

DEPRESSION AT WORK · ARTICLE 3

WHY AM I MAKING MORE MISTAKES AT WORK?

A COMPASSIONATE EXPLORATION

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Introduction

"I never used to make mistakes like this."

Perhaps you've sent an email to the wrong person, forgotten an important deadline, entered incorrect information or missed something you would normally spot immediately.

The mistake itself may have been small, but your reaction feels enormous. You replay it repeatedly, question your competence and wonder whether everyone has noticed.

If you're living with depression, making more mistakes at work is a common and understandable experience. It doesn't mean you've become careless or incapable. It often reflects the impact depression can have on attention, memory and mental processing.

Understanding why this happens can help reduce self-blame and allow you to respond with greater compassion and practical support.

Why Depression Increases Mistakes

Depression places significant demands on the brain.

Your mind may already be managing persistent low mood, negative thinking, emotional exhaustion and reduced energy. As a result, there are fewer cognitive resources available for tasks that require sustained attention and accuracy.

Work often depends on executive functions - skills such as planning, organising, prioritising, remembering information and monitoring your own performance. Depression can temporarily affect all of these.

When your brain is working harder simply to get through the day, small errors become more likely.

This isn't a lack of effort. It's a reflection of reduced mental capacity while coping with a health condition.

The Pressure to Be Perfect

Many people who experience depression are conscientious and take pride in doing their job well.

When mistakes begin to happen, it's common to become highly self-critical.

You may think:

"I'm letting everyone down."

"I'm not good enough anymore."

"I'm going to lose my job."

"Everyone else copes better than I do."

These thoughts can increase anxiety, making concentration even more difficult and creating a cycle where fear of making mistakes actually increases the likelihood of them happening.

The Hidden Cost

Mistakes don't just affect your work - they often affect your confidence.

You may begin:

Checking your work repeatedly.

Avoiding taking on new responsibilities.

Delaying tasks because you're worried about getting them wrong.

Staying late to compensate.

Working through breaks.

Avoiding asking questions for fear of appearing incapable.

Ironically, these behaviours often increase fatigue, making mistakes more likely rather than less.

What Can Help?

Instead of trying to eliminate every mistake, focus on creating a working environment that supports your brain while it's under pressure.

Helpful strategies include:

Using written checklists for routine tasks.

Breaking complex work into smaller stages.

Building in time to review important work before submitting it.

Reducing distractions where possible.

Taking regular breaks to reduce cognitive fatigue.

Using reminders, calendars and task management tools.

Speaking with your manager if temporary adjustments could help.

Seeking professional support if symptoms continue to affect your work.

Supporting yourself is often more effective than demanding perfection.

Remember Your Track Record

When depression affects your confidence, it's easy to judge yourself based on your worst days.

Instead, try to look at the bigger picture.

Think about your years of experience, the skills you've developed and the achievements you've accomplished before depression became part of your daily life.

Your abilities haven't disappeared. They're simply harder to access while your brain is under strain.

Recovery often involves rebuilding confidence alongside improving your mental health.

Reflection

Ask yourself:

"Would I judge a colleague by one difficult week?"

Most people would answer no.

Yet many of us hold ourselves to standards we would never expect of someone else.

Offering yourself the same understanding isn't lowering the bar - it's recognising that you're human.

Key Takeaway

Making more mistakes at work doesn't mean you've become less capable or less committed. Depression can temporarily affect concentration, memory and decision-making, making errors more likely even in experienced and highly skilled professionals.

Recovery begins by recognising that mistakes are often a symptom of cognitive overload, not personal failure. With the right support, practical adjustments and time, confidence and

performance can improve.

A gentle reminder

This resource offers general information and reflection. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individual medical or therapeutic care. If you are worried about your safety or someone else's, seek urgent professional support.

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