

How to Handle the Stress of a Job Search



It is important to recognize that stress is a normal and inevitable part of the job hunting process. The job seeker is going through a time of change, moving from something familiar (current employment, an educational environment, unemployment, caring for children, etc.) to something unknown. Although job hunting leads to new opportunities and rewards, the job hunting process can create stress.

Stresses related to the job search

- Financial uncertainty
- Increased interaction with new people
- Uncertain direction
- Additional demands on time
- Feelings of isolation
- A sense of lack of control
- Anxiety about the future
- Change in routine

The stress of job hunting cannot be avoided, but it can be managed through a variety of techniques. Review the following techniques and then actively use them during your job search to diminish the negative effects of stress.

Stress management techniques

- Exercise regularly
- Involve family and friends
- Avoid isolation
- Use support networks
- Eat a balanced diet
- Keep a regular schedule
- Get adequate rest
- Set realistic goals
- Use relaxation techniques
- Limit intake of alcohol

Exercise regularly

Regular exercise is one of the most important steps in managing stress. Regular exercise will increase your energy, enhance your sense of well being, help you relax, contribute to better sleep patterns, foster disease resistance and encourage weight management. A regular exercise routine that you choose will give you a sense of control during a time of uncertainty. Exercise will contribute to a healthy and vigorous appearance during job hunting when you want to look your best.



Experts recommend starting with 30 minutes of physical activity three times a

week. Work up to the equivalent of 30 minutes a day of moderately intense activity for stress management and significant health benefits. It is a good idea to check with your doctor before beginning any new exercise program. Look into visiting a gym and having an expert develop an exercise plan for you. Pick forms of exercise you enjoy and make exercise a part of your daily routine.

Involve family and friends

Involve your family and friends in your job search. Your family may not know what you are going through, so do not wait for them to offer assistance. Ask for help. Most people are more than willing to help if you let them know their help is needed.

Remember to:

- Talk to your family - Share your concerns, plans and goals.
- Listen to your family - This is also an uncertain time for them. Listen to their feelings and suggestions.

Ask for help - Family members or friends can offer emotional support and provide feedback. They can assist with practical tasks so that you will have the time you need for job hunting. They can also serve as contacts for networking and informational interviewing. Review the **JobSearch Guide** *How to Involve Your Family in Your Job Search*.

Use support networks

In addition to a support system of friends and family, many job hunters find it useful to participate in job hunter's support groups. People in similar life circumstances can often be very understanding of your experiences. A support group offers opportunities for social interaction, a chance to express a range of emotions (excitement, fear, disappointment, etc.) and a place to relax with others who are in similar situations.

Support groups can be found through local places of worship, libraries, One-Stop Career Centers and United Way directories.

Eat a balanced diet

Your health and sense of well-being is affected by your eating habits. Additional time demands and change in routine often lead to snacking on non-nutritious foods, eating at irregular times or skipping meals. Plan time for regular, balanced meals in order to look and feel good during your job search.



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Take Care of Yourself While Job Hunting

Prioritize and set goals

Effective job hunting takes time. Job hunting can be a full-time job in itself. It is important to organize your time to meet the demands of your job hunt.

Remember that everything cannot be accomplished at once. Setting priorities will help you allocate your time realistically so that time demands do not become overwhelming.

In order to prioritize, make a list of steps in your job hunt which need to be accomplished (include time frames) and other tasks which need your time. Decide which tasks are most important and allocate your time accordingly. Include time for your stress management techniques.



Your job hunt is placing new and increased demands on your time, so some things you are used to doing may not get done for a while. Let these things go for now or enlist help for these tasks so that you will have the time you need for job hunting and taking care of yourself.

Take control and keep a regular schedule

Goals will be more effectively accomplished if you keep to a regular schedule of prioritized tasks. A routine which includes job-hunting steps, stress management techniques and family time will give you a sense of balance and accomplishment. Establishing and maintaining a routine will give you a sense of control over your time.

Use relaxation techniques

Relaxation techniques can help manage stress. Begin with simple exercises such as sitting in a chair, breathing deeply and visualizing the tension leaving your body. Other forms of relaxation, such as yoga, Tai Chi, listening to relaxation tapes or doing meditative exercises, can help you release the tension that accumulates in your body and mind during the job-hunting process.



Reduce the effects of stress

Taking time to manage stress is important. If stress is not managed, it can lead to a variety of symptoms, including:

- Irritability
- Insomnia
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Weight fluctuations
- Headaches
- Muscular/skeletal pain
- Chronic fatigue
- Relationship difficulties
- High blood pressure
- Intestinal disorders
- Skin disorders



Using stress management techniques in your job search process

- Step 1: Recognize that stress is an inevitable part of the job hunting process.
- Step 2: Make it a priority to take care of yourself during your job search in order to be effective and stay healthy.
- Step 3: Make a list of job hunting tasks which need to be accomplished as well as other demands on your time. Include time for regular exercise, balanced meals, relaxation and family.
- Step 4: Write down tasks that you need help with or tasks that can temporarily be left undone.
- Step 5: Prioritize your list; be realistic about your time and your goals.
- Step 6: Keep a regular schedule in order to accomplish your goals.
- Step 7: Exercise, get adequate rest, communicate with your friends and family, eat well and use relaxation techniques.
- Step 8: Continue to talk to others and ask for help when needed.
- Step 9: Set realistic goals and make choices that will take you in the right direction.

Internet resources



www.execsearches.com/articles/interview_stress_management.htm -- Dealing with job search anxiety.

http://helpguide.org/life/unemployment_job_loss_stress_coping_tips.htm -- Dealing with a job loss.

www.helpguide.org/life/unemployment_job_loss_stress_coping_tips.htm -- Tips for reducing stress.