

Keep your cool

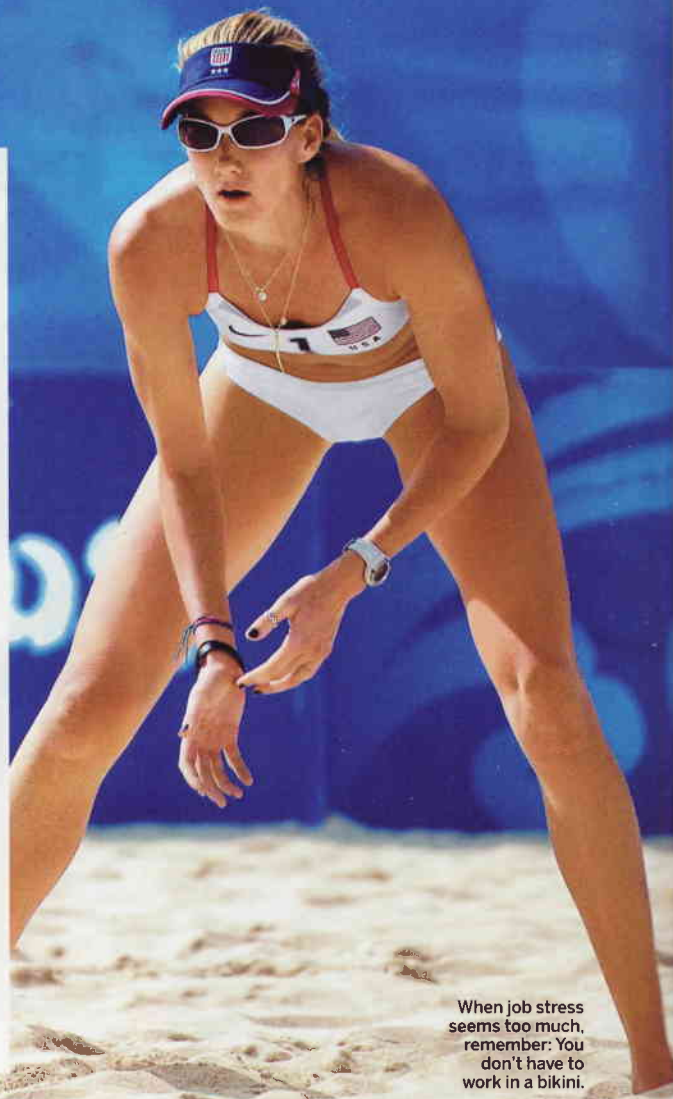
Because job stress is a health hazard—it can increase risk for heart disease by 68 percent—we asked women with high-pressure gigs how they stay calm. Try their strategies when the tension mounts.

Just exhale. “Before a big match, I find a quiet place and breathe slowly, deeply and low in my lungs. The exercise slows my heart rate, puts my mind at ease and takes the edge off.” —*Kerri Walsh, 30; Hermosa Beach, California; 2004 and 2008 Olympic gold medalist in beach volleyball*
WHY IT WORKS Stress causes you to breathe rapidly, which raises your heart rate and shifts the brain into fight-or-flight mode. “By slowing your respiration, you tell your body it’s not in danger, so anxiety abates,” says Loretta LaRoche, a stress-management consultant and author of *Relax—You May Only Have a Few Minutes Left* (Hay House).

Rely on your posse. “When flames are coming at me, I remember that my crew is right behind me, I know they’d do anything to save my life.” —*Jenifer Kaufmann, 31; Simi Valley, California; firefighter*
WHY IT WORKS “Tapping into a network of family and friends who have your back helps you believe you can handle anything,” LaRoche says. Running late? Ask a trusted associate to start your meeting.

Put on blinders. “When I’m busy, which means monitoring up to 25 airplanes, I concentrate on my screen and shut out everything else.” —*Denise Spencer, 36; Maple Valley, Washington; air-traffic controller*
WHY IT WORKS “This technique is called focused awareness, which is all about staying in the flow of the moment,” LaRoche explains. If you’re crazed, log off of Gchat, mute the phone and tackle the most urgent to do.

Act the part. “When a difficult case comes into the ER, to prevent chaos I speak calmly so everyone understands what to do. It helps me feel in control, too.” —*Amy Conley, 47; Tampa, Florida; ER doctor*
WHY IT WORKS “Chemically speaking, the body doesn’t know the difference between pretense and reality,” LaRoche says. When you pretend to be unruffled, your body thinks, “Hey, I guess I’m less stressed after all.” Bonus: Your confidence can reassure others. —*Kate Ashford*



When job stress seems too much, remember: You don't have to work in a bikini.

Creepy or cool?

MUMOOCIE

WHAT IT IS This fleece body pillow (\$98 to \$138; Mumoocie.com) is designed to ease slumber-sapping separation anxiety.

THE PROMISE Your sweetie leaves a message for you on Mumoocie’s voice recorder, and after he sleeps with the pillow for a night, its fleece lining absorbs his scent. These familiar reminders help you snooze more peacefully.

TESTER TAKE Our tester’s hubby recorded this message before leaving for the weekend: “Go back to sleep. Everything is OK. I love you.” It comforted her, so she slept soundly; the scent soothed her, too.

EXPERT TAKE “It’s worth a try,” says Lisa Shives, M.D., medical director of Northshore Sleep Medicine in Evanston, Illinois. “Smells can trigger memories and emotions that help you relax,” she says. Creeped out by a talking pillow? Spritz his cologne on your sheets instead. —*Alison Deffner*

Would you sleep with this?! Our tester did!



ASK LISA CALLAHAN, M.D., SELF'S HEALTH EXPERT

Q My doctor found a uterine fibroid. He wants to leave it alone; I want a biopsy. What should I do? —*L.W., New York City*

A I'd skip the biopsy. Roughly half of all women have fibroids (lucky us!), typically benign growths of uterine muscle tissue. No one quite knows why these muscle cells “go wild,” but they’re almost always harmless—fewer than 0.1 percent of fibroids become cancerous. In fact, fibroids can be ignored unless they are causing heavy periods or pelvic pain. If this is the case, your doctor may prescribe an oral contraceptive

(to lighten your flow) or an anti-inflammatory drug stronger than the over-the-counter stuff. For the rare, more serious case, she may want to remove them surgically.



Docs can spot fibroids during an ultrasound.

Have a question for Lisa Callahan, M.D.? Nothing is too personal! Log on to Self.com/health to submit a query or browse through our health Q&A database. Dr. Callahan is the author of *The Fitness Factor* (The Lyons Press).

