

# Over Work

in America



When the Way We Work Becomes Too Much

## How Overworked Are You?

**D**id you know that employees who are more overworked are significantly more likely to experience high levels of stress, symptoms of clinical depression, and poorer overall mental health than other employees? They also are more likely to make mistakes on the job, be angry toward their employers for having to work so hard, resent coworkers who work less than they do, and take less good care of themselves. In addition, being overworked can even have negative consequences for your family or personal life.

How overworked are you? Take our self-assessment quiz to find out. Your results will be compared to a nationally representative sample of U.S. employees.

For more information about this study, or to download a free Executive Summary, please go to [www.familiesandwork.org](http://www.familiesandwork.org).

## HOW OVERWORKED ARE YOU?

Answer each of the following 7 questions and score your answers from 1 to 5 on the far right. These questions refer to experiences on your main or only job. Next, add up your total score, which can range from 7 to 35 in the bottom right hand box. Finally, compare yourself with the U.S. workforce as a whole.

Questions	Answers					Enter Your Score for Each Question
	Score=1	Score=2	Score=3	Score=4	Score=5	
1. How often have you felt overwhelmed by how much you had to do at work in the last month?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	
2. How often have you felt that you didn't have time to step back and process or reflect on the work you are doing?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	
3. How often have you felt overworked in the last month?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	
4. During a typical workweek, how often do you have to work on too many tasks at the same time?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	
5. During a typical workweek, how often are you interrupted during the workday, making it difficult to get your work done?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	
6. How often do coworkers, supervisors, managers, customers, or clients contact you or you contact them about work-related matters outside normal work hours?	Never	Less than Once a Week	Once a Week	Several Times a Week	Once a Day or More	
7. While you are on vacation, how often do you do any work related to your job, such as calling into work, being called by others from work, checking email, working on projects, etc.?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	

ADD THE SCORES FOR EACH QUESTION AND ENTER THE TOTAL HERE →

## INTERPRETING OVERWORK SCORES

**Not Overworked:** A total score of 10 or less places you in the bottom 10% of the U.S. workforce with respect to being overworked. You seem to have a good handle on the demands of your work.

**Generally Not Overworked:** A total score of 14 or less places you in the bottom third of the U.S. workforce with respect to being overworked. You are managing your work in a way that minimizes feelings of being overworked.

**Moderately Overworked:** A total score of 15 through 20 places you in the middle third of the U.S. workforce with respect to being overworked. Although you are experiencing only average levels of being overworked, there is still room for improvement.

**Highly Overworked:** A total score of 21 or more places you in the top third of the U.S. workforce with respect to being overworked. You are more overworked than most U.S. employees, and this may have negative consequences for you and for your employer.

**Dangerously Overworked:** A total score of 26 or more places you in the top 10% of the U.S. workforce with respect to being overworked. These high levels of overwork may be having serious negative consequences for your health and job performance.

## Dealing with Overwork

If your scores indicate that you are moderately to dangerously overworked, it may be time to make some changes in your work and/or personal life.

First, think about the source of your feelings of overwork. Being overworked can be caused by:

- How you work
- How much you let work intrude into your vacations and non-work time
- Your own priorities

Take a few minutes to think about the last few times you felt overworked. What was happening? Where were you? What was the trigger? Try to identify which of these three causes was behind your feelings.

The following are some suggestions for making your job less demanding:

- **Set do-able goals:** Instead of logging endless to-do lists that you can never get done, go to work every day with no more than a few top priorities. If you do more than that—and you most likely will—you'll feel good about work, rather than overwhelmed. The same technique works for your home life too.
- **Take regular breaks:** Take breaks during the day, even short ones that refresh you, and use your allotted vacation time. Athletes know that it is necessary to take some time for rest and recovery. It is equally important for employees.
- **Take stock regularly:** Even when you start out determined not to let work overwhelm you, slowly, surely, the stress can start to escalate. Pick a time, like the first day of the month, to check in with yourself to see how things are going and to make the changes that will help you be the worker, and the *whole person*, you want to be.

## How You Work

*Overwork in America* finds that frequent interruptions, too much multi-tasking, and doing a lot of work you consider a waste of time are strongly linked to being overworked. If any of these are problems for you, consider the following suggestions for making changes:

- If you are unable to focus on your work because of constant interruptions, see if you can set aside some time each day when everyone knows not to interrupt you. Even a short time to focus on what's really important for you to do, such as an hour a day without interruptions, can really help.
- If you are jumping from task to task and feeling as if you are multi-tasking too much, try to prioritize what is most important and focus on that. Perhaps you are being asked to or offering to take on too much. If so, again, setting priorities help. A discussion with your supervisor about your workload and others' expectations of your time may also help. And remember that problem-solving with your supervisor or coworkers isn't an admission of failure, but rather a way of proactively managing your workload.
- Being overworked is also related to having to do work that you consider a waste of time. This "low-value" work takes attention away from truly important tasks and can lead to frustration and even anger. Think about how you can redesign your workload to minimize low-value work. A number of companies, in fact, are having these discussions within workgroups to identify and agree to reduce work that employees agree is "low-value" as a way to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

## Your Own Priorities

Research indicates that those who typically put work first, or who are "work-centric," actually feel more overworked than those who put an equivalent emphasis on work and their personal or family lives. In addition, work-centric employees are more likely to have poorer mental health and less satisfaction with their lives than other employees. Having your "eggs in more than one basket" can actually be good for you and good for your work.

- If you are someone who always puts work first, ask yourself why: Is this a choice you are comfortable with? Do you identify yourself largely—or solely—in terms of your work?
- Then ask yourself: What else might you become involved with that would enrich your life?
- Deepen your appreciation for the people who are important to you and try to connect with them more often.

## How Much You Let Work Intrude Into Your Vacations and Non-Work Time

Research from *Overwork in America: When The Way We Work Becomes Too Much* shows that employees who work frequently during vacation time are more likely to return to their jobs feeling overwhelmed than those who use the time just to relax (even when the researchers held job responsibilities and job demands constant). In addition, longer vacations are associated with returning to work feeling more relaxed and energized than shorter breaks. The study also found that the more often employees are contacted or contact others during non-work times, the more overworked they feel.

- Ask yourself if you are taking the time you need to "recharge your batteries" now and then. Interestingly, almost three times as many employees work on vacation because *they* want to than

those who work because their employer requires them to. If you are having trouble letting go, remind yourself that your workplace will survive without you for a few days—and that your work can actually benefit from your taking time off now and then.

- If working during non-work hours or days is a source of stress for you, create some boundaries. There are times when working on time off may be very necessary but so too is taking some time away from work. You will find time off can give you a better perspective and increase your creativity in your work. So plan some time off that is just for you or your family and turn off your computer and your blackberry or palm pilot.
- You can also let people know when you are willing to be contacted and when you aren't, such as dinnertime.
- Just say no—with respect. If you need to cut down on the time you spend working during your time off, rather than simply refusing, work with your supervisor to problem-solve together to address needs and prioritize. Offer alternatives, "I can't do this today, but it will be my first priority on Monday morning."



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