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INTRODUCTION

More than ever, the information and businesses of the world are heading into the world of computers, and the employees who work with these businesses must follow. This progress has a price. Everyone knows the stresses of a general work environment. Bosses, noise, deadlines, co-workers, and an uncertain job future all contribute. As the tools of the trade shift to being more computer-oriented, the types of stress change too.

PHYSICAL STRESSES

Physical stresses shift away from those common to manual labor and lean toward a new set of hazardous circumstances. Sitting and staring at a computer for hours every day has its own possible pitfalls. Sitting may be thought to be a nice, relaxing, non-strenuous way to spend your days, but this is not true.

Posture, especially when sitting in one position for a prolonged period of time, is especially important. The wrong postural positioning can lead to a whole host of problems including tension, muscle soreness, and even muscle pain. With the amount of time spent at computers, these consequences may seem unavoidable.

Eye strain can be another issue. Staring at a lit up screen is taxing for the eyes and raises all kind of questions. Is the screen bright enough? How bright is too bright? How bright should the rest of the room be compared to the screen’s brightness? The factors that can contribute to eye strain and fatigue are many and varied.

MENTAL PRESSURE

There is a stress to the mass amounts of information that is always available, and endless streams of emails put pressure on workers too. It should result in improved communication, but this is not always the case.

A low stress environment is necessary to avoid the potential problems that this new computer-based work environment can create. You need to know why the physical environment is so important and what you can do to make it work for you and your body.
Once you protect the physical, it is time to move on to the psychological side of life. Good time management skills make all the difference in this fast paced world. A working knowledge of how to handle the regular deluge of emails is essential for anyone who has an inbox, as is the ability to use current programs and applications to your advantage.

Outsourcing is a tool of this brave new world. Contracting out work to contractors, freelancers, and service companies necessitates that you know why you are doing it, what you should outsource, and information about outsourcing access. Done properly, it can promote growth. If it is done incorrectly then it may cause more problems than it solves.

There is so much to be taken into consideration as a computer-based worker. The field is fraught with peril. Luckily, by becoming well-versed in all these possible problems and their solutions, you can ensure that the stress that you face as a computer-based worker can be either avoided or dealt with.
1
WHAT IS STRESS AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

Stress is everywhere. Everyone has it, but can you say exactly what stress is? Do you know exactly what stress does? If you ask a bunch of different people then you will get a bunch of different answers. People find different circumstances stressful. Some love to go on amusement park rides and roller coasters while others would not do it if you paid them. The difficulty with stress is that it is a subjective experience. Not everyone finds the same thing stressful or even responds to stress with the same reactions. People experience stress differently. This is what makes stress so difficult to narrow down and define.

GOOD AND BAD STRESS

Additionally, stress can be good or bad. You may wonder how stress can be good. Well, a certain amount of stress pushes you to work at peak efficiency. It can improve your focus and increase your productivity. This positive form of stress is called eustress. It is not thought of as much as the negative type which is called distress. Most people tend to zero in on the negative type because it is the most noticeable. There is no need to stop and take note of the times when you are feeling good. You only notice it when it is unpleasant and is unable to ignore. This is when something needs to be done.

HOW TO MEASURE STRESS

Considering its subjective nature, this makes stress especially hard to measure. How can you measure something that is not consistent from one individual to another? It is not consistent in the way that people respond to stressful stimuli, but what about the response? People do not even necessarily respond to stress in the same way. The symptoms can vary greatly from person to person.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES TO STRESS
There are a myriad of possible physical symptoms that can indicate an increased level of stress in an individual. The symptoms can include rapid heartbeat, headache, backache, sweating, upset stomach, diarrhea, muscle tightness, and many others.

As stated earlier, people respond to stress in their own way. Some could not imagine eating while some develop a voracious appetite as an attempt to cope with stress. It all comes back to what the individual does and feels when stressed.

Stress can also be reflected in your mental state and actions. You may find yourself being worried, irritable, and frustrated even over inconsequential matters. You may have difficulty concentrating, and you may be either exhausted or wired all the time. Stress can go in many directions.

**ACUTE AND CHRONIC STRESS**

The severity of stress is influenced by the intensity of the stress response, the length of time that the stress response is triggered, and how the individual deals with the stressor. If you are exposed to a stressor on a frequent basis, and you do not remove yourself or find a way to manage your stress then the effects will be more pronounced than those caused by a one time stressor.

These symptoms can be either acute or chronic. Acute symptoms have an immediate onset, and you become aware of them quickly. Chronic stress is more of a build up of stress over time. Chronic stress may be the result of stressful circumstances you find yourself in such as workplace difficulties, or it may be the result of a medical condition. For the medical condition, it could be the direct result of the medical condition or a consequence of try to manage health problems. The point is that the stress is intense and lasts a long time.

Typically, the response to acute stress is meant to be short lived. The stressor is present. Your body responds to it in the most appropriate way it knows how until the stressor is gone. Ideally, the body returns to its naturally calm state, and no real harm is done. If the stressor is prolonged, however, then there could be more of an effect. This is also the case if the stressor is presented repeatedly.

On the other hand, chronic stress encompasses situations where an individual is exposed to greater amounts of stress over a longer period of time. This prolonged stress response can adversely affect an individual’s health. It weakens your immune system. Your body’s ability to fight off illness and infection is compromised. This is true both for the common cold
and for more serious medical conditions. Chronic stress leaves you vulnerable to it all.

Not surprisingly, it also sets you up for cardiovascular disease. You probably know about the connection between stress and high blood pressure, but you may not have known all the other possible effects. It can cause irregular heartbeats, problems with your blood’s ability to clot, and hardening of your arteries. It is also linked to heart attack and heart failure.

Consistently high levels of stress can also manifest as persistent muscle tension. This can result in soreness or even muscle pain. Problems of the neck, lower back, and shoulders are common in those who regularly experience high levels of stress. Your body was not meant to experience high amounts of tension for prolonged periods of time, and it cannot handle them without starting some form of breaking down.

Stress can cause a host of other problems too. Some of these are stomach problems, skin problems, and problems with asthma and other breathing difficulties. Each one can be caused or worsened by the occurrence of stress.

Physical stress can result in overuse injuries. Overuse injuries occur when muscles are exposed to a combination of repetitive movements and awkward positioning. This can lead to tension, discomfort, and pain. It is a commonplace occurrence in the hands, wrists, and elbows of computer-based workers. Performing a task in an awkward body position once is not as likely to do much harm, but performing the same movement in the same awkward position every day is going to be detrimental to your physical health.

The fact that stress can lead to or contribute to serious health problems is cause for concern. Society’s dependence on computers is only going to grow, and that will make these matters more relevant with each passing year. The dependence upon computers is increasing these types of health concerns, and this issue is not going to go away until computers go fall out of fashion. That is probably not going to happen for a very long time, if ever. The long periods of time spent at home computers add in to this equation. Everyone is at risk.

In this age of computers, stress takes on a new meaning. As lives centre more and more around computers, more of the stress that people feel manifests in ways that are specific to working with computers. Of course, some generalized responses will always be associated with stress, but computers bring with them specific hazards. The mind and body can be stressed in different ways. As computers take over more and more of your time, you will need to find ways to reduce the stress that their use places upon you.
There are many kinds of stress common to computer workers. While this tool brings speed and convenience, it also has its downsides. There are concerns about proper posture, the effects of eye strain, the dangers of repetitive movements, and the stress management of having endless information at your fingertips. First, you must gain an understanding of what is meant by contact stress. This will bring many of the physical hazards of spending prolonged periods of time in front of a computer into the light.

**CONTACT STRESS**

Contact stress is the physical stress that is placed on the body when it remains in one position for a time. It is the pressure inherent in maintaining a certain position or posture. Poor postural choices can lead to injuries. The position of fingers, wrists, arms, and back all influence the type of contact stress that you feel when working at a computer. When you think about how much time is spent at a computer, especially if you work at one day after day, you begin to realize the possible problems of having bad posture and body positioning. When you think of the cumulative time spent in this position, the risks become apparent. Add in the repetitive motions and it seems as though some level of wear and tear on your body is inevitable.

The first concern is proper posture.

**POSTURE**

The problems that can be caused by the lack of proper posture are numerous. Slumping forward, for example, can result in shoulder pain, back pain, headaches, and jaw pain. The posture of leaning forward in this slumped position can also realign your ribs while you sit like this and lead to issues involving the heart and lungs. It is also pertinent to mention that this position creates a possibility of gastrointestinal distress.

Slouching can get worse over time as you work in front of a computer day after day. It is true that your slouching may even have some genetic undercurrents, specifically predisposing you to these problems associated
with slumping forward. With a genetic predisposition, bad posture may seem all the more unavoidable.

**EYE HEALTH**

Staring at your computer screen all day is not conducive to good eye health either. This nonstop monitor watching can result in weakness of eye muscles, eye strain, eye irritation, sensitivity to light, and other vision problems. The glare produced by surrounding sources of light can contribute when their light is reflected off your monitor. This reflection makes it even more difficult to see your screen and is more likely to cause eye strain.

The placement of your monitor can actually contribute to these symptoms. If your monitor is positioned too high up then it can increase the eye irritation that you experience. This placement makes you hold your eyes wide open and to blink more frequently that if it had been properly placed. In addition, such a high placement can force you to lean your head and neck back more than you should, and that can add to your postural strain.

**REPETITIVE MOVEMENTS**

Repetitive movements can lead to injury simply because of their repetitive nature. Often these movements are carried out at a rapid pace and require the application of some pressure to complete the movement. The parts of the body that sustain injury through this type of activity are typically the fingers, wrist, elbow, shoulders, hands, or arms. The injuries that may be caused by this sort of repetitive motion are plentiful.

One such injury is tendonitis; this is a swelling of the tendon near the gap between the tendon and the corresponding muscle. This condition can cause pain.

Another condition is epicondylitis. This is more commonly known as tennis elbow. This can also cause pain and finds its root in swelling in the location of the tendons and bones near the elbow joint.

Ganglions are another matter. They consist of a swelling that is round and smooth. It is usually located near a joint and commonly occurs on the back of a person’s hand.

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is perhaps the most well known injury related to prolonged computer use. Everyone has heard of it and is vaguely aware that it has to do with repetitive computer work or repetitive actions. In reality, it is again a swelling of the tendons that come through the front of the wrist. This swelling then applies pressure to the median nerve. This may coincide
with rheumatoid arthritis, or it may stand on its own. The resulting sensations for the individual who suffers from Carpal Tunnel Syndrome can include feelings of pain, numbness, burning, and tingling. In time, this can impair the usage of the afflicted hand. The afflicted hand may be weakened, experience clumsiness, and may not fare as well when it comes to manual dexterity. Tingling or itching sensations of the fingers may also be present.

Repetitive motion injuries are diagnosed by the symptoms of pain, numbness, or swelling around the problematic areas. These will be the main indications of the injuries. In the beginning, it may take the repetitive action to trigger the unpleasant symptoms or pain. If the condition worsens, however, then the pain or other symptoms may be present in the afflicted areas all the time. In some cases, symptoms may not even manifest until after the action, making it harder to diagnose. You may not realize that the pain or numbness that you feel in your hands at night is actually the result of your long hours spent at the computer during the day.

You may be wondering if this damage is permanent. It all depends on how a sufferer responds in the early stages. These problems can be avoided if immediate action is taken, but allowing them to persist unchecked can lead to permanent damage to the affected areas.

THE INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Having endless amounts of information at your fingertips may seem like a dream come true. You can have access to information any time of day or night. You can contact or at least leave an e-mail for anyone around the clock. You can also sign up to receive e-mails to stay updated on practically anything. You can perform online transactions with companies from almost anywhere, and you can monitor accounts, markets, and everything else from your computer terminal. So what is the problem?

All of this information comes at a price. You have to learn to separate the worthwhile information from the information that is not really necessary. You cannot read every e-mail you receive, peruse every web site that pertains to your topic of interest for the day, or monitor every market. You will not only drive yourself crazy, but you will be out of time before you know it.

You could spend your entire day doing these things and never accomplish anything. This can be stressful. You may want to keep on every detail of your business, every change in your stock market status, and be apprised of the latest updates available on many web sites, but you cannot do everything. You may feel the stress of attempting to do it all but coming short, or you may feel a sense of worry as you try to separate the wheat
from the chaff. You may be concerned that in your efforts to bypass the
nonessential information that something truly important might slip through.

How do you deal with the relentless stream of emails coming your way? How
do you answer every one while still having time to attend to your other
duties? How do you know which emails you need to pay attention to and
which you can let fall by the wayside? Knowing what to do with the flow of
emails can make anyone feel the stress. Trying to figure out how to answer
emails in a timely manner without spending your day checking your inbox is
a real issue. You are either stressed because you are devoting all your time
to checking for and answering emails or you are stressed because you think
you may not receive an important one in time. It can feel like a no win
situation.

It is a ridiculous amount of information to take in and a daunting task to
know what to do with the information once it makes its way to you. Even if
you are committed and the bravest of the brave and faithfully catch up on
every random e-mail that comes your way, there will be a whole new
mailbox full of them when you return to work the next day and even more
after the weekend. It is an uphill battle, and it saps your productivity and
your focus. Knowing what to read and what not to read can be maddening.
You want to catch everything you need to, but you do not want to spend half
your day reading e-mails that you realize have nothing to do with you and
your job. It amounts to a mountain of information, and finding the useful
needles in that haystack can be quite stressful.

Constantly checking your mailbox to make sure that you are up on the latest
changes is demanding. The pressure to take advantage of this instant
communication can be overwhelming. You want to check your email often
enough that you can instantly respond to any emails you receive. It can turn
from a convenience to a cloud hovering over you at all times because you
never know when you will have more emails to respond to immediately.

These are some of the stresses common to computer-based workers. They
may sound like a lot, but once you know how they are caused then you can
deal with them. You can replace bad habits with goods ones. You just need
to know how.
SET YOURSELF UP FOR A LOW STRESS ENVIRONMENT

A low stress environment helps you to avoid the problems common to computer-based workers. If you limit the stresses then you will not have to deal with the repercussions of stress later. There are many details that must be attended to if you want to ensure that your work environment is as low in stress, both physical and psychological, as possible. The physical environment is a good place to start.

WHY THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

The right physical environment makes all the difference. As you have learned, the danger of a workspace that is not set up properly is a recipe for disaster. Your health and your productivity are both likely to suffer. You probably spend a great deal of time, even a good chunk of our life, at your computer so it needs to be as low stress as possible. This means mentally and physically low in stress. You have learned all the potential consequences of setting it up incorrectly. Now, you need to learn how to do it right.

Having covered the hazards than are the natural consequences of working in a computer-based field, you can understand why it is imperative that your workspace be set up correctly and that you perform your tasks in the way that is the least taxing to your body. General injuries, muscle aches, eye strain, and repetitive movement injuries can all be avoided once you learn better ways to carry out routine work duties. If you do not consider and enact the solutions to these problems now then you will pay for it later.

THE RIGHT FURNITURE AND COMPONENTS FOR A LOW STRESS OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

Your office, cubicle, or work station should be tailored to you. Some people are taller, and their setup needs to reflect this. Some people are shorter, and their work station needs to keep this in mind. If you are the only one
utilizing your station then it will only have to be adjusted once to fit your personal physical characteristics. If you share your work station then there will have to be means of adjusting the environment to accommodate all who work there.

- **Footrests**
  These adjustments may include a footrest so that your feet can be flat on the floor. If the desk itself cannot be adjusted in height then some manner of adjusting the height of the keyboard is ideal. If you are lucky enough to have your own work station then you need only adjust it to fit yourself.

- **Keyboard**
  An ergonomically designed keyboard can help to alleviate the stress placed on the hands and wrists. By offering them the chance to relax into a natural position, you will help to prevent the injury that can result from poor hand and wrist placement.

- **Mouse**
  Your mouse is best placed at the same height as your ergonomically designed keyboard. This way you will not have to be dealing with tools at different heights simultaneously. It will provide for a more even, fluid transition between the two. When you utilize your mouse, it is best to move your arm as a whole, not just your wrist. This will lessen the load that is placed exclusively on your wrist.

- **Typing style**
  Do not press into the keys with force. A gentle typing style is highly preferable. Typing is a repetitive task and should be cared out only with the effort that is necessary to accomplish it. Any more force than that will put more pressure on your muscles than is necessary.

- **Resting arms and hands**
  When you are not typing, you should rest your hands, fingers, wrists, and arms. Do not leave them in the typing position when you relax them. They are in that position quite enough. Change to a different relaxed placement of your arms whenever possible.

- **Alternate other duties with typing**
  This will prevent uninterrupted typing for long stretches and the wear that this can cause. Interrupting typing with other unrelated activities can allow for the dissolution of any tension that has built up as a result of typing and its postural requirements. Stand regularly for a change in posture.

- **Organization**
  The work space should also be neatly organized. Anything that is used on a regular basis should be within easy reach to prevent the need of
having to constantly reach beyond your comfort zone for the things you need.

- **Leg room**
  A clear space under the desk is necessary so that your legs have sufficient room and are able to stretch at appropriate intervals. Remember that you do not want to stay in any one position for too long. This is a habit of working at a computer.

- **Stretch and move!**
  Computer-based workers often become engrossed in their work and stay in one position for extended periods of time. This is incorrect. You want to change positions regularly to exercise the muscles, relax them, and to engage different muscle groups throughout the day.

- **Headsets**
  A headset is called for if you frequently make calls, especially if they are of extended duration. It may not seem taxing to make one long phone call, but when this action is repeated on a daily basis then the tension and awkward positioning can add up quickly.

- **Static sitting**
  Now it is time to talk about sitting itself. It cannot be said enough that it is not advisable to stay in one position while sitting for long periods of time. You want to break it up. Standing, moving around, and going for short walks will help avoid the problems associated with prolonged periods of static sitting.

- **Chairs**
  Your chair should be ergonomically designed so that it goes with the natural contours of your back. You will want your knees to be bent at a right angle or slightly wider. Your feet should settle squarely on the floor. You will want several inches between the back of your knees and the end of your seat. They should not meet up. Your thighs will be parallel to the floor. There should be enough room beneath your desk so that you can move your chair up until you are aligned with the end of the desk. You will want a couple inches of space above your thighs before the desk begins.

**WAYS TO REDUCE EYE STRAIN AND FATIGUE**

Now, here are ways to reduce eye strain and fatigue. Your monitor is best positioned a little below eye level. If you are looking back and forth between the screen and papers then you will want them at the same level. Otherwise, you will be craning your neck in uncomfortable positions. You will also want
them the same distance away from your eyes so that your eyes will not have
to keep changing focus.

Position your wrists and forearms so that they are parallel to the flat surface
of the desk. Glare should be reduced or eliminated. This can be
accomplished in one of two ways.

Proper positioning of the monitor can keep it from potential sources of glare,
or you can purchase an anti-glare screen for a similar effect. Ideally, you do
not want to be looking past your monitor into a source of bright light such as
a window. Keep the monitor clean because it may become obscured by dust
and become harder to read.

Turn your head away from the screen regularly to focus on objects at a
distance. This will give your eyes a break and allow them to exercise their
ability to see more than just the screen directly in front of you.

Make sure that the screen is at a comfortable distance. Of course, you do
not want to have to lean forward to see it. This is a postural issue. Proper
distance will also benefit your eyes.

A final tip is that of taking breaks. Of course, you should take breaks, but
make them shorter and more frequent. This is more effective in cutting
down on eye strain and fatigue than longer breaks that are spaced farther
apart.

Exercise breaks can aid in interrupting your static position and the monotony.
It does not matter how enthralling the material on your computer screen is.
Eventually, the fact that you are staring at the monitor will get monotonous.
Taking breaks to stretch out your arms, back, hands wrists, shoulders, and
just getting a good overall stretch can work wonders for your body and your
eyes.

**PEACE AND QUIET...**

This one is a no brainer. A quieter environment is more conducive to work
and is less stressful.

**THE PROPER POSTURE**

Proper posture allows you to keep the keyboard and mouse within reach
while bending your elbows at approximately a ninety degree angle. Your
shoulders should be relaxed. Maintaining tension in your shoulders will
create problems later. Keep your back straight and position your monitor at
a level slightly below your eyes. It should be in the centre of your vision. Having to look one way or the other to view your monitor puts unnecessary strain on your neck muscles.

Repetitive stress injuries may occur if you do not follow this advice, or they may just happen. If that is the case, then the best move is to get a break from the action that is causing the injuries. Examine the work environment and see if there is anything about it or about your positioning that is contributing to the problem.

**REST WHILE WORKING!**

One way is to get rest and still continue to work. This is done by performing the same tasks at a slower speed and doing so for shortened periods. The more frequent breaks may help to alleviate some of the stress that the movements are causing. You should, of course, also see your doctor. These problems can be derailed form becoming more serious if they are caught in time. If they are not then injuries may become permanent.

**HYDRATION**

Here is one you may not have thought of. Stay hydrated. That is right. Drinking plenty of water is important for your health whether you are running a marathon or working at a computer. Your body requires sufficient hydration to function at peak efficiency in any situation so drink plenty of water.

**LEARN TO LET GO OF STRESS**

Meditate, do yoga, or take some deep breaths. These techniques of stress management are excellent ideas whether your stress is related to computers or not. The last one may be the most feasible for practicing on the job, but carrying around tension is not the way to go. Taking a few deep breaths at your desk every so often can help you to recognize and release any tension that has built up since your last relaxation break.

It may seem like a small effort to stop and take some deep breaths, but it can make the difference between you ending your work day feeling refreshed and proud of your efforts for the day and feeling tired, tense, and frustrated all because you never stopped to relax your body and mind. You may think that you do not have time to do even this simple exercise, but you do not have the luxury of not doing it if you want to stay relaxed. In the end, it will make you more productive to be free of tension. Plus, you will be in a better...
mood. Learning to release tension periodically throughout the day and before you head home can ease the burden of stress on your system.

**WHEN TO GET HELP**

If your stress is starting to get the best of you then seek some help. Exercise is a wonderful stress reliever. The physical release and working the muscles can drain the stress from your body, but that is not all. The concentration and coordination that physical exercise requires helps you to get your mind off work and gives you a break from work-related matters.

If the stress is getting to you emotionally then you may want to go into counseling to identify stressors and find productive ways to deal with them. You could even make changes to your life to work through some issues on your own. Just find any activity that relaxes you. It could be gardening, journaling, or dancing a little jig. As long as it works for you then it is a good stress reliever.

All of these issues are based on you. Do you remember the subjective nature of stress? It affects different people in different ways. The same is true for dealing with stress. Everyone relaxes and unwinds in their own way. This is the best piece of advice that there is to offer. Figure out what is stressing you out and then either find a way to avoid it or find a way to deal with it. Just find out what works for you. Whatever it is, you can make it better if you put the effort into it.
4

AVOIDING STRESS THROUGH GOOD PROJECT PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Managing time becomes a particularly interesting issue for the computer based worker. With all the information available, you can easily be overcome by the sheer volume of it. So what do you do? Hide under your desk until you feel it is safe to come out again? What is the best use of your time when you are working in this type of setting?

TIME MANAGEMENT FOR COMPUTER-BASED WORKERS

You probably know that you need to prioritize. Deciding what is most important and what must absolutely been done is a great way to start the day. You can run around like a chicken with its head cut off, but you will likely get very little accomplished. Make a list. Figure out what absolutely has to be done first and go on down the line. Realize that you may not be able to accomplish every little thing in the course of one day. It is fine to let things carry over from one day to the next as long as the essentials, which are at the top of your list, get completed.

Another matter to consider, especially if you are working at home or have a flexible schedule, is when you are most productive. You will naturally have times of day when you are more productive so use that to your advantage. At the very least, plan to do the things that require the most of your attention during the period of the day where you are most awake, focused, and capable of being detail oriented. Go with your strengths.

Another thought for those who work at home, in whole or in part, is the management of family interruptions. Once you are in the home then it may seem that all bets are off when it comes to having any private time to complete work. You are fair game unless you set some boundaries. It is easy to get sidetracked at home with all the other things you could be doing. The laundry, the dishes, and the little ones will all by vying for your attention, some louder than others. This can interfere greatly with any productivity that might have happened in your home office hours. The key is to set some boundaries.
If you can, having a separate room as your own secluded office area is ideal. Having a door is a great way to mark the threshold between home life and work life when they occur under the same roof. It is also an effective way to indicate when you are indisposed. Work has to come first sometimes or you will always be distracted from both home and work life. Neither will get the full attention it deserves.

Sitting down with the family and discussing the importance of uninterrupted work time is the best way to do it. Involving them in the discussion lets them know that you need their assistance to make this work. It is a much better tactic than gritting your teeth because they do not fully understand that a few quick interruptions every day from each family member can really add up. Ask for their help keeping noises levels down and managing the household affairs when you are in your office so that you can get your work done.

When you directly enlist their aid, they will feel a part of your work life. This can cut down on the desire to intrude on your private office time. Getting their willing support is better than gritting your teeth because they do not understand that one more knock on the door really is an interruption.

When you have something that must be done then you have to be able to put your foot down. You need to resist the temptation to become sidetracked by new projects, intrusive individuals, and anything else. This is a part of prioritizing. Once you know what needs to be done, you need to set up boundaries so that you will be able to get it done without interruptions. If this is not possible then you want as few interruptions as possible. Zero sounds like a good number.

Along the same lines is the subject of multitasking. In general, it is a bad idea. It may sound like a good one. You are doing two or more things at once. You seem to be getting more done, and in some cases this may very well be true. However, many activities require your full attention to be done well. Splitting your focus may give the illusion of cutting down on the time spent, but it can cut down on the quality of your work just as easily. There are a myriad of ways to save time, and this is not at the top of the list. It is true. Sometimes multitasking is fine and maybe even desirable. The overwhelming majority of the time, it is not. Something is being missed or not done with your full attention.

Time management is about organization and finding better ways to do the same old things. All you have to do is pay attention, and you will see where the majority of your time is spent. You can then decide if those activities are worth the time they take up and go from there. You may want to reduce the time spent, change the way you perform these tasks, or eliminate them entirely. It is not worth it to keep doing something in a way that is no longer working for you.
MANAGING THE STRESS OF EMAILS AND OTHER SIDETRACKERS

The next thing to consider is managing the stress of emails. You will undoubtedly receive an endless flow of these convenient little messengers, all with something to say. The question becomes one of what messages you really need to receive and which are just trying to rob you of precious work time. It is tempting to read every one that crosses your screen, but this game can cut into your productive time quickly. In addition to that, the desire to compulsive check your email can encroach on your focus because you never want to be a minute behind when the latest updates are always available.

Asking anyone from whom you regularly receive emails to make the subject lines specific can be a great help. When you know the content from the subject line, you can separate the necessary from the useless with a glance. They will appreciate you doing the same.

Separate email accounts for work and personal use help you to keep these two domains of life apart. You want to know ahead of time when you are checking your email if this is something that was sent by a family member or a friend who likes to forward jokes or if it is something from a client that needs your immediate attention.

Many email services allow you to organize your incoming mail further. You can collect them according to their urgency, their subject nature, or the client that they pertain to. Creating folders for various topics or clients allows you to quickly and easily separate your emails using a pre-existing system so that you do not have to stare at each email and wonder what to do next. Making sure that each message already has its place is a fantastic timesaver.

Also, evaluate any regular subscriptions you have to emails. Online newsletters and informational emails may serve you well in your chosen field, or they may not. Cancel any subscriptions that do not serve you. If they are not explicitly useful and helping you to get ahead then maybe it is time for them to go. If it is not doing anything other than wasting your time then why continue receiving it?

Delete emails that you do not need. Aside from creating room visually, this can keep you from feeling overwhelmed by the number of messages in your inbox. If you never delete emails then that number is only going to keep growing.

A schedule is one way to avoid the excessive checking of your email. It may be tempting to check every few minutes just so you do not miss the latest updates, but if you do this often then it will add up. If you do this every day, then a lot of time is going into this practice. You can check your emails...
regularly without allowing them to detract from your work. You may have a new email every few minutes, but if you also check every few minutes then your day will be eaten up by trying to stay ahead. Spending too much time trying to stay ahead can leave you further and further behind. Who knew?

There are so many things that you think you have to do in a day that you may never stop to wonder if you have to do every little thing. Even if you really have to do something then have you thought of an innovative way of doing it? Considering new ways to do the same old things can be the difference between time well spent and time wasted out of force of habit. You do not need to read every email that crosses your screen. You do not have to read every word of every email or web page to get the general idea. Maybe you want to look into speed reading. You may not remember every detail if you just skim, scan, or glance at every piece of information you receive, but you do not have to. Many of the emails that you receive you will not even be tested on later! This is just one example of doing something a different way to save yourself some time. A little ingenuity now could save you hours of time in the future.

If it is an option then do not be afraid to delegate. Have some faith in your fellow workers. Delegating or even asking for help can make people feel useful. You do not have to handle everything yourself, and you cannot do it anyway. Perhaps reassigning tasks could make things run more smoothly. Put some thought into it. Ask yourself if there is a better way.

If you are always answering the same questions then prepare a list of these frequently asked questions complete with answers. This way you will not be stuck answering the same questions every week. You can have this list available to them or ready to send out from your email account at a moment’s notice. It should prevent some future questions too. Compiling the list may take some time now, but it is likely to save even more in the future. Think about how you can do something different or how you can do the same thing but better. Make smart changes.

**PROGRAMS AND APPLICATIONS TO AID COMPUTER WORKERS AND PROJECTS**

There are computer programs and applications for everything these days, but you need to make them work for you. Things go wrong sometimes so remember that. Make a plan. Everyone knows about saving your work frequently as you go, but there is so much more. You need to backup all the files that you would not want to be lost in the case of a computer crash, virus, theft or anything else. Hopefully, these protocols will never actually have to serve as your way to restore your system, but if something does happen then you will be glad that you have them. Backup your files regularly.
Learn all the ways that current software can help prevent these occurrences or make them easier to manage. Use functions that allow you to restore your system to a previous point in time without losing files. Take advantage of back up disks that allow you to reinstall your entire computer’s programming if the need arises. These things are easy to do and will save you endless headaches later. Buying a surge protector is so much simpler than trying to recover from the aftermath.

There are more computer programs than can be listed. Some even produce images on your screen to remind you to keep your breathing slow and deep. Other protect your image from every potential hazard they can while still others help you to manage your finances using already existing financial forms. Whatever you may need, it is out there. You need only to decide what you need or want and start looking. Many programs are made to do work for you so let them.

Good planning and preparation make your work day go by smoothly. They allow you to get everything done as quickly and as easily as they can with a minimum of stress. Through time management, handling emails effectively, and utilizing the latest computer programs and applications, you can cut your stress down to as little as possible.
Outsourcing, simply put, is paying someone who is not an in house employee of your company to perform certain tasks for your company. Ordinarily, you would have these matters handled in house, but outsourcing takes this burden off your immediate staff. It is a notion that has been popularized in recent years because it frees up employees to attend to more pressing or more complicated tasks while an outside contractor takes care of the simpler ones, the ones that can be passed on without a drop in quality.

**WHY OUTSOURCE WHAT YOU COULD DO YOURSELF**

Financially, outsourcing often makes sense. If you could pay an outside source to take care of tasks for less money and they can do it just as well, or better, as you could do in your own company, then that is the bottom line. With the smaller details taken care of, management can devote their attention to larger issues. An experienced outsourcing service can raise their services to an art form because they might focus primarily on performing that small subset of services. They may even have more advanced methods, computer programs, and equipment that a smaller business may not be able to afford to buy on its own.

Some of the areas targeted in outsourcing are answering calls, receiving emails, and handling payroll duties. Removing the responsibility for these functions can free up time and money that can be better used to improve the company’s overall growth. The reasons for outsourcing soon become clear.

There may be some drawbacks. Because these issues are not handled in house, there is an increased distance between a company and their clients. This can lead to the degradation or initial lack of business relationships that is the hallmark of many a successful business. There is always a risk when
using outside contractors because delays can happen. If they do, the measure of control that can be extended over the issue is less than what it would be were you dealing with your own employees in house. If there were a problem with an outsourcing service then that in itself could be a problem. Because they can handle so much work, if they are deemed unable to handle the workload suddenly or cannot continue as your outsource service for any reason then you could be left in the lurch. A large amount of work would fall back on your shoulders until you could find another new outsourcing service.

**HOW TO CHOOSE WHAT TO OUTSOURCE**

Choosing what to outsource can take some thought. You will want to consider if any sensitive information will be necessary to share as you share the workload. No doubt some sensitive information will be so you need an outsourcing service you can trust and a means to prevent the spread of any private information.

What to outsource can be a matter of what can be done just as well somewhere else. Usually, answering phones, emails, and payroll are fairly standardized tasks that can be performed at the same level of efficiency and at the same level of quality somewhere else. You will want to consider outsourcing anything that does not necessitate the personal attention of your in house employees. Take a look at how each of these might work.

- **Answering phones**
  This is one of the basic tasks that can be outsourced rather easily. Like any other task, it will require training for the employees of the outsourcing service, but it is an easy way to take the burden of customer service duties off of the in house employees of your company. By diverting these calls, which are often rather repetitive in nature, to the outsourcing service, you free up in house employees to tasks that make better use of their talents.

- **Answering emails**
  This can be even easier to outsource. This medium allows the outsourcing employees time to research and appropriately and thoroughly answer customer service questions. These, too, are often highly repetitive in nature. Having an in house employee who is capable of handling more diverse and difficult matters tend to these email questions is often a waste of resources. Outsourcing makes perfect sense in these cases.

- **Payroll**
  Payroll services are quite standardized and can be performed just as well by an outsourcing service as it could be by anyone in house. Instead of employing an entire department to handle your payroll
needs, you can send the work away and have it handled by an offshore service. This can be cheaper much of the time, and that possibility is a good reason to look into this option.

An outsourcing service may feel the need to send someone from their service to evaluate your outsourcing needs. This can include the amount of work, the deadlines involved, and the quality controls. If you are paying a service to handle your calls, you want to make sure that this service is kind, courteous, helpful, and reachable. If you try to call your own service at times when you should be able to and have difficulties then you know it is time to have a talk with your outsourcing service or to switch services altogether. They have become a part of the public face of your company and you need to make sure that you are being well represented. Outsourcing services may require a level of monitoring to ensure proper handling of duties, but it can be worth it for the weight that they take off your shoulders.

ACCESS TO OUTSOURCING HELP

Once you have an idea of the possibility of outsourcing for your needs, you will need to examine how feasible the idea is. You will want to look at this from both the financial standpoint and the effectiveness standpoint. Outsourcing can be a big help to businesses but only if it is done right. If not, you may be shifting work around without creating circumstances that are any better than the ones you started with. You need a clear plan of how outsourcing is going to improve your business structure. Do not just think of pushing the work off on someone else. Think of it as creating a whole new way of running your business.

The price should definitely not be the bottom line when you are looking for an outsourcing service. Prices vary according to a variety of factors. They depend on the size of the company, the amount of Western staff, the nature of the work being outsourced, and if the service has an office in North America. You do not want to pay through the nose and defeat the entire purpose of outsourcing, but you do not want to just go for the cheapest services either. If they are unable to perform services adequately then that could impair relations between your clients and your company. It may also raise problems when it comes to meeting deadlines and completing other work to your specifications. All outsourcing companies are not the same so doing all the research and asking the right questions is crucial.

You get what you pay for. Less pay can mean staff that are not as well trained, a higher turnover rate for staff, or a company that will not be able to stay in business. If this happens, then you too will have to start all over.
Another thing you have to realize about access to outsourcing is that in many cases, the transition is not instant. You do not hire a service and then they start handling all your calls and emails the next day. Their employees have to be trained in proper protocol as you specify it. They have to be able to answer the questions that your customers will ask and perform any tasks that you require of them. This sort of training takes time so the gap between hiring an outsourcing service and shifting the workload entirely to that service may be a little larger than you think.

There will be an adjustment period. Mistakes are bound to happen in the beginning so expect them. Managing them, correcting them, and minimizing them can be done through clarity of instruction and clear feedback. You do not want to sabotage the relationship that you have with your new service because of some initial foibles. They are going to happen anyway.

You will want to know who is in charge of quality assurance for the services that they are providing for you. You want to make sure that the standards match your own and are being monitored and maintained. The more you know about how your affairs are being handled, the more you can offer your input to see to it that all involved have the same ideas of excellence.

One option is monitoring calls from your home office. This is one quality assurance measure that can be performed without travelling to the actual outsourcing centre. It also informs the service that you are aware of their actions and will be checking in to make sure that calls are being handled properly at all times.

Some calls cannot be resolved offsite. They can be redirected back to your actual office if necessary. This is a good way to ensure that all calls are handled to the customer’s satisfaction. You want your offshore service to be able to shoulder as much of the responsibility as possible because that is what they are there for, but leaving the option of transferring calls back to the main office will allow for higher customer satisfaction.

A crucial aspect of this process is regular communication between your company and the outsourcing service. Checking in daily or requiring daily reports will ensure that you are kept apprised of any new developments or the lack thereof. Without these constant reports, you fall out of touch with what is now a possibly substantial part of your business. Detailed reports are essential. You want to know exactly what is going on at all times. You will want to know the volume of calls and emails and how they are being handled. You will want to implement quality assurance procedures.

Speaking of procedures, what if something goes wrong? Does your outsourcing service have a plan ready to go if something happens? Make sure that they do, and make sure that you know exactly what it is. An improperly handled problem can give your business a poor reputation very
quickly. Make sure that this plan is spelled out, that it is in place, and that your outsourcing service has the ability to carry it out if the need arises.

Procedures change. The business world is not static, and neither are your needs. Will the company that you choose be able to adapt to the changing needs of your business? From growth to changes in format, you will want the service you choose to be able to keep up with the demands of the field you are in. Again, realize that there will be a transition period whenever you make major changes. It is an adjustment for everyone. You want to clearly correct and mistakes, but you want to do so as amicably as possible. Maintaining a good working relationship will make any transitions go more smoothly.

From their end, you will want to be informed in advance of any changes that could impact the services that you receive. This could be disastrous if you have a high volume of calls and emails being handled by a service that, for some reason, is suddenly unable to complete its duties. It is an unfortunate circumstance and you want to know that, if that happens, that you will be informed as soon as possible.

Payment to outsourcing services varies from situation to situation but here are some generalities. Most services work on advance payments. You pay anywhere from fifteen to thirty days in advance for their services. This is not set in stone. Some services require this advance payment schedule, and some do not. It is something that you should keep in mind as you plan to handle the financing for your outsourcing efforts. You may have to pay a great deal in advance.

Outsourcing is a means of transforming your business through intelligent delegation. There are many things to consider as there would be with any other major change. The important thing is to look at the potential benefits and drawbacks from every angle before you commit to a decision.
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MAINTAINING A LOW STRESS LIFESTYLE FOR ONGOING ONLINE SUCCESS

Stress is a part of life. No matter how the scenery changes, work changes, or life changes, stress will always be a part of life. It is good to remember that this is not a bad thing. Stress can spur you on to greater achievements. It can encourage you to grow beyond your current limitations. The difficulty comes in when there is just too much stress, and you do not know how to deal with it.

Dealing with stress goes beyond handling the specific stressors. It is all about lifestyle choices. Getting plenty of sleep, eating a nutritious diet, and getting enough physical exercise are all part and parcel to any low stress lifestyle. The stresses specific to computer-based workers are just part of the equation. Still, they have to be managed. Fortunately, you have learned to improve the ways in which you deal with these stressors. One by one, you have learned how to handle or avoid these potential problems.

First, you learned what stress is and what it is not. You learned the impact that it can have on the many parts of your body. You learned that poor choices that do not work with the natural functioning of your body can accumulate over time and lead to greater problems in the future.

You explored the types of stress that directly relate to the computer-based worker. You learned the hazards of poor posture, eye strain, eye fatigue, repetitive motions, and mishandling the endless amount of information that comes to you through your computer.

Then, you were exposed to the ways in which you can create a work environment that is conducive to both work and health. You learned about the mechanics of proper sitting, proper monitor placement, and the joys of the appropriate working environment. You became more aware of how this can make all the difference.

You moved on to the topics of planning and preparation. You studied the pertinent aspects of time management and how proper use of your time can help to alleviate stress. You figured out how to navigate the mine field that is the barrage of emails that modern workers face on a daily basis. You got a quick look at how computer programs and applications can be made to work for your benefit.
You reveled in the wonders of outsourcing. You learned what it is, why you might consider doing it, and what to watch out for. You began to think about what tasks you would outsource and how you would effectively access these services. You learned how, in time, you might be able to incorporate outsourcing to take your business to new heights.

Stress for the computer-based worker is a specified field. Computers bring with them a subset of stressors that are all their own. By recognizing the stressors that computers bring with them, you can understand how problems can and do develop. Most importantly, you can understand how these stresses might be avoided, alleviated, and dealt with and that dealing with computer-based stress is nothing to get stressed about.