

OH&S Series

Edition 1: Stress

We all know the importance of maintaining good health and well being.

The FSU through a series of upcoming bulletins will assist in providing you with additional information on how you can identify work related symptoms, hazards and risks that may impact on your well being.

We will also include steps and procedures on how to resolve any issues around health and safety in your workplace.

Welcome to edition 1.

In an occupational health and safety sense, stress is essentially a misfit between a employee's needs and capabilities, and what the workplace offers and demands.

A "good job" usually involves a measure of positive stimuli, which encourages the employee to perform well and gain job satisfaction as a result. On the other hand, many jobs involve negative factors and create unwanted pressure. This is the process we call "stress"

Stress is a natural reaction to excessive pressure. It's the name we give to the physical or emotional reactions that we experience when we feel unable to cope with the pressures or demands upon us.

It isn't a disease, but if stress is excessive and goes on for some time, it can lead to mental and physical ill health.

Work related stress is caused by a poor match between us and our work, by conflicts between our roles at work and outside it, and by not having a reasonable degree of control over our own work and our own life. Stress at work can be caused by multiple of stressors.

It's Not Your Fault!

Most people react to the same kinds of stress in similar or identical ways.

Being affected by work-related stress is not a sign of personal weakness.

It is also common for management to blame workers for being stressed or to talk about the need to have "better coping skills". We are often told that we are stressed because we don't know how to relax or that we are poor at time management.

Stressors

- » Work overload and underload
- » Lack of clear job description, or chain of command
- » No recognition, or reward, for good job performance
- » No opportunity to voice complaints
- » Too many responsibilities, but little authority or decision making capacity
- » Unpleasant or hazardous physical work conditions
- » Uncooperative or unsupportive superiors, co-employees, or subordinates
- » No control, or pride, over the finished product of your work
- » Job insecurity, no permanence of position
- » Exposure to violence, threats, workplace bullying or prejudice
- » No opportunity to utilize personal talents or abilities effectively
- » Any combination of the above

Often, little or nothing is done to remove the real cause of work related stress or to put the responsibility for safe and healthy workplaces where it belongs – with employer's and management.

Work related stress is a major health and safety issue across a range of industry sectors and workplaces.

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While some jobs, such as hospital and emergency services, air traffic control, social work and teaching, are more often associated with stress, there are few working environments that are immune from it. Therefore the need to prevent work related stress must be acknowledged and addressed in all jobs and industries.

Health and safety problems arise when we are continually exposed to stressors at work and feel that we cannot escape or avoid them.

Human beings react to the external world through complex physical, biochemical and psychological systems, which interact with and affect each other. What happens to the body affects how we feel and think and our mental state can directly affect the way our body functions.

All these reactions and effects can have further detrimental social effect – poor relationships with others at home, at work and in the community which may ultimately break down.

How can stress make us feel?

When we are exposed to chronic and prolonged workrelated stress, we may experience physical and psychological symptoms, such as:

- » Headaches, tension, dizziness, faint
- » Backaches and other muscular aches and pains
- » Cramps in the neck, shoulders or arms
- » Poor memory, difficulty in concentrating
- » Feeling frustrated, irritable or angry
- » Feeling weepy or tearful
- » Loss of energy and motivation

- » Feeling anxious, helpless or afraid
- » Apathy and hopelessness
- » Changes in appetite and weight (loss or gain)
- » Sleeping difficulties (insomnia, fatigue)
- » Continual tiredness, even exhaustion
- » Generally feeling worn out or run down
- » Loss of self confidence



Can stress be good?

Some people claim that stress can motivate us and improve job performance.

While it is desirable to have jobs and workplaces which are interesting, stimulating or challenging, where there is excessive and negative stress there will be health and safety effects which are not good for anyone.

For more information contact the FSU, your local workplace representative or your organiser.