



Stress at Work

Into every life a little stress must fall... that's a given. The nature of work is changing at whirlwind speed, and change can lead to stress. Job stress poses a very real threat to the health and safety of employees.

Recent studies have shown that 25% of people believe their job to be the number one source of stress in their life, and 75% of people believe that job stress is worse now than even ten years ago. Continual demands placed on us can take their toll.

Job stress can be described as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of a job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the individual. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury in an otherwise healthy person.

Don't confuse job stress with challenge. Challenge is supposed to be energizing and motivates us to learn, grow, and master our jobs. When challenge is met, you should feel relaxed and satisfied in your work. The importance of challenge in our lives is what leads us to say, "a little stress is good for you."

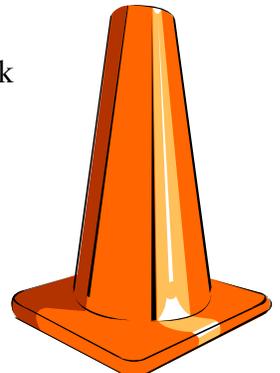
Job Stress is when demands cannot be met, relaxation is replaced by exhaustion, and you feel continually stressed without satisfaction.

Two variables contribute to job stress: the characteristics of individual employees, and job working conditions. The first accounts for the differences in how people handle challenges; what is stressful for one person may not have the same effect on another. In contrast, less-than-ideal working conditions tend to affect everyone. Identifying and improving poor working conditions have the greatest potential for broad reductions in job stress.

Since the characteristics of individual employees can vary so widely, the focus here is on job working conditions. Identifying and improving poor working conditions have the greatest potential for broad reductions in job stress.

The following are typical problems areas where job stress can originate, along with some suggestions for prevention:

Task Design - Heavy workloads, infrequent rest and stretch breaks, long work hours, poor workstation design and ergonomics, routine and/or repetitive tasks, and those that do not utilize fully an employee's potential, can be problematic. Simple changes to any of these, involving the employee's input, can result in reduced stress.



Management Style - Lack of participation by employees in decision-making and poor communication within the work area can cause feelings of apathy and disconnect. Improving these, to include representations of all concerned parties, can result in reduced stress.

Interpersonal Relationships - Lack of co-worker and supervisor support, and poor social environment. We are all social creatures who need feedback and camaraderie, and a workplace culture that supports these can reduce stress.

Work Roles - Conflicting or uncertain job expectations, too much responsibility, and “too many hats.” Good matching of employees to the job is essential, and effective communication can minimize problems if they arise.

Career Concerns - Job insecurity, poor growth and promotion opportunity, rapid job changes without adequate preparation. These too can be alleviated through good employee-management communication.

Environmental Conditions - Unpleasant or uncomfortable physical working conditions, including crowding, noise, heat, poor air quality, and workstation design problems. Consult with area planners, Facilities Management, and Environmental Health and Safety, for ideas toward improvement in these areas.

