

Are You Addicted to Work?

Objective

To identify if you are a “workaholic,” a person who has an addiction to work and working.

What to Know

Psychologist Wayne Oates coined the term “workaholism” in 1971 (Oates, 1971), and he defined it as a compulsion or an uncontrollable need to work. If you are addicted to work, you have a chronic and progressive psychological, emotional, and social dependence on work. You work at the expense of other aspects of your life, working long hours even when it is unnecessary or sacrificing sleep to get work done. You might be overly concerned about your work performance, and obsessively think of ways to free up more time for work. You become stressed if you are unable to work.

Work addiction is not the same as just working long hours, because certain professions require long work hours. If you have one of those jobs, it doesn’t necessarily mean you are addicted to work.

Because society rewards people who work hard, you might have a problem and not realize it. You are encouraged to work harder when you receive praise or a raise – thinking you are ambitious and simply achieving career success.

If you struggle to detach from work and ruminate when you are not working, you might experience high levels of stress, anxiety, depression, or sleep problems. Under chronic stress, your physical health is affected, putting you at greater risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and even death. In addition, work addiction impacts your relationships, leading to loneliness, isolation, or depression.

Do you merely work long hours or are you a workaholic? This worksheet will help you determine if you have an addiction to work and working.

What to Do

To find out if you are a workaholic, rate yourself on each of the statements below, using a rating scale from 1 to 4, where 1 = never true, 2 = sometimes true, 3 = often true, and 4 = always true. Write down the number that best describes your work habits next to each statement. Once completed, add your numbers for your final score.

____ I like to do most things myself rather than ask for help.

____ I get impatient when I must wait for someone else or when something takes too long.

____ I am often in a hurry and feel like I’m racing against the clock.

____ I get irritated when I’m interrupted while I’m in the middle of something.

- ___ I stay busy and have many projects or tasks going at the same time.
- ___ I find myself doing two or three things at the same time, such as eating lunch, writing an email, and talking on the phone.
- ___ I over-commit myself by accepting more than I can finish.
- ___ I feel guilty when I'm not working.
- ___ It's most important that I see the results of what I do.
- ___ I'm more interested in the result of my work than in the process.
- ___ Things never seem to move fast enough or get done fast enough.
- ___ I get angry when things don't go my way or work out the way I want them to.
- ___ I ask the same questions repeatedly without realizing I already received the answers.
- ___ I spend a lot of time planning and thinking about future events while tuning out the present.
- ___ I continue working after my co-workers have stopped.
- ___ I get angry when others don't meet my standards.
- ___ I get upset when I'm not in control.
- ___ I set unreasonable deadlines, putting myself under unnecessary pressure.
- ___ It's hard for me to relax when I'm not working.
- ___ I spend more time working than socializing with friends or engaging in hobbies or leisure activities.
- ___ I prematurely dive into projects to get a head start.
- ___ I get upset with myself when I make even small mistakes.
- ___ I put more thought, time, and energy into my work than I do into my relationships.
- ___ I forget, ignore, or minimize celebrations such as birthdays or holidays.
- ___ I impulsively make important decisions.

___ **Total Score**

If you scored 67-100, you are considered addicted to work. You might be on your way to burnout, and research suggests that family members may be experiencing emotional repercussions as well.

If you scored between 57-66, you are considered mildly workaholic. There is hope, and with some modifications, you can prevent negative long-term effects.

If you scored between 25-56, you probably don't have a work addiction. You're an efficient worker and there's no need to worry that your work style will negatively affect you or others.

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you learn from this exercise that you didn't know before?

If you discovered you have a work addiction, how motivated are you to address this problem?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?

Adapted from: Oates, W.E. (1971). *Confessions of a workaholic: The facts about work addiction*. New York: World.