes are possible. Showing gratitude, or extending an olive branch can make a big difference.

How about the opposite scenario? What if you have a strong team connection already? How can you show them appreciation? Here are some tips for both of these:

1. Send a thank you card (in the mail or via e-mail)
2. Offer to take a task off someones hands if you have extra time
3. Give a virtual Hi-five
4. If possible, send an E-gift card
5. Text or email an encouraging message

[Or ***Spoiler Alert*** my next blog/recipe:](#)

6. DIY thank you gift (when socially distant and when appropriate).

To Sum It Up

The Psychology Today article also found that those polled reported that "words were the preferred expression of gratitude" from management, co-workers and family. A simple "Good morning", "Have a good night" and a good old fashioned "Thank you" can be all that you need to say or do to help others.

Until you can lock down these emotions and if you feel the urge to stress eating, check out my quick trail mix recipe below for a healthy snack! Also, remember that you should exercise because you love your body, not because you hate it.

Eat Well, Be Well, Walk your dog, Do yoga, BREATHE and Bon Appetit!

~~ Chef Jen RDN/LDN, RYT-200

Resource for blog:

1. "What Remote Workers Want, Or Else. New study finds U.S. workers aren't taking it anymore unless one thing changes" Posted Nov 20, 2020 by Bryan E. Robinson Ph.D.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-right-mindset/202011/what-remote-workers-want-or-else> accessed 11/20/2020

Easy Trail-mix for healthy “stress-snacking”

By Chef Jen, RDN/LDN, RYT-200

Ingredients:

- 1 cup lightly salted, roasted almonds
- ¾ cup golden raisins (can sub dried cranberries or chopped, pitted dates or dried cherries)
- ½ cup pretzel sticks (not the large rods)
- ½ cup dark chocolate chips (such as Enjoy Life Allergen free morsels or Signature Select 61% cacao extra dark chocolate chunks)

Preparation:

1. Place pretzels in a baggie and lightly crunch into ~ 1/2” pieces with fist. Mix all ingredients together in a bowl. Transfer by ½ cup portions into reusable containers or small snack plastic bags.

