In the Loop

Managing Stress and Anxiety During Troubling Times

Tuning into the news may be highly stressful or upsetting for many Americans. You are not alone if you've been experiencing stress or anxiety due to current events. Stress is part of everyday life, but it can be particularly heightened due to the news, current events or unfortunate incidents that could directly or indirectly impact your well-being. So, what exactly are stress and anxiety?

Stress Versus Anxiety

Stress is any demand placed on your brain or physical body. An external trigger typically causes stress. Any event or scenario that makes you feel frustrated or nervous can trigger it. On the other hand, anxiety is defined as persistent, excessive worries that don't go away even in the absence of a stressor.

Anxiety and stress lead to nearly identical symptoms. According to the American Psychological Association, people experience mental and physical symptoms, such as irritability, anger, fatigue, muscle pain, digestive troubles and difficulty sleeping.

How to Cope

Since anxiety and stress are emotional responses, they respond well to similar coping mechanisms.

Try these general tips to manage anxiety and stress:

- **Avoid doomscrolling.** Binging on negative news or excessively scrolling on social media can have negative consequences. Try to focus on facts rather than speculation.

- **Be physically active.** Try to give your mind a rest, shifting the focus to your body instead. Physical activity creates mood-boosting chemical changes in the brain.

- **Be mindful.** When thoughts feel spiraling, meditation and other mindfulness activities can help you feel present in the moment.

- **Try breathing exercises.** Breathing is closely linked to the nervous system. Deep, controlled breathing with extended exhalation can cause a fall in heart rate and blood pressure.

- **Take time to unwind.** It's essential to still engage in activities you enjoy. Creative outlets, such as hobbies, crafts, writing or home improvement, can be good distractions.

- **Maintain sleep habits.** Although it may be hard to sleep when anxious, try to maintain your usual sleeping pattern. Being well-rested is vital for emotional balance.

- **Eat healthy, balanced meals.** Healthy eating positively impacts your overall physical and mental health, improving your ability to navigate stress during troubling times.

- **Connect with others.** Good relationships foster a sense of belonging and provide an outlet to share experiences. Sharing worries with others can improve your situation and feelings.

- **Be transparent.** Talk to your manager if your stress or anxiety stems from work-related situations. There may be ways they can help to lessen the burden.

- **Reach out for help.** Feeling anxious or stressed is natural, but don't suffer alone. Talk to your doctor or check with your employer for mental health or wellness resources.

If you're concerned about your mental health, talk to your doctor, a licensed mental health professional or contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Helpline by calling 800-662-HELP (4357).

6 Productivity Tips for Hybrid Employees

The hybrid work model continues to evolve — and is a significant departure from the traditional work arrangement. McKinsey recently reported that 92 million (58%) Americans have the opportunity to work from home part-time. As such, hybrid work is likely not going anywhere. Although hybrid work is increasingly popular among employers, they are some concerns and negative perceptions about employee productivity.

According to a Microsoft report, 54% of leaders say the shift to hybrid work has negatively impacted productivity.

Switching between workplaces may be a change, but it doesn't need to cause your productivity to decline. Here are some tips that may help boost your productivity as a hybrid employee:

- **Maximize your schedule.** Plan tasks based on where you'll be working. You may find tasks that require focus are best at home, while collaborative tasks and meetings are better suited for the office. Different locations may spur creativity and focus in different ways.

- **Maintain a consistent schedule.** Your schedule at home should be consistent with your office schedule. Blocking your calendar each week can help you stay productive and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

- **Mirror your office setup at home.** Maintain the same organization at home that you use in the office. Keep your items in the same place on your desk. Consider which

items are worth having at each location and which are worth shuttling between workplaces to save time.

- **Leverage technology.** Using technology, such as digital communication, project management tools and cloud-based platforms, can make it easier to jump into any project and stay productive wherever you work.

- **Continue communicating with your manager and co-workers.** Hybrid work may cause you to miss out on crucial information or lose focus of your manager's expectations. Using company communication channels and regularly checking in with your manager and peers can help you stay connected and updated on the most recent information and expectations.

- **Connect regularly with your co-workers.** Feelings of social isolation can lead to a decline in your productivity. Find creative ways to have fun with co-workers even when working remotely, like playing games or virtual happy hours. This can reenergize you and counter feelings of burnout.

While no two work environments are the same, these tips are worth considering as you build a long-term hybrid work routine that is effective and efficient. Communicate with your manager about what is working and what could be improved. Make adjustments when necessary, and when issues arise, keep trying.