

# Stress Management for Managers



**“Exercise relieves stress. Nothing relieves exercise.”**

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**“If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment.”**

Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (121 AD–180 AD)

**“If you ask what is the single most important key to longevity, I would have to say it is avoiding worry, stress and tension. And if you didn't ask me, I'd still have to say it.”**

George Burns (1896–1996)

If there's one piece of wellbeing advice we probably hear more than any other, it's that we need to manage our stress levels. We hear it everywhere, we read it everywhere. We know it's true.

However, actually doing this may not be the easiest thing in the world when you feel you are caught up in a stress cycle, but with a little thought and small steps, then it is possible to break that cycle and significantly reduce your stress levels.

If you'd like to discuss any of the issues raised in this Helpsheet, the **ciC 24-hour Confidential Care Adviceline** is available for practical and emotional support.

## What is stress?



How we work, what we do, why we do it and how we are supported in our work helps to maintain and promote individual health and well-being in the workplace. When insufficient job design, role description and organisation of workload and support fail then our ability to work competently and successfully can be impaired. As a manager, the stress can be two-fold as we have to manage and monitor our stress levels, and that of our staff.

Stress arises where work demands of various types and combinations exceed the person's capacity and capability to cope. The ramifications can be high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and other indicators of organisational under-performance – including human error and low morale. Our individual ability to cope and be resilient fluctuates depending on our character, resources and what else is happening in our life.

Pressure turns into stress when you feel unable to cope. People have different ways of reacting to stress, so a situation that feels stressful to one person may in fact be motivating to another.

Many of life's demands can cause stress, especially work, relationships and money problems, and when you feel stressed, it can affect everything you do.

Everyone needs a certain amount of stress to live well. It's what gets you out of bed in the morning and gives you the vitality and zest to do all sorts of things. Without it, we would have no motivation for many of life's chores.

Stress becomes a problem or distress when there's too much or too little. A lack of stress means your body is understimulated, leaving you feeling bored and isolated. In an effort to find stimulation, many people do things that are harmful to themselves (such as taking drugs) or society (for instance, committing a crime).

Too much stress, on the other hand, can result in a range of health problems including headaches, stomach upsets, high blood pressure, and even a stroke or heart disease. It can also cause feelings of distrust, anger, anxiety and fear which in turn can destroy relationships at home and at work.

## What are the symptoms of stress?

What are the symptoms of stress to look for in ourselves and our work colleagues? Here are a few examples:

- **Difficulty sleeping.**
- **Tearfulness.**
- **Exhaustion.**
- **Irritability.**
- **Neck or back pain.**
- **Obsessive behaviour.**
- **Heart palpitations.**
- **Panic attacks.**
- **Feelings of pointlessness or futility.**
- **Struggling to focus and concentrate.**
- **Increased drinking/smoking/eating.**

Stress is generally categorised into six main areas:

- **Job-based stress:** Long hours, tight deadlines and being overworked.



- **Role-based stress:** Unclear role and job definition, potentially leading to a mismatch of skills and ability.
- **Relationships:** Difficult relationships at any level can lead to mistrust, competitiveness and difficult dynamics.
- **Career stress:** Lack of recognition, under-promotion, confused expectations.
- **Organisational structure and climate:** The people companies attract sometimes need an assessment on what works and what doesn't. Other factors in this category include autonomy, influence and reward.
- **Work/life balance:** Imbalances between the two impact our abilities to cope and stay healthy.

## Coping with stress



Once stress has been monitored and recognised in yourself and/or your staff you can think about the best way of managing stress. Monitoring stress levels and recording tipping points, peaks and troughs during the day and how feelings fluctuate can be a useful starting point to then work out how best to support yourself and others. Writing your feelings down or expressing your emotions in other ways such as with friends, family or professional help, can help de-brief and put stress points in perspective, so you can focus on how to tackle stress in a useful way. Organising and recording your week, identifying your goals and enjoying and marking your successes can also help, and are encouraged for the rest of your team too.

For your employees, whilst being boundaried enough with your time to protect your stress levels, ensure you are available for regular one-to-one meetings or that people feel comfortable talking to you about problems as they arise. You can check your relationships with your staff by regularly conducting 360 degree feedback sessions through HR, as well as giving yourself space to reflect on your working relationships.

Making changes to your work and lifestyle may prove beneficial, particularly if you can ask for help from your manager as well as supporting your staff with their needs. A good start is to assess what someone's coping mechanisms are in periods of stress. What helps and what hinders? What support do you have both in work and life outside of work, and how can you ask for any help you may need?

Striking a balance can often mean stress is diminished through regular breaks, interactions which are away from work problems and proper lunch breaks. If you're concerned that these may prove 'inefficient' when you have a full plate,

often people get more done through less procrastination and avoidance strategies when the right balance is struck.

Keeping healthy has an effect on how we process stressful situations too. Diet and exercise are key to feeling resilient and healthy enough to tackle stressful situations as and when they arise. 30 minutes of moderate exercise a day is generally recommended and can be combined with breaks. Find an exercise that's right for you so that you look forward to it rather than it prove to be another source of stress.

No-one can run on an empty stomach but what we put in has an effect on our mood. Sugary and fatty foods are a regular response to time pressured breaks and a quick hit of energy, but foods that provide more regular sustained energy such as cereals, grains and nuts will help take the edge off your energy peaking and troughing. The same applies to caffeine levels.

Drinking, smoking, overeating and taking drugs are often unhealthy reactions to stress and also need to be monitored. When stressed and overwhelmed, breathing exercises, stepping away from the source of stress for a break and asking for support can be much more healthy and useful ways of calming yourself and others.

We all need sleep, but this can be effected as adrenaline and cortisol levels increase when under stress, which may mean we need longer to rest and relax before turning in for the night. Take your sleep seriously, and develop a bedtime routine if it helps you wind down. Warm baths, milky drinks and activities that are calm and peaceful can help achieve a restful night's slumber.

## Resources

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

[www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Stress/Pages/Introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Stress/Pages/Introduction.aspx)

[www.bbc.co.uk/health/emotional\\_health/mental\\_health/mind\\_stress.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/emotional_health/mental_health/mind_stress.shtml)



### Further help and information

CiC – Supporting Organisations

[www.well-online.co.uk](http://www.well-online.co.uk)

24-hour Confidential Care Adviceline, providing emotional and practical support.

(This helpsheet is intended for informational purposes only and does not represent any form of clinical diagnosis. While every effort has been made to ensure that the content is accurate, relevant and current, CiC accepts no liability for any errors or omissions contained herein. The list of books is provided for interest only and CiC is not responsible for their availability, accuracy, or content.)

