Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Stress and Resiliency-Understanding the "Back to Work Blues"



Most Canadians enjoy a brief respite from work during the holiday season. Many tack on a few vacation days to the statutory holidays to create a prolonged break, perhaps to visit family or travel to warmer climates. While this may maximize family time and allow the freedom to participate in a wide variety of seasonal activities, returning to work afterward can present a challenge. According to a recent English survey, 80 percent of employees return with signs of post-holiday tension (PHT), also known as the "back to work blues."

The exact symptoms can vary from person to person, but employees dealing with PHT will commonly feel exhausted, irritable, and unmotivated. They may experience an apathy that prevents them from focusing on their tasks, causing their minds to wander instead. PHT may even be expressed through headaches and foul moods.

Transitioning back into the work routine can seem overwhelming, especially when combined with the natural low that typically follows a busy, celebratory time. Even employees who love their work can experience difficulty returning after a break. To help you get back into the flow, consider these tips:

1. Show up to work ready and rested. Nothing will amplify the blues more than returning in a state of exhaustion or disorganization. Get plenty of rest before your first day back, then organize yourself and your workspace to be as efficient as possible.

2. Be present. You may have thoroughly enjoyed the break, but it's now time to get back to work. Set aside your holiday mindset and direct your energy and attention toward your work instead.

3. Create and prioritize a to-do list. Doing so can add structure to your work and enable you to more easily focus on the tasks at hand. Include everyday tasks that you may not typically include on a to-do list, as you may need the reminder until you get back into the swing of things.

4. Begin planning for your next break. Whether your next vacation is weeks or months away, starting to plan for it will shift your focus from the break you just experienced toward the next one. Even a long weekend on the horizon can provide a target to work toward.

5. Define your goals. What are the next targets you are working toward? Determine what you are hoping to accomplish and identify the steps that will get you there. Having clearly-established goals can lift your spirits and provide some much needed motivation when facing the blues.

By recognizing the potential of PHT and taking steps to relieve it, you should settle back into your work routine quickly and smoothly. If symptoms persist for more than a few weeks, however, consult with a health professional or counsellor.

Holidays and vacations can provide a much-needed break from the demands of the job, but they should not leave you unable to fulfill your tasks. Instead, by taking steps to mitigate the back to work blues, you can return renewed and reenergized, ready to take on whatever comes your way.

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