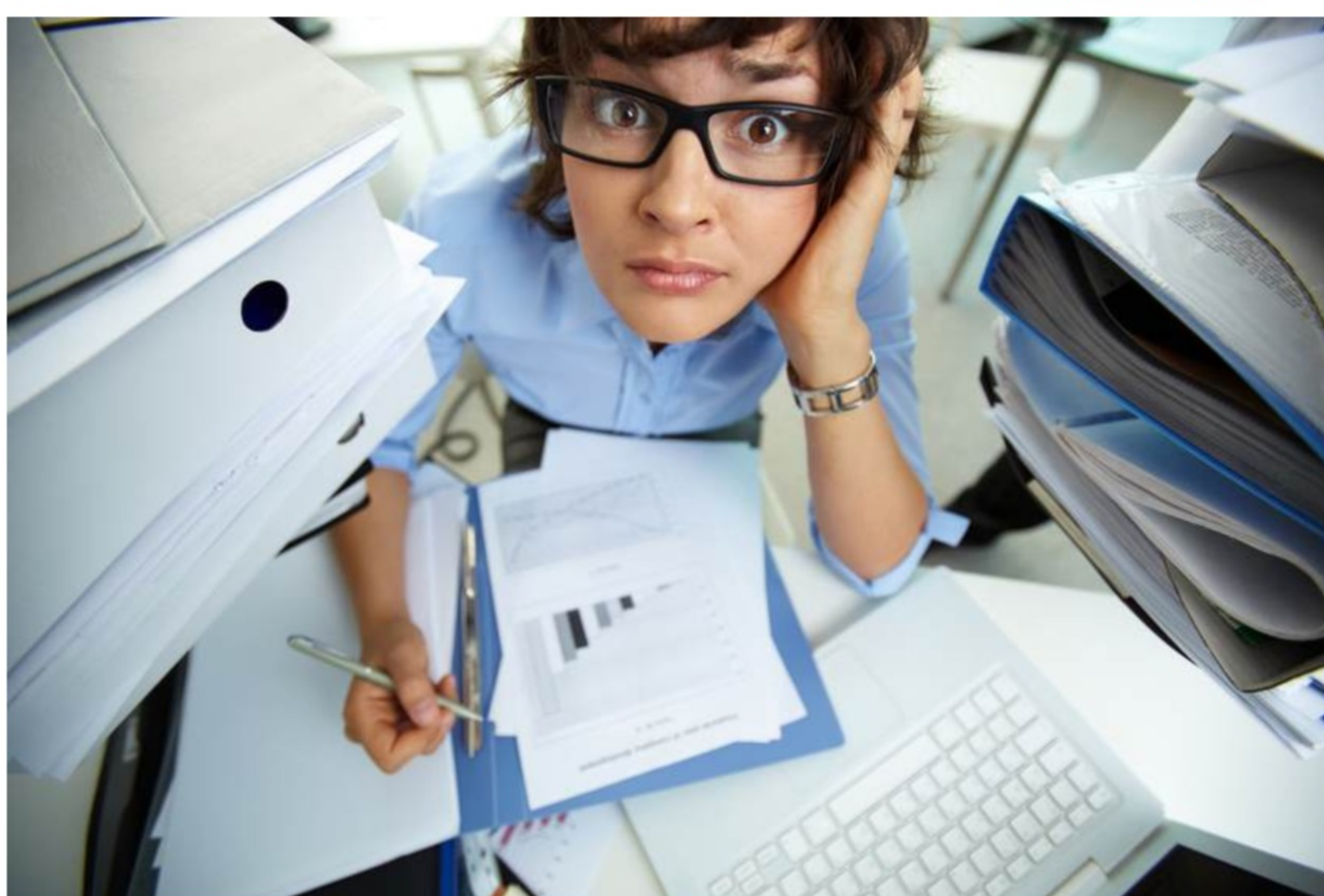


# 8 Surprising Causes of Workplace Stress

These subtle stressors have nothing to do with bad bosses or workplace bullies

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Health  
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**Ineffective bosses**, excessive workloads and **workplace bullies** aren't the only causes of stress in the office. Sometimes, it really is the little things, like poor lighting or a messy desk — things you might not even be consciously aware of.

Elizabeth Scott, a wellness and stress management coach and author of “8 Keys to Stress Management,” says stressors like these and also our own bad habits can add up to chronic stress, decreasing productivity and contributing to health problems.

Here are eight surprising causes of stress and what to do about them.

Related: [Quiz: Can You Spot a Toxic Coworker?](#)

## Procrastination

Big deadlines can be paralyzing, but putting off work is worse. “Procrastination is both a reaction to and contributor to stress,” Scott says. “People procrastinate as an avoidance strategy when they feel stressed, but as the deadline approaches, their **stress increases** and they procrastinate more. Ultimately, they associate all that stress with the deadline itself and not their procrastination, which makes the cycle harder to break.”

**The fix:** First, be aware you’re procrastinating. Then set concrete goals and get going. Start small — take 10 minutes to outline a plan, for example. Also reward yourself for small steps. Getting started lifts the stress that paralyzes you.

## A messy desk

According to Scott, while some people think they work well with a messy desk, most do better with a clear surface. “You can feel stress just looking at your messy desk because it’s a visual reminder of work you need to do. Your mind can feel tired and less sharp,” she says. Messy isn’t all bad, though, if it isn’t contributing unnecessary stress. An [American Psychological Association study](#) links it to creativity.

**The fix:** Put your papers and files in a single stack to clear the surface, even if you have to sort them later. Create organizational systems you like: file folders, a tray or a shelf, while keeping oft-used resources readily accessible. Or better yet, go paperless.

## Too much caffeine and sugar

Too many **cups of coffee** or office donuts make you more agitated, more emotional and more reactive to stress, Scott says. Caffeine **too late in the day** may inhibit good nighttime sleep and start you out feeling tired the next day. More coffee perpetuates the cycle.

**The fix:** Watch your intake of java and sweets. Your coworkers will appreciate your more even-keeled side.

Related: [Quiz: What’s Your Coffee IQ?](#)

## Perfectionism

A study by the [Society of Personality and Social Psychology](#) showed that perfectionism leads to burnout in the workplace, in part because perfectionists set unrealistic goals and fear failure. In fact, perfectionists often procrastinate and miss deadlines, Scott says, and work in a state of stress. None of that is good for productivity.

**The fix:** Become a high achiever. A high achiever feels great about earning 95 on a test, while perfectionists fret about that last 5 percent, Scott explains. Congratulate yourself on small victories. Celebrate progress, not perfection.

## Tardiness

Chronically late people miscalculate what they can get done, and it rarely works out well. “Being late creates significant amounts of stress; you arrive stressed, and you bring stress to the activity and the person you’re dealing with. You’re also inconveniencing others and may have to deal with more hostility because of it,” Scott says.

**The fix:** Set alarms for yourself, one for when you need to get ready, and one for five minutes before you need to leave.

## Poor lighting

You may not even be aware of how your office lighting affects you, but poor lighting can make you feel tired or irritable.

Related: [The Lowdown on LED Light Bulbs and Insomnia](#)

**The fix:** Natural light offers the most benefit for workplace productivity, according to a [2013 study](#) published in the journal Sleep. But a desk lamp offering brighter or warmer lighting helps. “It’s a one-time fix that can change the whole mood of the room and how you feel in it,” Scott says.

## Perfume

Your coworker’s fragrance drives you nuts, but you’re not sure how to approach the situation. It’s worth addressing, though, because distractions drain energy over time and reduce the ability to focus, Scott says.

**The fix:** It may feel personal, but consider kindly telling your coworker you have a sensitivity to fragrances. If you suspect the conversation won’t go well, talk to your human resources representative about a generalized email to the staff about fragrance sensitivities.

## A humorless environment

Laughter is a stress-buster, according to the [Mayo Clinic](#). An upbeat workplace helps people approach tasks with a positive frame of mind, Scott explains. Humor is subjective, though; telling jokes at someone else’s expense or joking about politics won’t make you popular.

**The fix:** Keeping it light and neutral can lift an office mood. Strive for silly or clever jokes.

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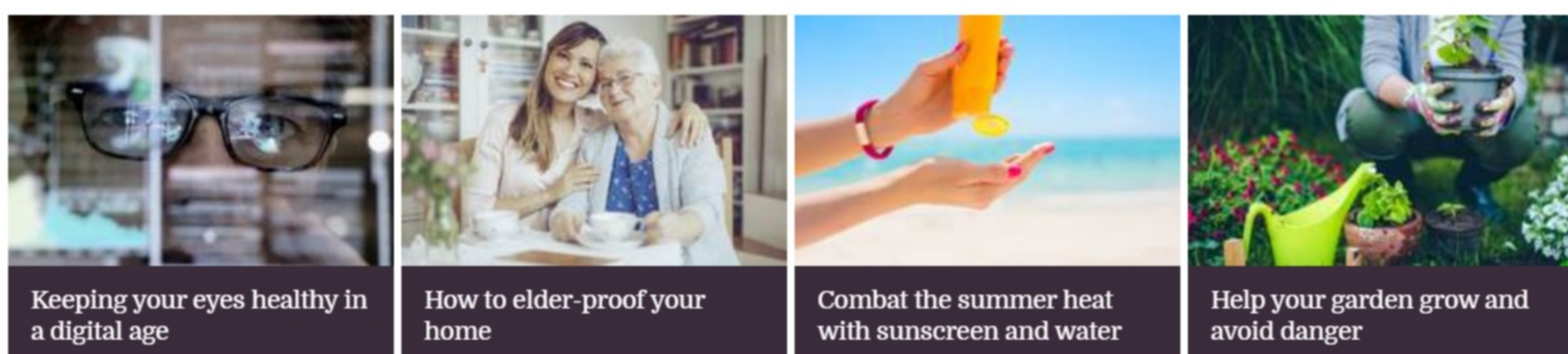
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