

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

Commuter Calm: Getting to Work without Getting Annoyed

Whether you're gridlocked in traffic, crammed into a subway car or forced to sit next to someone with questionable hygiene, the worst part of your work day may actually be getting there. More and more of us commute farther and farther to work than ever before, and it's not only unpleasant but can actually be a health hazard. Transit tension can cause chronic stress, body aches, heightened blood pressure and boiling rage. Although there's no way to completely eliminate commuter chaos, there are things you can do to stay sane.

To survive your daily trek to work try to:

Be prepared.

The best defense against commuter stress is to get everything organized the night before. Pack your lunch, top up your gas, set out your clothes and organize any work before you go to bed to avoid the morning rush. Watch traffic reports and if you know there's going to be construction, transit delays or road closures, plan an alternate route. Sleep well and wake up early—if you're already stressed before you leave the house, you will take this with you on your commute and into your day.

Consider your options.

Finding a carpool buddy will save you money, provide you with needed company during traffic jams and might even get you entrance into the high-occupancy vehicle lanes. Just be selective about who you choose because spending hours together everyday could be a recipe for disaster. If possible look into public transit, riding your bike or even walking. You won't be stressed in traffic, you'll save money, ease the strain on your car and decrease your carbon footprint. If you're lucky enough to live relatively close to work, biking and walking will give you your daily workout going to and from the workplace.

Get comfortable.

If you're spending a lot of time in your car you should pay attention to ergonomics. Make sure that your headrest aligns with the tops of your ears and that the seat supports your thighs while leaving space between the edge of the seat and your knees. Use a back pillow to support the lower spine, make sure your mirrors are lined up properly to limit neck strain and use stoplights for regular stretching breaks. If you're on a train, invest in an ergonomic head pillow, take a look at your posture and riding position and wear comfortable shoes.

Flex your time.

Employers are often willing to support flexible work hours. Instead of joining the nine to fivers in the slow lane, try a ten to six or eight to four shift. You'll have to experiment to find out which hour has the least amount of "rush." Some employers may even allow you to work from home one day a week to give you a break from the daily grind. If these options aren't possible, try working out at a gym or running errands near your work. This should delay your departure enough to miss the mad dash.

Stash snacks.

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For most of us, the after-work commute overlaps with dinnertime. To prevent you from visiting vending machines or making quick stops at the drive through, you need to be ready. Keep nuts, dried fruit and granola bars in your purse or glove box, or pack a healthy evening snack with your lunch. Most commuters report that their daily travels contribute to unhealthy habits so keep healthy options at your fingertips.

Embrace it.

Sadly, your commute may be the only time you get to yourself all day. Instead of looking at it as lost time, appreciate it as found time. This is an opportunity to read a good book, listen to music, daydream and reflect or if you're driving you can listen to relaxing music or enjoy an audio book. Your commute can actually help you transition between work and home and allow you to leave your stress behind before you walk through the front door.

While you can't eliminate the traffic or crowds from your daily dash, you can control how you react. Next time someone cuts you off or pushes past you in line and you want to give them a rude gesture, try taking a deep breath instead. Work towards cultivating a calm, collected commuter attitude so you can both survive and thrive in transit.