

**Did you know?**

## Stress

**Stress is how people describe the way they feel when it all seems too much, when they are overloaded and don't feel able to cope.**

Some stress is needed for certain challenges but too much stress, especially when it occurs every day, can cause physical and emotional problems.

The stresses we face in our everyday lives such as deadlines at work or money troubles don't require the 'fight or flight' response, but they do release the same stress hormones, and this natural reaction can damage health and reduce our ability to cope.

**Causes of stress at work include: Other causes of stress:**

- *Pressure to perform at work*
- *Money worries*
- *Too much pressure – unrealistic deadlines*
- *Arguments*
- *Poor working conditions*
- *Family conflicts*
- *Work that's too difficult or not demanding enough*
- *Divorce/marriage*
- *Job insecurity and the threat of unemployment*
- *Bereavement*
- *Bullying, racial or sexual harassment*
- *Unemployment*
- *Too much interference with your private, social or family life*
- *Moving house*

When facing challenges, certain body responses happen to prepare your body for a 'fight or flight' response. Your heart beats faster, chemicals such as adrenaline are released into your bloodstream and you become more alert, boosting your blood pressure and releasing sugars into your bloodstream creating a heightened, or stressed, state that prepares your body for optimum performance.

## When are you most at risk of stress?

Stress is felt when a person believes that they aren't able to cope with the demands of their work, for example being given a tight deadline, a job that you feel you don't have the skills for or little/no control over the task. Because everyone is different, stress affects people in different ways. So what one person finds stressful might not feel stressful to someone else.

## What should your employer be doing?

As with any workplace hazard, your employer should be helping to reduce stress in the workplace and if this is not possible then they should carry out a risk assessment to look at different work activities and assess the risk of stress-related ill health. Once your employer has carried out a risk assessment then they must make sure that:

- *Control measures are used, for example*
- *Reviewing workloads, work patterns and work environments and making sure that you are able to have a say in how you do your job*
- *Making sure that you know what support is in place and how to get that help*
- *Providing you with relevant information and training on how to spot signs of stress and what you can do to reduce or manage it*
- *If necessary, carrying out health surveillance (health checks)*

## What health checks do I have?

It is important to pick up early signs of stress. Stress is not an illness but if it becomes too much, or continues over a long period of time, mental and physical illness may develop. You may be given a questionnaire to fill in or asked some simple questions about your work, including how it's organised or managed, and how much control you have over it. If your answers show that you may have symptoms of stress then you may need to be referred to someone else for further checks or help.

## What can I do to protect myself from stress?

Getting rid of all stress from your life is impossible. However, using some stress management techniques can help you to control some of its harmful effects. This might include following a healthy diet, getting regular exercise, and making time for relaxation without any interruptions.

### **Other tips include:**

- *Getting a good night's sleep*
- *Quitting smoking*
- *Using alcohol/caffeine only in moderation*
- *Setting realistic goals for yourself, your job and your family*
- *Developing a good support team*

## What are the symptoms and what do I need to do?

**The warning signs of stress can vary as everyone is different, but can include:**

- **Physical** – headaches, indigestion, palpitations, raised blood pressure, heart disease, stomach problems
- **Mental** – indecision, failing memory, loss of concentration, making mistakes, depression
- **Behavioural** – feeling unsociable, lack of appetite/sex drive, poor sleep, eating, drinking and/or smoking more, inability to concentrate properly – forgetting things
- **Emotional** – irritable, lack of confidence, problems at home, relationship breakdown

If you have answered yes to one or more of these questions then you need to speak to your manager, the occupational health nurse or your GP as soon as possible.

**For general advice you can contact CBH on 0845 873 7726**

## Useful links

HSE website at: [www.hse.gov.uk/stress/](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/)

Mind website at: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

CBH website at: [www.cbhscheme.com](http://www.cbhscheme.com)

Fit for Work website at: [fitforwork.org](http://fitforwork.org)