

# 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.

According to OECD health data from 2009, Korea's suicide rate per 100,000 was 21.5, the highest among the organization's member countries and close to twice the average, which was 11.1 suicides per 100,000 people. "The seriousness of stress is not properly acknowledged in Korea, and people need to maintain a balanced life and try to prevent stress," said a researcher at SERI.

"However, Korea's social and working environments are lacking in efforts to prevent individual stress, as they only focus on results." In order to overcome the serious problem of individual stress levels, SERI suggested three solutions including a well-rounded, balanced life that includes exercise and hobbies, measuring and managing one's stress properly through mental health checkups and counseling, and creating a less stressful working environment to prevent more serious disorders from developing.

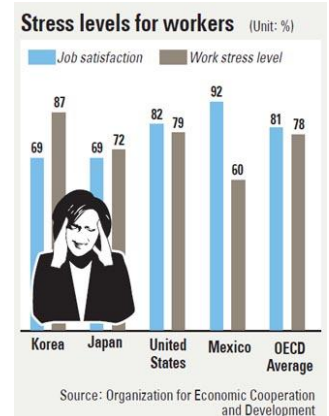
## **Stressed and Depressed, Koreans Avoid Therapy** By MARK McDONALD New York Times

"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 Web site advises that "nearly all of the medications used in the U.S. are available here, too. So don't worry about getting those medications in Korea."



### **Stress - Discussion Questions**

1. Which of these is most stressful for you....  
(public speaking, taking a test, meeting new people, going on a first date, dealing with family, long flights, big social gatherings, dealing with native speakers of other languages, having to record another video for Jeff's class, ....)?
2. What else causes you stress? (e.g. money, grades, family, lovelife, health, future, etc.)
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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 sexual 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 developmental growth in children by lowering the production of growth hormones 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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# **Stress in College: What Causes it and How to Combat it**

It's no secret that many college students spend most of their time on campus stressed out. Balancing classes, tests, projects, extracurricular activities, and work is enough to make anyone feel overwhelmed, especially with final exams right around the corner.

"College life has become a lot more competitive--it's much harder to get into schools, it's gotten a lot more expensive," says Elizabeth Scott, stress management expert. "There are a lot of things that are factors that have made society more stressful, and that really translates to college life as well." Having stress in your life is unavoidable, but there are steps students can take to mitigate its effects on their lives and health.

## **Why College is Stressful**

Going off to college involves significant adjustments to your daily routine; your sleeping and eating habits, time-management skills, and stress levels will be altered in one way or another. And even though it's been barely three months since you left high school, you are now expected to be more independent and self-sufficient. Adapting to this new life stage and the inevitable stress that comes with it (both good and bad) affects students differently.

If you go to university straight from school, you are facing the challenge of leaving home, separating from your parents, and beginning the process of finding your identity, as an adult, and your place in the world. This is a big psychological upheaval. It also involves many challenges at a practical level. You will need to practice housekeeping, manage a budget and find your way around a strange place. This all demands energy, just as you are beginning to take on the work requirements of your course and build a new social life.

"A lot of people are going away to school, so they're moving away from their social support network and that's a pretty huge change right there," Scott says. "At the same time, they have a lot of new things they have to navigate--not just getting around campus and living on their own, but choosing their classes, choosing what direction they want to go in their lives and choosing who to hang out with."

Striking a balance between school and personal life takes discipline and strong time-management skills, something that not every student comes equipped with as a freshman.

Relationships can also be a source of stress for students. Wishy-washy friends who are supportive one minute and negative and insulting the next adds unnecessary stress, and according to Scott, can be worse for your health than having a completely conflicted relationship with an enemy.

"Knowing who is toxic to you and safeguarding a little bit [can] keep the stress from happening," she says. "There's going to be conflict in every relationship at some point. Working on conflict resolution skills and communication skills in yourself can really help you manage the conflicts that come along."

## **Chronic Stress**

While it is perfectly normal, and even healthy to feel stressed out from time to time, there is a point where stress crosses the line into what experts call "chronic stress."

"Chronic stress diminishes the amount of time you spend in the sleep cycles that we need to stay in [and] affects our digestion and our bodies," he says.

Scott says that chronic stress is aggravated by not allowing your body to recover and return to a normal, relaxed state. "It can either be because your body is being triggered over and over again in a period of time, or it can be a constant stream of stress and you never recover from it," she says.

In addition to the strain on your body, Jantz points out that under chronic stress, you may subside to unhealthy behaviors. "If they're under chronic stress, maybe they're going to drink more or use [drugs]," he says. "We tend to look for more destructive outlets alternately."

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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**

Is your glass half-empty or half-full? How you answer this age-old question about positive thinking may reflect your outlook on life, your attitude toward yourself, and whether you're optimistic or pessimistic — and it may even affect your health.

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. 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. The drive-through coffee shop gets your order wrong and you automatically think that the rest of your day will be a disaster.
- **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.

## Focusing on positive thinking

Practice positive self-talk. Start by following one simple rule: Don't say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to anyone else. Be gentle and encouraging with yourself. If a negative thought enters your mind, evaluate it rationally and respond with affirmations of what is good about you.

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 and anxiety in the digital age: The dark side of technology**

There is evidence that we are becoming over dependent, or even possibly addicted to our phones. Think about how you feel when you realise you have forgotten your phone, or left it behind somewhere. It can be uncomfortable, can't it? In fact, recent research has shown that some people experience significant stress and anxiety when they are separated from their phones and can even exhibit withdrawal-like symptoms, comparable to those usually seen when someone has an addiction. Some research has even shown that high levels of engagement with smartphones and multimedia technology may be physically changing our brain structure and function. So, what is it about technology that is making many of us anxious and stressed? Here are what we think are the top stressors:

### **Perpetual Distraction**

The persistent beeping, vibrating and flashing of notifications mean that we are constantly distracted and driven to interrupt what we are doing to check our phones. Indeed, a UK study found that smartphone users unlock their phones on average 85 times a day; and use it for about five hours each day. This means we are unable to focus our attention and consolidate things properly into our memory, causing us to feel more and more 'goldfish-like', which can be quite distressing in itself. This is backed up by research which is beginning to show correlations between high smartphone and internet use, and poor cognitive skills such as attention, memory and learning.

### **Sleep Dysregulation**

Many of us use our phone at bedtime. You get into bed intending to go to sleep, but you just want to check your phone (just for 'a second') to find out something innocuous like tomorrow's weather... and then an hour later, there you are watching a totally random video. Looking at our phones when we should be going to sleep has the double whammy effect of over-stimulating our brains, making it hard to wind down and switch off, and exposing us to blue light from the screen. Research suggests that blue screen exposure can reduce melatonin production, which interrupts our circadian rhythm (i.e. sleep-waking cycles), making it harder for us to fall, and stay, asleep. Unfortunately, poor sleep tends to mean poorer resilience and higher levels of anxiety and stress.



### **F.O.M.O**

...Or Fear Of Missing Out is essentially a type of social anxiety that arises from the fear that you are missing out on something; whether it's an event, a work or social opportunity, a communication, or a potential connection, or just something cool and ethereal that you might like to see or be part of. So we want to be connected... 'just in case'. To test this, just ask your friends and family if they've ever considered coming off social media. Like us, they probably have... but the majority probably decide not to, because of FOMO. Ironically, the more connected we are, the more likely we may be to experience FOMO, because it is often caused by the posts we see on social media sites like Facebook leading us to believe our friends and acquaintances are having exciting and/or interesting experiences in our absence.

### **Social Comparison**

We can't help but compare ourselves to others, and social comparison theory suggests that we use these types of comparisons to evaluate how we think and feel about ourselves. Social Media, by its nature, actively encourages social comparison, as it is littered with information that can easily be used as metrics of apparent social success (e.g. friends, likes, shares, followers and so forth). These metrics are problematic in themselves, because if we don't get enough likes to a comment or picture we have posted, or if someone has more likes or friends than us, it can make us feel inferior. Furthermore, the disparity between real life and what people actually post on social media means that we tend to only see an extremely edited 'highlight reel' of other people's lives. This effectively gives the false impression that others lead a more exciting/perfect/interesting life than our own, which, in reality has its fair share of ups, middles and downs for everyone... increasing the likelihood of negative social comparisons being made, which can have serious consequences on our wellbeing.

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- Read the entire handout by yourself. Do NOT stop to look up unknown words or phrases - just underline them.
- Go over the handout together to discuss the main points and figure out the meaning of words or sentences you don't understand. Using Korean to discuss meaning is OK.
- As a group, make a list of 5~10 challenging words from the reading.
- Discuss: Which points do you agree or disagree with? In what ways does the reading 'hit home'?
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