



'TIS THE SEASON FOR STRESS

The holidays' impact
on employees' health &
happiness (& what it
means for employers)

2014 SURVEY REPORT

Introduction

Staying healthy when the holidays hit isn't easy. Between the parties, seasonal sweets, and time spent scouring stores for top-notch gifts, décor and other necessities, maintaining healthy habits is often last on employees' lists.

The most wonderful time of the year, the holidays provide the perfect excuse for delicious dinners and desserts, sharing special gifts with loved ones, and planning parties that bring everyone together. But if employees spend the whole season indulging, reaching for candy canes in favor of fruit, blowing their budget on extravagant gift lists, or losing sleep over the holidays' hectic pace, it can directly impact their physical energy, mental focus and emotional drive – and wreak havoc on your business. In fact, unhealthy habits like poor nutrition from eating too many sugars, fats and carbs can cause cognitive impairment¹, and unhealthy workers cost businesses \$153 billion in lost productivity annually².

Fortunately, the perks of supporting employees' well-being extend far beyond the holiday season. With stress accounting for up to 90 percent of doctor visits³, supporting your peoples' health and happiness can help companies tackle the \$300 billion price tag tied to stressed out employees⁴. And with 70 percent of employees' saying their healthy habits impact their ability to focus at work⁵, investing in well-being can drive more focused, productive people – and better business results.

Managing pressure and making well-being a priority is key to employees' health and happiness. But when seasonal stress levels strike, keeping everything under control isn't as simple as it sounds. Virgin Pulse's latest survey of over 1,000 full-time employees in the U.S. and Canada (not Virgin Pulse members) reveals what's behind people's stress levels and how it's impacting their health, focus, productivity, and performance on the job.

Read on to learn:

What impact the holiday season has on employees' **stress levels**

How pressure from the holidays takes its toll on **employees' health, happiness, and performance at work**

Why employees are feeling **anxious** in the first place

Top tips to start supporting employees' **well-being** – today and all year long

1 http://www.unboundmedicine.com/medline/citation/24310052/Cognition_and_nutrition_

2 <http://www.gallup.com/poll/150026/Unhealthy-Workers-Absenteeism-Costs-153-Billion.aspx>

3 Perkins, A. (1994). Saving money by reducing stress. Harvard Business Review. 72(6):12.

4 http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/05/health/05stress.html?pagewanted=print&position=&_r=0

5 Virgin Pulse. "Driven by Distractions: Why Employees' Focus is Waning at Work & What You Can Do About It." Survey Report. 2014.

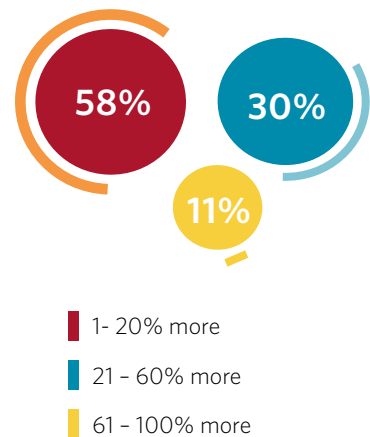
Let's face it - the holiday season's stressful

When it comes to the year-end holiday season, there's no doubt about it: Employees are frazzled.

In fact, more than 70 percent of survey respondents said they're over 21 percent more stressed during the holidays. Of that, more than 10 percent said they're between a whopping 60 and 100 percent more stressed. What's more, nearly 34 percent admit they anticipate being somewhat or a lot more stressed this year, in comparison to years past.

The stress begins early for employees, too. One in five respondents say they start worrying about the winter holidays in October, with a third saying their stress spikes in mid- to late-November.

How much more stressed are you during the holiday season?



The seasonal balancing act

For most, the holiday stress starts early and hits hard, impacting employees way beyond just their personal life.

In fact, 64 percent of survey respondents say holiday-related stress causes them to be distracted at work, driving 30 percent more anxiety than usual and diminishing their quality of work by about the same amount.

As employees struggle to juggle priorities at work and home, consider offering additional resources to help them stay focused and stress-free through the season so they can complete their top tasks.

Working through a long list of holiday to-dos means employees aren't dedicating the same amount of attention to their entire workday as they typically would.

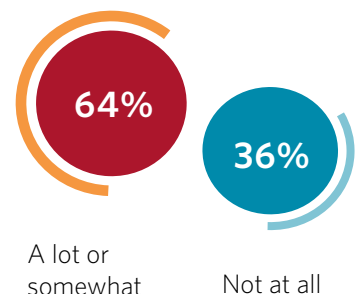
Two-thirds of survey respondents admit to using up to 60 percent of their workday to complete holiday prep work – like shopping, running errands, and having phone or online conversations with family or friends about the

holidays. Over 45 percent use time to shop online during the workday, while 27 percent get out of their workplace during the day to complete holiday-related errands. Twenty percent take some time on the job to plan their holiday menu by researching recipes.

With employees performing a balancing act between work- and holiday-related responsibilities, consider instituting flexible policies, if possible, so they can better handle all that matters – on the job and off.



Does the holiday season cause you to be distracted at work?



What types of holiday prep do you anticipate using the workday to complete?

46%

Online shopping

32%

Having conversations with family/friends about the holidays

28%

Running holiday-related errands

20%

Researching holiday recipes or planning holiday meals

15%

Coordinating travel

14%

Shopping from a mobile device

8%

Planning parties

What's behind employees' anxiety?

With endless obligations around the holidays, the root of employees' seasonal stress isn't exactly unique.

The culprit behind most respondents' stress is unsurprising, with 65 percent saying shopping for gifts and event necessities is to blame for their anxiety.

With that extra shopping comes added financial worries, too. Sixty percent of respondents said maintaining finances topped their

list of stressors this time of year. That same amount also reported they have the most difficulty maintaining this area of well-being. Thirty-one percent said that maintaining their finances would benefit their well-being the most during the holidays.

Crowds at the stores (44 percent), family dynamics (43 percent), and balancing holiday and work responsibilities (43 percent) are also among the top reasons employees feel stressed.

You may not be able to help with the gift giving, party planning, or troublesome in-laws, but you can support employees' financial well-being by offering resources and programs that help people set up and stick to a holiday budget. Help employees navigate the extra demands on their time and attention too. Work with them to manage projects, deadlines, and deliverables. They'll feel supported and in control on the job, and pay it forward by maintaining their productivity and performance.



What stresses you out most about the holiday season?

65%

Shopping for **gifts & events**

60%

Maintaining **finances**

44%

Crowds at the stores

43%

Family dynamics

43%

Balancing **holiday and work responsibilities**

29%

Planning and/or attending **parties**

25%

Longer commutes due to **holiday traffic**

18%

Hosting guests

Unhealthy habits aren't helping any

It looks like the stress – not to mention all that turkey and eggnog – is weighing on employees' health.

Sixty-two percent said eating healthy is the hardest aspect of well-being to maintain during the holidays, with 71 percent of respondents saying they eat unhealthily between two and five days a week.

Employees are also have trouble finding time to exercise and aren't logging enough sleep. Fifty-one percent and 46 percent, respectively, said these were the aspects of well-being they found hardest to maintain during the

holidays. Fifty-nine percent of respondents said they sleep poorly and 51 percent said they skip exercising between two and five days during the holidays.

Encourage your employees to maintain their healthy habits during the holidays, and all year long. With exercise, sleep, and proper nutrition all proven to have dramatic impacts on people's performance and cognition, they'll see benefits – and so will your business.



Which elements
of your well-
being are most
difficult to
maintain during
the holidays?

62%

Eating healthily

60%

*Maintaining my **finances***

51%

Exercising regularly

46%

*Getting **7-8 hours of sleep** each night*

22%

*Staying focused and **productive at work***

22%

*Making time for **personal relationships***

20%

***Focusing on tasks** unrelated
to the holidays*

10%

*Finding time for **community involvement***

6%

*I have no difficulty maintaining my
well-being during the holidays*

Is experience to blame?

The reason for employees' burgeoning stress levels may simply come down to their experience planning and prepping for the holiday season.

Young professionals between 18- and 29-years-old indicated they expect to be 45 percent more stressed this year than last, compared to just 30 percent of respondents between 45- and 60-years-old. This could indicate that the more experienced group simply has a tried-and-true plan of attack when it comes to the holidays.

Young professionals are also more likely to use their workday to focus on holiday-related tasks in comparison to their more seasoned counterparts. Eighteen to 29-year-olds are two times more likely to say they'll spend 20 to 40 percent of their workday focused on holiday-related tasks than 45- to 60-year-olds (10 to 20 percent).

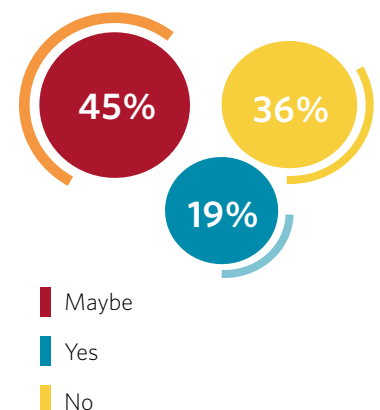
Managing seasonal stressors

When it comes to maintaining well-being and combating holiday stress levels, some employees are getting creative in their efforts this year.

Young professional are five times more likely to use productivity software or apps than those employees 45- to 60-years-old. Across all respondents, nutrition tracking was another method many plan to implement this holiday season (14 percent), followed by a daily relaxation session (13 percent).

Fifty-four percent of respondents said their employer doesn't offer free tools, resources, or programs to help them manage stress, productivity, and other aspects of their well-being – or they weren't sure if they did. This highlights a major opportunity for employers to extend support for employees' well-being and stress. In fact, employees are asking for it, as over 80 percent of respondents said they'd be interested if their employer offered free tools, resources, or programs to help them manage stress, productivity, and other aspects of their well-being.

If your employer offered free tools, resources, or programs to help you manage stress, productivity, and/or other aspects of well-being, would you be interested in learning about them?



What's behind employees' anxiety?

Whether it's financial woes, family feuds, or simply balancing seasonal pressures with the rest of life, one thing's clear: the holidays are stressful for almost everyone.

This year, help employees stay on top of their holiday check-lists. Support their health and happiness with tools, resources, and programs that drive all aspects of their well-being so they can better keep their stress and health under control.

Here are three tips to help you out.

1. Pick a priority



When employees' attention is on their holiday to-do list rather than their work, help them get back on track by encouraging them to highlight their most important task for the day. Making progress on meaningful work is one of the biggest motivators for employees, and pinpointing one top priority each day can help them make headway on what matters most.

2. Crank up the competition



If employees' health has flown right out the window this season, encourage them to pay their well-being some attention. Educate them on the importance of getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising – and then show that you practice what you preach. Consider a friendly company-wide competition to see who can take the stairs every day or log the most sleep through the week.

3. Take time to reboot



With hectic holiday schedules, it's all too easy to neglect the need for downtime. Be sure your workforce unplugs this season – and all throughout the year. Encourage employees to submit and plan for vacation days well in advance, and make it clear that you support their time away from work by keeping emails and other messages mum, if possible.



About Virgin Pulse

Virgin Pulse, part of Sir Richard Branson's famed Virgin Group, helps employers create a workforce with the energy, focus, and drive necessary to fully engage at work and in life. With its award-winning, online platform, the company fosters healthy daily habits and sustainable behavior change that help employees thrive at work and across all aspects of life. Unlike narrowly-focused employee health

and engagement solutions, Virgin Pulse is a hub of consumer-focused strategies and innovative tools that set the foundation for a company's engagement efforts. More than 250 industry leaders representing 1.5M+ employees have selected Virgin Pulse's programs to reinvigorate their workplace.

Learn more at www.virginpulse.com.

