Science Says You Shouldn't Work More Than This Number of Hours a Week

Working too much can be counterproductive and even hazardous to your health. You've been warned.

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Do you work more than 40 hours a week? If you're an entrepreneur or small business owner, it's hard not to, but all that extra time in the workplace isn't necessarily a good thing. After a certain point, it can be counterproductive and even hazardous to your health, so it's imperative to know when to say no to more hours.

What the research says:

Various organizations and independent researchers have looked at the physical, mental, emotional, and social effects of working beyond the standard 40 hours a week. Notable findings include the following:

- Working more than 10 hours a day is associated with a 60 percent jump in risk of cardiovascular issues.

- 10 percent of those working 50 to 60 hours report relationship problems; the rate increases to 30 percent for those working more than 60 hours.

- Working more than 40 hours a week is associated with increased alcohol and tobacco consumption, as well as unhealthy weight gain in men and depression in women.

- Little productive work occurs after 50 hours per week.

- In companies with normal overtime, only 23 percent had absentee rates above 9 percent. In companies with high overtime, 54 percent had absentee rates above 9 percent.

- Individuals working 11 hours or more of overtime have an increased depression risk.

- Injury rates increase as work hours increase. Those who work 60 hours per week have a 23 percent higher injury hazard rate.

- In companies with an 8.7 percent overtime rate, researchers found no fatigue-related problems. When the overtime rate was 12.4 percent, however, fatigue-related problems were minor. By the time the overtime rate hit 15.4 percent, fatigue-related problems were severe.

- In manufacturing industries, a 10 percent increase in overtime yields a 2.4 percent decrease in productivity.

- In white collar jobs, productivity declines by as much as 25 percent when workers put in 60 hours or more.

- Many of the problems identified above tie to stress, which connect to hormonal balances. Specifically, stress raises cortisol, which can disrupt sleep, appetite, blood pressure, immune system function, memory/cognition, mood, and more.

A general guideline for your wellbeing.
The available research shows that most workers in the U.S. already are working close to the point where problems can start to occur. Despite how pervasive the managerial idea still is that working employees harder always translates to a better bottom line, science says that your company isn't going to gain much, if anything, if you put in much more than an extra hour or two a day. Don't work more than 50 hours if you value your health, happiness, and connections to others.