Occupational Health Department

University of Huddersfield

**Managing Mental wellbeing and Stress in the workplace**

**Aims and Objectives**

* Look at what mental wellbeing is
* Raise your awareness of the causes of stress and its impact on wellbeing
* Know how to recognise the signs and symptoms of stress
* Advice on techniques to help manage your wellbeing and stress
* Empowering you to manage your wellbeing both at home and work

**Wellbeing definition:**

“A positive state of mind and body, feeling safe and able to cope, with a sense of connection with people, communities and the wider environment.” (Department of Health 2011)

‘The state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy’. (Oxford dictionary)

**Stress Definition:**

Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that "demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize." (Mind Tools)

**What is work related stress?**



HSE's formal definition of work related stress is:

"The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work.”

**Pressure or stress?**

**Pressure**

* Most people react well to a normal amount of pressure and this is seen as a positive thing that we all need:
* It can help concentration
* Helps you perform well in challenging situations
* Pressure is balanced – with time off for relaxation and actually enhances our wellbeing

**Stress**

* Stressor is constant with no time off for relaxation
* Challenges are outside of your ability
* Can lead to health and emotional problems

**Some of the causes of stress**

Here is a list of some of the many things that can cause a person to become stressed:

* Death of a partner, friend or family member
* Divorce of relationship breakdown
* Loss of employment
* Serious debts
* Major changes at work
* Disagreements with family members of friends
* Legal problems
* Health problems
* Getting married
* New employment
* Change in living conditions

**Symptoms of Stress**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Physical symptoms**   * Headaches * High blood pressure * Stomach problems * Sweating, dizziness, dry mouth * Nausea * Tired all the time or difficulty in sleeping * Breathlessness, palpitations, fainting * Tingling, pins and needles * Skin rashes | **Psychological symptoms**   * Tense, irritable * Anxiousness * Low mood, low self esteem * Apathy * Loss of interest in others * Feeling bad * Loss of humour * Feel you have nobody to confide in * Fear of diseases * Fear of failure * Sense of dread | **Behavioural Symptoms**   * Forgetfulness/poor concentration * Outbursts – short temper * Tearfulness * Increase use if alcohol, smoking, caffeine * Altered eating habits * Withdraw/avoid situations * Become unreasonable * Clumsiness * Rushing around * Inability to relax * Self-neglect * Poor decision making or a difficulty in making decisions * Denial of problems |

**Managing your own wellbeing and stress at work**

**Identify your triggers:** Working out what triggers stress for you can help you anticipate problems and think of ways to solve them. Even if you can't avoid these situations, being prepared can help.

**Manage your time**: Proper time and priority management can reduce a lot of workplace stress. Set yourself SMART goals and each day by making a to-do list of tasks. Prioritize the list according to tasks you must do, those you would like to do, and those that can wait. Don’t schedule too much. And build in time for interruptions.

**Take a break and Relax**: Hourly mini-breaks during which you stretch your shoulders, back, and neck can provide physical stress relief. This in turn can reduce mental stress. Being well-rested and relaxed can increase your ability to deal with difficult situations at work.

**Be realistic**: Stop promising to do more than you can handle. If people are making unreasonable or unrealistic demands on you, be prepared to tell them how you feel and say no.

**Eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly**: A healthy diet rich in whole foods, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein may reduce stress. Consuming lots of caffeine, sugar, and alcohol can increase it. Many studies have found exercise reduces stress. Aerobic exercise like running, swimming, or brisk walking, works best for most people. Yoga, Pilates, tai chi, or simple stretching also can help by bringing about a calmer, meditative state.

### **Communicate**: Talking to your line manager about your problem or concerns may prompt them to treat you in a more positive and constructive manner. Your line manager may find it helpful to undertake a **Stress Risk assessment** with you and formulate an action plan to address any identified issues and ensure you are adequately supported in your work role. If you do not feel comfortable with this, consider HR or Occupational Health as alternatives. Also, talking with a family member or friend outside of work about the issues that cause your stress at work can help you put things in perspective, explore solutions and ways to cope together.

### **Initiate positive working relationships:** the better our relationships are at work, the happier and more productive we're going to be.

### **Get help:** If you’ve tried these self-help methods but continue to be highly stressed, get help from a professional such as your GP or counsellor.

### Always remember that it helps to maintain a positive attitude in any situation at work.

### **Useful Links**

### [www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress)

### [www.mind.org.uk/work](http://www.mind.org.uk/work)

### [www.hse.gov.uk/stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress)

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