



County of Santa Clara Internal EAP

Conquering Stress & Anxiety When You Return to Work



The last year has generated a huge amount of fear and anxiety for most people. The COVID-19 epidemic changed our lives in ways we could never have imagined. As more people get vaccinated, the world will slowly return to “normal.” For many, that means returning to the workplace.

Working from home afforded people protection from the spread of COVID. But what do you do when you rejoin your coworkers? A little preparation can go a long way to reducing anxiety about returning to work.

1 Learn your Departments Game Plan. Understand safety measures at work. These measures may include spacing workers further apart, requiring masks, and limiting break room gatherings to fewer than 10 people. Know the rules as well as the consequences for breaking them.

If you are still worried about returning to work, drop by and visit your workplace to see how it feels. Seeing things like clear plastic dividers or better ventilation may help calm your fears.

Develop a strategy for self-care at work. Bring a devotional with you, or practice meditation at your desk. Find a spot outdoors to get some fresh air when you are on a break.

2 Examine Your Bad Habits.

Working from home has fostered a lot of new bad habits for many people. Alcohol consumption is up as day drinking has become the norm for some. Many are using cannabis or other substances to cope with anxiety. Pandemic weight gain is common. Being around easily accessible carbs in the pantry means weight gain. If any of these habits sound familiar, start making changes before you go back to work.

3 Avoid Information Overload.

Another habit that directly affects anxiety is information overload. If you are watching hours of television news, cut back, or avoid incessant gloom and doom news. Most of the information is repetitive, anyway. Also take a close look at your social media usage. Although social media has been a godsend for isolated people during the pandemic, it can also add to your stress if it seems like “everyone is happier than me.”

4 Do Your Part. Make sure you’ve done everything you can to keep yourself and your coworkers safe before you walk through the door of your workplace. That means getting vaccinated as soon as possible. Side effects with the vaccine are possible, so consider the need to take a day off after getting the injection. Take care of yourself.

5 Get Plenty of Rest. Sleeping six to eight hours every night is important for your immune system and your emotional well-being. Make rest a priority. Don’t be fooled, if you feel “fine” after four to five hours of sleep, it means your body has adapted to less, but does not mean it is not suffer from a lack of rest.

6 Don’t Put Off Getting Medical Care. Many people have put off going to the doctor during the pandemic because they were afraid they may be exposed to the disease. Make an appointment with your doctor if you are having any health issues so you get them addressed before returning to work. If you have COVID symptoms, stay home. Call your doctor to health authority to get tested.

Once you get back in the workplace, help your coworkers. Most likely you aren’t the only one feeling anxiety about being in public again. Listen to their fears, even if you don’t agree with them. Don’t be afraid to speak to your supervisor if you don’t feel safe. The reopening plan may need to be tweaked a little to quell fears.

7 Dwell on the Positives.

Rather than focus on negative “what ifs”, focus on the good stuff. Odds are you’ve missed some of your coworkers and your work environment. The pandemic seems to be coming to close. Going back to the workplace is just one step closer to getting your life back. That’s something to celebrate!