What’s keeping employees up at night?

Understanding what causes stress is the key to helping your workforce.
Getting to the root of stress

When you think of relieving stress, what comes to mind? Taking a walk? Doing yoga? Deep breathing? While these things might help in the moment, they are only treating a symptom, not the root cause of the problem.

Stress not only causes employees to lose sleep, but its toxic effects can hurt your company’s bottom line as well.

To help address employee stress, we wanted to understand its underlying causes. We surveyed more than 9,000 employees to identify their biggest sources of stress to help them sleep better at night.

Top 3 sources of stress

1. Job
2. Overall financial situation
3. Saving for the future
It matters to them ... and you

Stress has toxic effects on the brain, body, and behavior—and that has consequences for employers as well as employees.

**The brain**
- More likely to have difficulty thinking clearly\(^1\)
- More likely to suffer depression\(^2\)

**The body**
- More likely to get sick\(^3\)
- More likely to gain weight\(^4\)

**Behaviors**
- Less likely to get enough exercise
- Less likely to take vacation

**Potential impacts on employers**
- People who have a lot of stress at work are **10 times as likely to be dissatisfied** with their job than those who have just a little stress.
- They are **half as likely to recommend their employer** as a great place to work, compared with those who have a little stress.
The landscape of stress

Work and money are by far the most stressful parts of employees’ lives across all age groups. This heat map based on our research illustrates where—and when—stress peaks in the overall population.
Work stress

Although “my job” is the biggest source of stress in our research, employees do not report high stress from any of the job-related things you might expect, such as bosses or commutes. This suggests it’s the inherent demands of the job that are causing employees stress.

1 in 4 employees feel they have too much work to do. They are 10 times more likely to report “a lot” of job stress than those who don’t feel overworked.

Causes of stress

% who have at least a fair amount of stress about:

- Job: 47%
- Work environment: 25%
- Boss: 21%
- Coworkers: 17%
- Commute: 12%

High stress, low satisfaction

People who are highly stressed are more likely to be dissatisfied with work. But stress levels don’t have to come down much to improve satisfaction dramatically.

% who are dissatisfied with work:

- People who feel a lot of stress: 46%
- A fair deal of stress: 15%
- A little stress: 4%

% who would not recommend their employer as a great place to work

- People who feel a lot of stress: 43%
- A fair deal of stress: 18%
- A little stress: 8%
Financial stress

Although “my overall financial situation” is the No. 2 stressor, many aspects of managing money cause stress. To make matters worse, people who are under stress tend to make worse financial decisions, creating a vicious cycle.

Top stressors

Five of the top 10 stressors are related to money:

- My job
- My overall financial situation
- Saving for the future
- Paying off my debt
- My weight
- My family’s health
- Maintaining a budget
- My diet
- Investing my money
- My children

Out of all types of debt, the top causes of financial stress are credit card debt and past-due medical bills.

What may help? An emergency fund, no matter how small

80% of people without emergency savings are highly stressed about their finances

70% of people with any amount of emergency savings feel little to no financial stress, even if they also had a large unexpected expense in the past year.
It gets better

Work and money remain the top causes of stress as people age, but older employees are less likely to feel highly stressed. Stress levels decline about many things, especially the nuts and bolts of finances, such as maintaining a budget, paying off debt, and investing.

Percent of employees who have at least “a fair amount of stress” in some area of their lives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>20-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>52%</td>
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Percent of employees who have at least “a fair amount of stress” about their finances specifically

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<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
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<th>50-59</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>31%</td>
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One exception for older employees

One thing that becomes noticeably more stressful among older employees is paying for health care. As they get older, they may be experiencing more health issues, and they are looking down the road at making the switch to Medicare.
There are some things women stress about that men just don’t:

- **Weight and diet.** Men aren’t necessarily more likely to maintain healthy diet and weight—they just aren’t as likely to stress about it.

- **Aging parents.** For women, stress about parents picks up in their 50s, when they are most sandwiched between aging parents and growing kids.

### Throughout life, women are more stressed

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>WOMEN</th>
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<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
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<td>60-69</td>
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Women are generally more stressed than men, but they tend to be stressed about the same things—primarily money and work. Women are 80% more likely to be highly stressed overall, and 60% more likely to report “a lot” of stress about their overall financial situation.
Helping employees sleep better at night

Managing the causes of stress

- **Debt and budgeting:** Providing financial wellness support for employees can help them make a plan to pay down debt and get a handle on living within a budget.

- **Flexible work arrangements:** Flexibility can help employees find balance for work and life, and so can your Employee Assistance Program. Make sure they know what support you offer.

Managing the stress itself

- **Exercise:** Make sure your employees are aware of programs that support and encourage exercise, and try to create a workplace culture that encourages a healthy lifestyle.

- **Friends:** People who have friends at work are less likely to have a lot of job stress. You can help foster friendly relationships by supporting affinity or networking groups for employees.
Most stressed refers to those who are in the top 20% of stress from all causes. Least stressed refers to the bottom 20% of stress from all causes.


ABOUT FIDELITY’S TOTAL WELL-BEING RESEARCH

Unless otherwise noted, data represents the Fidelity Investments Total Well-Being Research online survey of 9,315 active Fidelity 401(k) and 403(b) participants from across the United States. The survey was conducted by Greenwald and Associates, an independent third-party research firm, on behalf of Fidelity in September 2017.

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