



Managing workplace stress

Addressing psychosocial hazards keeps workers healthy

Workplace stress is a serious health and safety issue that affects both the mind and body. Stress can arise when job demands exceed a worker's ability to meet them, especially when they have limited control or support. Over time, this ongoing strain can lead to stress-related occupational illnesses such as anxiety, depression, or cardiovascular disease.

Factors such as heavy workloads, unclear job expectations, or poor work-life balance can contribute to stress at work. Chronic stress can affect both physical and mental health and increase the likelihood of mistakes or workplace incidents.

Common causes of workplace stress

Stress can be triggered by many factors, often related to job design or organizational culture. Common causes include:

- Workload: Too much or too little work, unrealistic deadlines, or repetitive tasks.
- Lack of control: Limited input into decisions or flexibility in how work is done.
- Limited role clarity: Unclear job expectations or conflicting demands.
- Career development: Job insecurity or limited opportunities for advancement.
- Team dynamics: Conflict, harassment, or lack of support.
- Organizational climate: Poor communication, limited recognition, or lack of fairness.
- Work-life imbalance: Difficulty disconnecting or balancing personal responsibilities.
- Working conditions: Exposure to noise, poor ergonomics, or unpleasant environments.

How stress impacts health and safety

Stress affects everyone differently, but over time, chronic stress can take a significant toll. Physically, it can cause headaches, muscle tension, high blood pressure, fatigue, and a weakened immune system. Mentally, it can lead to anxiety, irritability, forgetfulness, and difficulty concentrating.

Workers experiencing ongoing stress may also engage in unhealthy coping behaviours, such as substance use, increasing the risk of illness or injury at work.

Chronic stress has been linked to long-term conditions such as cardiovascular disease, insomnia, obesity, and depression.

Steps to manage workplace stress

Step 1: Get informed about mental health

Mental health affects every employee and fluctuates over time. Understanding how stress develops and how to talk about it is the first step in prevention.

Step 2: Manage psychosocial hazards

Psychosocial hazards are aspects of the work environment that can harm mental well-being, such as bullying, isolation, or unmanageable workloads. Use the RACE Model to address them:

- **Recognize** hazards in your workplace
- **Assess** their impact
- **Control** the risks with appropriate measures
- **Evaluate** whether controls are effective

Step 3: Create an action plan

Develop a plan to improve psychological health and safety. Set goals, monitor progress, and encourage open dialogue. Include supports such as peer check-ins, workload reviews, and access to mental health resources.

By understanding and managing workplace stress, organizations can reduce the risk of occupational disease, improve morale, and create safer, healthier teams.

How Workplace Safety North can help

Workplace Safety North provides mental health training and resources to help workplaces address stress and support mental well-being.

For more information, [contact your local health and safety specialist](#).