



Job Stress and Substance Use: What a New National Survey Reveals

Across the United States, employees are feeling the weight of job stress more than ever before. Workloads are heavier, expectations are higher, and the pace of change continues to accelerate. With all this pressure, it's no surprise that people look for ways to cope. But a new national survey by SubstanceAbuseCounselor.org from 2025 shows just how serious this issue has become, especially when it comes to alcohol and other substances.

The survey found that one in three U.S. employees uses substances at work to deal with job-related stress. This means that millions of workers are turning to alcohol, prescription medications, or illegal drugs during the workday as a way to manage pressure, anxiety, or emotional strain. Even more concerning, the survey reported that of those who use substances, 70% of employees use them daily as a stress-relief mechanism. These numbers paint a clear picture: stress is not just affecting how people feel—it is influencing their

behavior in ways that can harm their health, their safety, and their job performance.

When people feel overwhelmed, they often look for quick relief. Alcohol may seem like a way to “take the edge off,” and some drugs may appear to offer a temporary escape or boost. But these short-term solutions can quickly turn into long-term problems. Substance use can impair judgment, slow reaction time, and reduce the ability to focus. In a workplace setting, this can lead to mistakes, accidents, or injuries. It can also create tension among coworkers, reduce productivity, and damage trust within teams.

The survey's findings also highlight how stress has become a daily challenge for many workers. When so many employees say they use substances every day to cope, it shows that stress is not an occasional issue—it is a constant presence. This level of daily use increases the risk of dependence, health problems, and long-term harm. It also suggests that many employees may not have healthy coping tools or support systems in place.

It's important to understand that substance use is not always about "partying" or trying to get high. For many people, it begins as a way to manage emotional strain. Someone may start drinking more after work because they feel exhausted or anxious. Another person may misuse prescription medication because they believe it helps them stay focused or calm. Over time, these habits can grow stronger, and the person may feel like they can't get through the day without using something to cope.

Workplace culture also plays a role. In some environments, employees may feel pressure to push through stress without asking for help. They may worry that admitting they are overwhelmed will make them look weak or incapable. This can lead people to hide their struggles and turn to substances in secret. When stress builds up without healthy outlets, the risk of misuse increases.

The 2025 survey serves as a reminder that stress management is not just a personal issue—it is a workplace issue. Employers who want a safe, productive, and healthy workforce must pay attention to the signs of stress and substance use. This includes creating an environment where employees feel comfortable

asking for support, offering resources for mental health, and promoting healthy ways to cope with pressure.

At the same time, employees can take steps to protect their own well-being. Talking to a supervisor, reaching out to a counselor, practicing stress-relief techniques, or setting healthy boundaries can all make a difference. No one should feel like they have to face stress alone or rely on substances to get through the day.

The findings from this national survey also highlight why Drug Free Workplace programs are more important than ever. These programs help employers set clear expectations, provide education, and offer support for employees who may be struggling. They also help create a safer environment by reducing the risks associated with substance use on the job. In a time when stress is high and coping behaviors are changing, Drug Free Workplace programs serve as a vital tool for protecting both employees and organizations. By staying informed, staying supportive, and staying committed to safety, workplaces can make a meaningful difference in the health and well-being of everyone on the team.



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