

Stress in the workplace

Research indicates that being in employment has a positive effect on mental wellbeing. It can give a sense of purpose and self-worth as well as providing an opportunity for learning new skills and meeting new people, whilst providing a degree of financial security. However certain factors in the modern workplace can cause feelings of stress and increase the risk of an employee developing a mental health problem, or even risk worsening an existing condition.

Risk factors include a lack of support, heavy workloads, long hours, unclear role, bullying and a lack of career progression.

Circumstances and events outside the workplace such as financial problems, relationship issues, physical illness and bereavement can also impact on an employee's wellbeing in the workplace.

What is stress?

'The adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them' Health and Safety Executive NI (HSENI).

Feelings of stress are common, normal and experienced by everyone in certain situations, for example going to an interview, change in your working environment or pressure to work to deadlines. A certain amount of stress can actually be helpful however when it becomes intense, lasts a long time and starts to interfere with our daily lives it can have a detrimental effect on our mental wellbeing.

Who is at risk of stress?

- Everyone is at risk.
- Almost one in every three employees experience a mental ill health problem in any one year.
- 91 million working days are lost each year to mental ill health within the workplace.
- Stress is the biggest single cause of absenteeism in work after musculoskeletal disorders.

Signs and symptoms of stress

Stress affects people in a variety of ways but the symptoms can usually be grouped under four headings.

Thinking

We may think things like 'everyone else is coping', 'it's my fault', 'something bad is going to happen', 'I won't be able to cope' or 'I feel bad so it must be bad'.

Feelings

Anxious, fearful, worried, nervous, restless, agitated.

Behaviour

Avoiding certain people, places, situations; not going out; only going to places at certain times, only going with someone else or leaving early; increased use of alcohol or drugs.

AWARE
OVERCOMING DEPRESSION.
CHANGING LIVES.

Physical symptoms

Headaches, muscles and/or chest pain, sweating, tingling, numbness, shaking, dizziness, rapid or shallow breathing, rapid heartbeat or palpitations, dry mouth, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea.

How does stress affect us at work?

If you are under undue stress you may notice some or all of the following changes:

- Lack of productivity
- Difficulty concentrating
- Inability to meet deadlines
- Poor timekeeping
- Taking time off work
- Being irritable with colleagues or even having angry outbursts
- Loss of interest in your work or colleagues
- Inability to say no
- Working longer hours
- Taking on more and more even though you are already under pressure

Self-help strategies at work

- Get organised – make a daily ‘to do list’ and work through it
- Be realistic in what you can achieve
- Don’t be afraid to ask for help
- Deal with problems as they arise and don’t let them mount up
- Give yourself credit for what you do
- Be assertive – sometimes it’s ok to say ‘no’
- Take time out for regular breaks

Remember - there are challenges in every job and it is important to be prepared for setbacks.

Looking after your mental health

It is important to have a good work life balance and be aware that what you do

outside work is important as this can impact on your general mental wellbeing in work and vice-versa. The **5 Ways to Wellbeing - Take 5** (New Economics Foundation) are the most evidenced-based ways of looking after your mental health.

Connect – with the people around you, your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Think of these relationships as the cornerstones of your life and spend time developing them.

Be active – Go for a walk or run, cycle, play a game, garden or dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity that you enjoy; one that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

Keep learning – Try something new, rediscover an old hobby or sign up for a course. Set a challenge you will enjoy. Learning new things can increase your confidence and be fun.

Take notice – Be observant, look for something beautiful or unusual. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

Give – Do something nice for someone, volunteer your time or join a community group. Seeing yourself and your happiness linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and will create connections to the people around you.

T: 028 9035 7820/028 7126 0602

www.aware-ni.org