

## Managing Stress at Work

**Work-related stress is a growing problem in every workplace which not only affects the health and wellbeing of employees but the overall productivity of organisations.**

**Work-related stress arises when the demands and pressures upon an employee or upon a team exceed their capacity and capability to cope.**

**Work-related stress is the second-most compensated illness/injury in Australia, after musculoskeletal injuries.**

**That's why it's incredibly important for employers to work hard on managing and reducing workplace-stress for their workforce and provide staff with proactive support to better cope and resolve workplace stress when it strikes.**

### ***Physical Symptoms of stress***

- Fatigue
- Muscular tension
- Headaches
- Heart palpitations
- Sleeping difficulties, such as insomnia
- Gastrointestinal upsets, such as diarrhoea or constipation
- Dermatological disorders

### ***Psychological symptoms of stress***

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Discouragement
- Irritability
- Pessimism
- Feelings of being overwhelmed and unable to cope
- Cognitive difficulties, such as a reduced ability to concentrate or make decisions

### ***Behavioural Symptoms of stress***

- An increase in sick days or absenteeism
- Aggression
- Diminished creativity and initiative
- A drop in work performance
- Problems with interpersonal relationships
- Mood swings and irritability
- Lower tolerance of frustration and impatience
- Disinterest
- Isolation

### ***Work-related causes of stress***

A risk management approach will identify which of the following stressors exist in your own workplace and what causes them:

- Organisation culture
- Bad management practices
- Job content and demands
- Physical work environment
- Relationships at work
- Change management
- Lack of support
- Role conflict
- Trauma



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### **Other risk factors**

- Long hours or unreasonably heavy workloads
- Tight deadlines
- Changes within the organisation or to a worker's duties
- Job insecurity or inconsistent hours
- Lack of autonomy and over-supervision
- Boring work
- Insufficient skills or training for the job
- Inadequate or unsafe working environment
- Lack of proper resources or equipment
- Few promotional opportunities
- Bullying, harassment or discrimination
- Poor relationships with colleagues or bosses
- Crisis incidents, such as an armed hold-up or workplace death.

### **What employers can do**

Business owners and managers need to take a proactive and supportive approach to minimising and resolving workplace stress. This will improve the productivity and performance of their staff as well as lower the risk or impact of absenteeism or workplace injury claims.

Some ways that managers and business owners can reduce workplace stress:

- Set realistic expectations of staff and reward them when they meet them.
- Ask staff how they can be better supported to perform when expectations or deadlines aren't met.
- Build a safe, supportive and cooperative workplace culture.
- Provide opportunities for regular, genuine feedback from staff to team leaders and business managers.
- Support the positive mental health and wellbeing of staff, through training programs, access to a counselling service and ongoing personal and professional development.

### **Self-help for the individual**

A person suffering from work-related stress can help themselves in a number of ways, including:

- Think about the changes you need to make at work in order to reduce your stress levels and then take action.

Some changes you can manage yourself, while others will need the cooperation of others.

- Talk over your concerns with your employer or human resources manager.
- Make sure you are well organised. List your tasks in order of priority. Schedule the most difficult tasks of each day for times when you are fresh, such as first thing in the morning.
- Take care of yourself. Eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly.
- Consider the benefits of regular relaxation. You could try meditation or yoga.
- Make sure you have enough free time to yourself every week.
- Don't take out your stress on loved ones. Instead, tell them about your work problems and ask for their support and suggestions.
- Drugs, such as alcohol and tobacco, won't alleviate stress and can cause additional health problems or make a bad situation at work even worse. Avoid excessive drinking and smoking.

### **What Hunterlink can do**

We know it can be a daunting process to pick up the phone when you are already dealing with workplace stress, but please know that we are here for you 24/7 with our fully qualified and registered counsellors ready to help you anytime of the day or night.

We provide confidential telephone or face-to-face support sessions, as well as access to these services for immediate family members.

Remember, you don't have to be in a crisis situation to contact Hunterlink.

