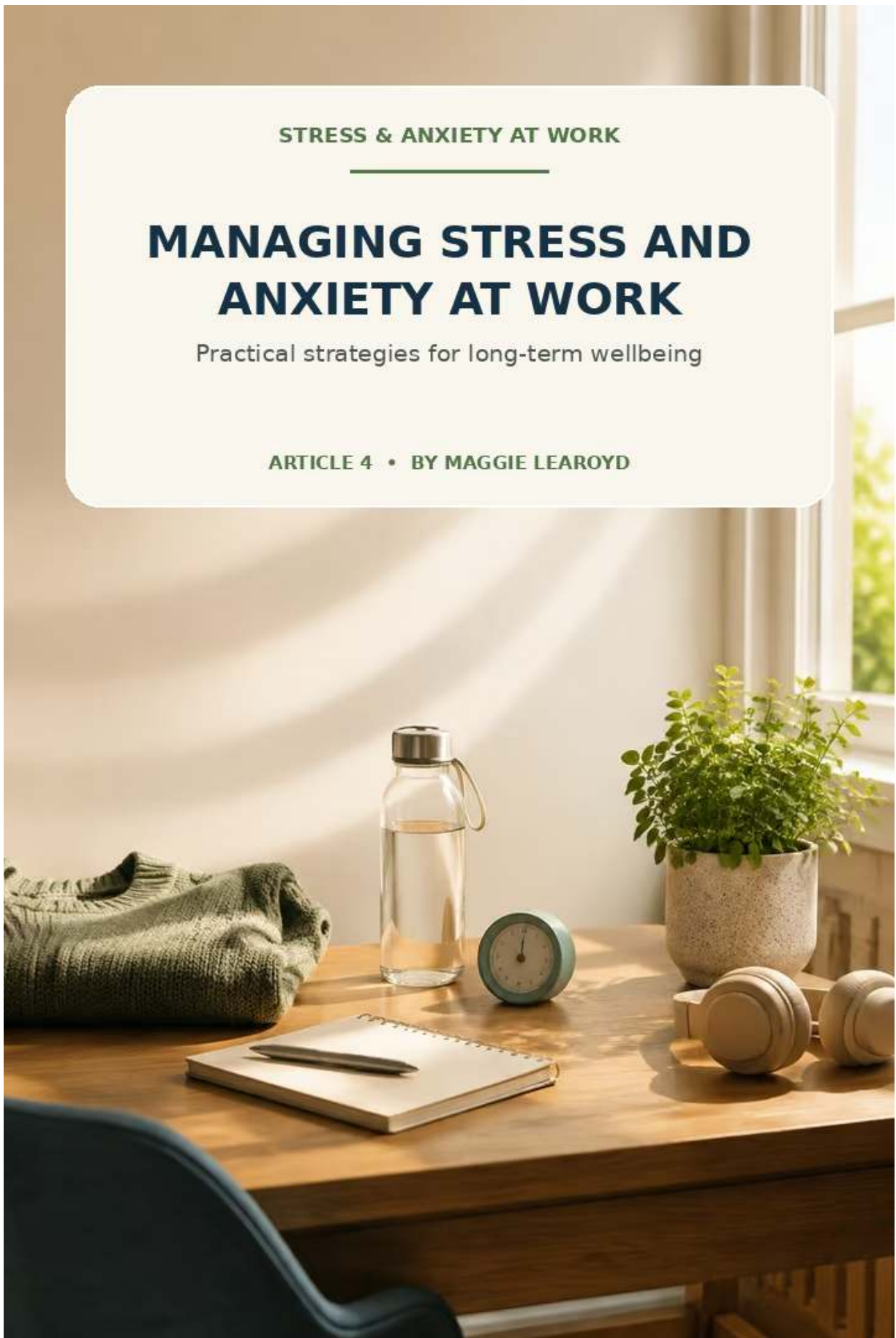


STRESS & ANXIETY AT WORK

MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY AT WORK

Practical strategies for long-term wellbeing

ARTICLE 4 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Managing Stress and Anxiety at Work

Practical strategies for long-term wellbeing

Experiencing stress or anxiety at work does not necessarily mean something is wrong. Most people will encounter periods of increased pressure throughout their working lives. Deadlines, organisational change, difficult conversations and heavy workloads are all common features of modern workplaces. The difference lies in how these pressures are managed and whether individuals have the resources, support and strategies needed to recover.

Stress becomes problematic when it is constant, overwhelming or left unaddressed. Over time, prolonged stress can affect concentration, decision-making, confidence, relationships and physical health. Fortunately, there are many practical strategies that can reduce the impact of workplace stress while promoting resilience and wellbeing.

Managing stress is not about eliminating every challenge or maintaining constant positivity. Instead, it involves recognising what is within our control, responding proactively to pressure and creating habits that support both mental and physical health. At the same time, employers have an important role in creating working environments that reduce unnecessary stress rather than placing the responsibility solely on individuals.

This article explores practical, evidence-informed strategies that employees and organisations can use to manage stress and anxiety more effectively.

Recognise Your Personal Stress Signals

The first step in managing stress is recognising when it is beginning to build.

Everyone experiences stress differently.

You may notice:

- Feeling irritable.

Difficulty concentrating.

Poor sleep.

Muscle tension.

Increased worrying.

Feeling overwhelmed.

Becoming forgetful.

Withdrawing from colleagues.

Working longer hours without being productive.

Recognising these early signs allows you to respond before stress becomes overwhelming.

Focus on What You Can Control

Stress often increases when we focus on factors outside our control.

Instead, ask yourself:

- What can I influence today?

What needs my attention right now?

What can wait?

Who can help?

Breaking challenges into manageable steps often reduces feelings of being overwhelmed.

Prioritise Your Workload

Not every task is equally urgent.

Helpful approaches include:

- Identifying your top three priorities each day.

Breaking larger projects into smaller tasks.

Setting realistic deadlines.

Avoiding unnecessary multitasking.

Completing one task before moving to the next where possible.

Progress is often more sustainable than striving for perfection.

Take Regular Breaks

Many people believe working continuously improves productivity.

Research suggests the opposite.

Short, regular breaks can:

- Improve concentration.

Reduce mental fatigue.

Improve decision-making.

Reduce mistakes.

Increase creativity.

Even five minutes away from your desk can make a noticeable difference.

Set Healthy Boundaries

Healthy boundaries protect wellbeing.

Examples include:

- Taking your lunch break.

Finishing work at your agreed time whenever possible.

Turning off work notifications outside working hours.

Learning to say "no" respectfully when workloads become unrealistic.

Avoiding checking emails during annual leave.

Boundaries help create space for recovery.

Learn to Manage Perfectionism

Perfectionism often increases stress.

Ask yourself:

Does this task need to be perfect, or does it need to be completed well?

Am I spending time on details that add little value?

Would I expect this standard from someone else?

Striving for excellence is healthy.

Expecting perfection is often exhausting.

Develop Healthy Coping Strategies

Everyone needs ways to recover from stress.

Healthy coping strategies may include:

- Physical activity.

Walking.

Yoga.

Stretching.

Reading.

Listening to music.

Mindfulness.

Deep breathing.

Spending time outdoors.

Talking with supportive friends or family.

Unhealthy coping strategies, such as excessive alcohol, avoiding problems or working even longer hours, usually increase stress over time.

Improve Time Management

Good time management reduces unnecessary pressure.

Helpful techniques include:

- Using calendars.

Planning your week in advance.

Scheduling focused work periods.

Allowing buffer time between meetings.

Avoiding overcommitting.

Reviewing priorities regularly.

Being organised supports both productivity and wellbeing.

Look After Your Physical Health

Mental and physical wellbeing are closely connected.

Supporting physical health includes:

- Getting enough sleep.

Eating regular, balanced meals.

Staying hydrated.

Exercising regularly.

Reducing excessive caffeine.

Taking movement breaks throughout the day.

Small lifestyle changes can significantly improve resilience to stress.

Build Supportive Relationships

Talking to someone you trust can reduce feelings of isolation.

Support may come from:

- Colleagues.

Managers.

Friends.

Family.

Professional supervisors.

Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs).

Counsellors or therapists.

Seeking support is a sign of self-awareness, not weakness.

Practise Mindfulness and Relaxation

Mindfulness involves paying attention to the present moment without judgement.

Simple techniques include:

- Slow breathing exercises.

Grounding techniques.

Body scans.

Short mindfulness breaks.

Noticing your surroundings during a walk.

These approaches may reduce physiological symptoms of stress and improve emotional regulation.

Know When to Ask for Help

If stress or anxiety is affecting your:

- Sleep.

Physical health.

Relationships.

Work performance.

Daily functioning.

it may be time to seek additional support.

Speaking to your manager, GP or a qualified mental health professional early can prevent difficulties from becoming more severe.

How Employers Can Help

Managing workplace stress is a shared responsibility.

Employers can support wellbeing by:

- Reviewing workloads.

Providing clear communication.

Encouraging flexible working where appropriate.

Offering wellbeing initiatives.

Training managers in mental health awareness.

Promoting psychological safety.

Encouraging regular check-ins.

Supporting reasonable adjustments where needed.

Healthy workplaces create conditions where employees can thrive rather than simply cope.

Creating Long-Term Resilience

Resilience is not about ignoring stress.

It involves:

- Recognising challenges.

Adapting to change.

Seeking support.

Learning from experience.

Recovering after difficult periods.

Resilience grows through healthy habits, supportive relationships and realistic expectations.

Key Takeaways

Managing stress begins with recognising your own early warning signs.

Prioritising tasks and setting realistic expectations reduces unnecessary pressure.

Healthy boundaries protect wellbeing and support recovery.

Regular breaks, physical activity and good sleep all contribute to resilience.

Seeking support early is a strength, not a weakness.

Employers have an important role in reducing workplace stress through supportive leadership and healthy organisational practices.

Sustainable wellbeing comes from consistent habits rather than quick fixes.

Final Thoughts

Managing stress and anxiety at work is not about avoiding pressure altogether—it is about developing practical strategies that allow challenges to remain manageable rather than overwhelming. By recognising early warning signs, setting healthy boundaries, prioritising self-care and seeking support when needed, employees can protect both their wellbeing and their ability to perform effectively.

At the same time, organisations have a responsibility to create environments where stress is recognised, discussed openly and addressed proactively. Clear communication, realistic workloads, supportive leadership and a culture that values wellbeing all contribute to healthier, more engaged teams.

Ultimately, the most successful workplaces are not those where stress never exists, but those where people feel equipped, supported and empowered to manage it. When wellbeing becomes part of everyday working life rather than an afterthought, both employees and organisations are far more likely to flourish.