

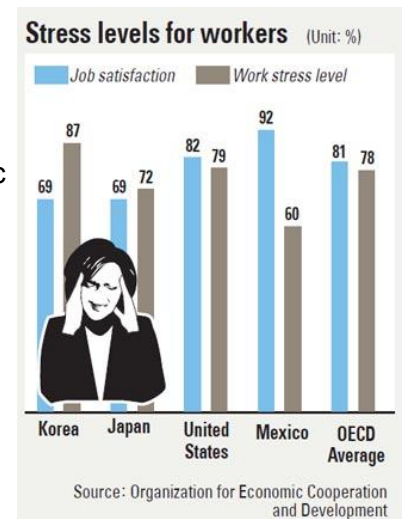
# Korean workers are most stressed in the OECD

Feeling anxious all the time? Dread heading to work in the morning? Join the crowd. A report released by the Samsung Economic Research Institute yesterday claims that Korea has the highest stress levels and the lowest job satisfaction of any developed country.

The nation ranks at the bottom of the pack among Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development member countries, SERI said, because it has had to cope with a series of economic crises without the infrastructure to maintain workers' mental health.

Though some companies have instituted stress management programs, the report said, many workers still try to hide or suppress their problems rather than seek treatment. Managers also bear some of the blame, it said, for focusing too much on results and not enough on individual workers.

According to the report, 87.8 percent of Korean workers reported experiencing a feeling of malaise or digestive problems, while 74.4 percent said they thought their jobs had driven them to depression. Another reason an increasing number of Koreans are suffering from such stress-related illnesses, SERI said, is a prevailing belief that a drinking outing can solve most psychological problems.



## Stressed and Depressed, Koreans Avoid Therapy By MARK McDONALD New York Times

SEOUL — It can sometimes feel as if South Korea, overworked, overstressed and ever anxious, is on the verge of a national nervous breakdown, with a rising divorce rate, students who feel suffocated by academic pressures, a suicide rate among the highest in the world and a macho corporate culture that still encourages blackout drinking sessions after work.

More than 30 South Koreans kill themselves every day, and the suicides of entertainers, politicians, athletes and business leaders have become almost commonplace. The recent suicides of four students and a professor at Korea's leading university shocked the nation, and in recent weeks a TV baseball announcer, two soccer players, a university president and the lead singer in a popular band killed themselves. And yet Koreans have largely resisted Western psychotherapy for their growing anxieties, depression and stress. Talk-therapy modalities with psychiatrists, psychologists and other types of trained counselors are only slowly being accepted, according to mental health experts here. "Talking openly about emotional problems is still taboo," said Dr. Kim Hyong-soo, a psychologist and professor at Chosun University in Kwangju.

"With depression, the inclination for Koreans is to just bear with it and get over it," he said. "If someone goes to a psychoanalyst, they know they'll be stigmatized for the rest of their life. So they don't go." Mental health experts said many troubled South Koreans seek help from private psychiatric clinics (and pay their bills in cash) so their government-insurance records do not carry the stigma of a "Code F," signifying someone who has received reimbursement for such care.

Even when Koreans do seek out counseling, the learning curve can be steep. A prominent psychiatrist with a practice in Seoul, Jin-seng Park, said it was not uncommon for some new patients to come to his office, talk over a problem for 40 minutes and then be shocked when they're presented with a bill.

"They'll say, 'I have to pay? Just for talking? I can do that for free with my friend or my pastor,'" said Dr. Park.

Patients also balk, he said, at the idea of spending more than a couple sessions on talk therapy. Instead, most patients simply ask for, and expect, medication, said Dr. Park, whose website advises that "nearly all of the medications used in the U.S. are available here, too."

## **Stress - Discussion Questions Part 2**

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12. What has been the most stressful part of TTP?

The reality of every teacher trying to make even a modest go at this profession is a life of almost constant stress, overwork and, at times, emotional exhaustion. Anyone who enters the teaching profession thinking otherwise is in for a rude awakening. So why am I griping? I chose this profession and I enjoy what I do.

I should note that teaching has not broken me. But it has broken the sanity and soul of some very motivated teachers I know. "I think that the whole idea of teaching has changed in the last 15 to 20 years," says Emily Noble, past-president of the Canadian Teachers' Federation. "People are dealing with more high-need students, with more multicultural issues and with no-fail policies. "Teachers want to make a difference, but the supports are just not there."

Non-teachers are shocked when I describe exactly what today's teachers have to put up with. There is an understanding that things "are not the same as they once were." But many non-teachers still don't understand just how much the moral tone and standards of public education have been compromised in recent years in the name of individual freedom, diversity and accommodation.

In my experience, it has been the most highly motivated and committed teachers who undergo the most stress and who break down simply because they truly care for their students and, against the odds, try to deliver. Mediocre teachers, it seems, have less of a problem in detaching their personal well-being from that of their students. And that is not just my view.

"Burnout is more common in the young, highly motivated, energetic, hard-working teacher," says Martin at the University of Regina. "The people who burn out are the people who pour everything into it without balance."

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## The Effects of Stress

Dr. Connie Lillas describes the three most common ways people respond when overwhelmed by stress:

- **Foot on the gas** – An angry or agitated stress response. You're heated, keyed up, overly emotional, and unable to sit still.
- **Foot on the brake** – A withdrawn or depressed stress response. You shut down, space out, and show very little energy or emotion.
- **Foot on both** – A tense and frozen stress response. You "freeze" under pressure and can't do anything. You look paralyzed, but under the surface you're extremely agitated.

### Signs and symptoms of stress overload

The following table lists some of the common warning signs and symptoms of stress.

Stress Warning Signs and Symptoms	
Cognitive Symptoms	Emotional Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Memory problems</li><li>● Inability to concentrate</li><li>● Poor judgment</li><li>● Seeing only the negative</li><li>● Anxious or racing thoughts</li><li>● Constant worrying</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Moodiness</li><li>● Irritability or short temper</li><li>● Agitation, inability to relax</li><li>● Feeling overwhelmed</li><li>● Sense of loneliness and isolation</li><li>● Depression or general unhappiness</li></ul>
Physical Symptoms	Behavioral Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Diarrhea or constipation</li><li>● Nausea, dizziness</li><li>● Chest pain, rapid heartbeat</li><li>● Loss of sex drive, libido</li><li>● Frequent colds</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Eating more or less</li><li>● Sleeping too much or too little</li><li>● Isolating yourself from others</li><li>● Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities</li><li>● Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)</li></ul>

### Assorted Facts About . . . Stress

1. While it is a myth that stress can turn hair gray, stress can cause hair loss. In fact, hair loss can begin up to three months after a stressful event.
2. Stress alters the chemical makeup of the body, which can affect the health and release of the human egg. Stress in men can affect sperm count and motility and cause erectile dysfunction.
3. Stress can make acne worse. Researchers say stress-related inflammation rather than a rise in sebum (the oily substance in skin) is to blame.
4. Laughing lowers stress hormones (like cortisol, epinephrine, and adrenaline) and strengthens the immune system by releasing health-enhancing hormones.
5. The stress hormone cortisol not only causes abdominal fat to accumulate, but it also enlarges individual fat cells, leading to what researchers call "diseased" fat.
6. Stress can alter blood sugar levels, which can cause mood swings, fatigue, hyperglycemia, and metabolic syndrome, a major risk factor for heart attack and diabetes.
7. Chronic stress can impair the developmental growth in children by lowering the production of growth hormone from the pituitary gland.
8. Pupils dilate during stress much the same way they dilate in response to attraction: to gather more visual information about a situation.
9. Stress makes the blood "stickier," in preparation for an injury. Such a reaction, however, also increases the probability of developing a blood clot.<sup>d</sup>
10. Chronic stress worsens irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), a condition that irritates the large intestine and causes constipation, cramping, and bloating.
11. Chronic stress decreases the body's immune system's response to infection and can affect a person's response to immunizations.
12. Chronic low-level noise and low-frequency noise below the threshold of human hearing provoke stress hormones that interfere with learning and elevate blood pressure, degrade the immune system, and increase aggression.

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## How to Keep Your Stress Levels Under Control

### *Foods That Help Reduce Stress*

- **Dark Leafy Greens** - vegetables like spinach, kale and Swiss chard are good for so many things, there's really no excuse not to eat them. Calming your nerves just happens to be one of them, as these veggies contain lots of the B-complex vitamins. These vitamins are crucial for preventing stress because they're needed to make serotonin, a chemical that helps boost your mood.
- **Broccoli, beets, and legumes** - are rich in folates, a B vitamin that is necessary to prevent irritability, fatigue, depression and even confusion.
- **Whole Grains** - also help to soothe your mood because they're rich in B vitamins. Make sure you're really eating something with whole grains, though, and not just "whole wheat" bread that's actually mostly refined flour.
- **Sweet Potatoes** - can be particularly stress-reducing because they can satisfy the urge you get for carbohydrates and sweets when you are under a great deal of stress. They are full of beta-carotene and other vitamins, and the fiber helps your body process the carbs in a slow and steady manner.
- **Berries** - are rich in antioxidants like vitamin C, which is known to help keep the stress hormone cortisol steady.
- **Nuts** - Almonds are rich in vitamin E, which helps to fight some of the damage caused by stress. Brazil nuts, meanwhile, contain lots of zinc and selenium, which also fight free radicals.
- **Chicken Breast** - Chicken is a great source of tryptophan, which can help you sleep better and elevate your mood (as a bonus, it can even help to regulate your appetite!). Contrary to popular belief, chicken breast actually contains slightly more tryptophan than turkey.
- **Avocados** - Add some avocado slices to your sandwich or salad or whip up a batch of guacamole for a quick boost in your B vitamins (plus, they can help prevent cancer and heart health!).
- **Dark Chocolate** - Research has shown that dark chocolate reduces stress hormones such as cortisol and other fight-flight hormones. Additionally, cocoa is rich in antioxidants called flavonoids.

### **Positive thinking: Reduce stress by eliminating negative self-talk**

Positive thinking doesn't mean that you keep your head in the sand and ignore life's less pleasant situations. Positive thinking just means that you approach the unpleasantness in a more positive and productive way. You think the best is going to happen, not the worst. Positive thinking often starts with self-talk. Self-talk is the endless stream of unspoken thoughts that run through your head every day. These automatic thoughts can be positive or negative. If the thoughts that run through your head are mostly negative, your outlook on life is more likely pessimistic. If your thoughts are mostly positive, you're likely an optimist — someone who practices positive thinking.

### **Identifying negative thinking**

Not sure if your self-talk is positive or negative? Here are some common forms of negative self-talk:

- **Filtering.** You magnify the negative aspects of a situation and filter out all of the positive ones. For example, say you had a great day at work. You completed your tasks ahead of time and were complimented for doing a speedy and thorough job. But you forgot one minor step. That evening, you focus only on your oversight and forget about the compliments you received.
- **Personalizing.** When something bad occurs, you automatically blame yourself. For example, you hear that an evening out with friends is canceled, and you assume that the change in plans is because no one wanted to be around you.
- **Catastrophizing.** You automatically anticipate the worst. You have a small headache and imagining that it could be a brain tumor.
- **Polarizing.** You see things only as either good or bad, black or white. There is no middle ground. You feel that you have to be perfect or that you're a total failure. Getting a 99% is a disappointment.

Here are some examples of negative self-talk and how you can apply a positive thinking twist to them.

Negative self-talk	Positive thinking
I've never done it before.	It's an opportunity to learn something new.
It's too complicated.	I'll tackle it from a different angle.
I don't have the resources.	Necessity is the mother of invention.
I'm too lazy to get this done.	I wasn't able to fit it into my schedule but can re-examine some priorities.
There's no way it will work.	I can try to make it work.
It's too radical a change.	Let's take a chance.
No one bothers to communicate with me.	I'll see if I can open the channels of communication.
I'm not going to get any better at this.	I'll give it another try.

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### **Stress - Discussion Questions Part 1**

1. Which of these is most stressful for you....  
(public speaking, taking a test, going on a first date, dealing with in-laws, long flights, open classes, work gatherings, dealing with native English speakers, ....)?
2. What else causes you stress? (e.g. money, family, lovelife, health, future, etc.)
3. Which social/professional situations cause you the most stress?
4. What were the most stressful periods of your life?
5. What were the least stressful, most care-free periods of your life?
6. When do you feel the most relaxed or unstressed?

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