

Stress and Well Being

Introduction

This topic covers your well being and how to identify and deal with stress and pressure.

Your well being is important to both you and NHS 24.

Work can have a positive impact on our health and wellbeing. As well as a financial reward it gives many of us self esteem, companionship and status. Healthy and well-motivated employees can have an equally positive impact on the productivity and effectiveness of the service.

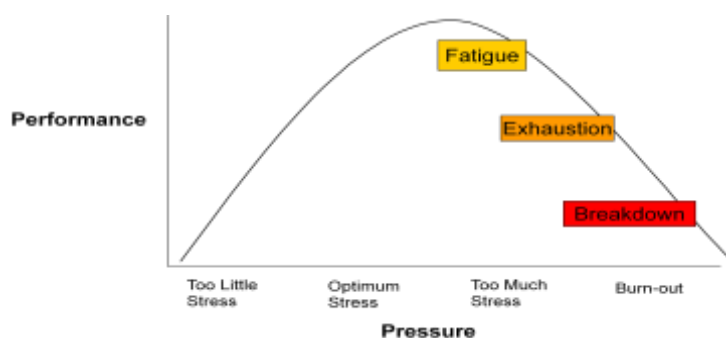
In this section we'll look at what the difference is between pressure and stress and how they can affect your performance at work.

Pressure is a normal reaction to events and isn't always a negative. It can keep us motivated and makes people work well and effectively.

Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them at work

Note that the word 'stress' is often used incorrectly, as is the term 'stressed out'. This means that people's perception of stress, which is a serious issue, has become watered down.

There is a direct relationship between performance and pressure.



If pressure is low, it results in low motivation and performance as pressure increases, challenge leads to 'peak performance'. As it increases further the person, if they can no longer cope, their performance declines rapidly and results in 'burn out'.

Things that may cause stress

There are several factors that can contribute to rising stress levels.

They cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. In other words, the six HSE Management Standards cover the primary sources of stress at work.

These are:

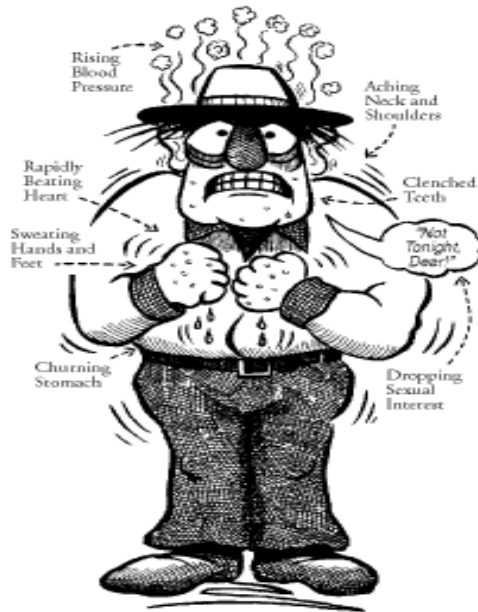
- **Demands** – this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.
- **Control** – how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
- **Support** – this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
- **Relationships** – this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
- **Role** – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures they do not have conflicting roles.
- **Change**– how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated within an organisation.

But bear in mind that other things may cause stress including:

- Relationships
- Financial pressures
- Health concerns
- Change in responsibilities – looking after children, elderly parents
- Insecurity
- Housing

Signs and symptoms of stress

There are many signs and symptoms of stress which can range from physical to emotional.



Physical

- Increased susceptibility to minor infections
- Nervous stumbling speech
- Persistent headaches
- Fatigue
- Sweating
- Sleeplessness
- Indigestion

Emotional

- Anxiety
- Low self esteem
- Crying
- Withdrawal
- De-motivation
- Anger
- Feelings of hopelessness/helplessness
- Temper outbursts
- Depression

In practice, the signs and symptoms of stress may show themselves in a change in behaviour.

Such changes might include:

- Increased smoking, caffeine or alcohol use
- Frequent irritability and aggression
- Accidents at home/work
- Arriving late/leaving early
- Extended lunches
- Absenteeism/Presenteeism
- Not taking lunch breaks
- Working at weekends
- Not taking holidays
- Working when ill
- Taking work home
- Withdrawal from others

Some other causes of stress

Some colleagues are often faced with handling difficult/complex , situations and ones where the third party is angry, over bearing, rude, aggressive, forceful

You may require additional training please speak with your Manager who will help you arrange training as part of your Personal Development.

Home working and/or Lone working can produce different types of stress too.

These include:

- Isolation - missing out on emotional support from, and interaction with other colleagues.
- Over-reliance on technology, and difficulties in getting issues resolved.
- Fears about career progression – 'out of sight, out of mind'.
- Working excessive or unreasonable hours because work and home blend into one.

Change

Change involves loss and 'letting go'. It threatens the sense of being in control and requires adjustment and new learning.

Our response to change often follows the 5 phases of the change curve:

1. usually starts with **shock** followed quite quickly by
2. **denial**
3. Starts with **emotional turmoil** caused by the realisation that the loss has occurred. Timescales for this phase can differ from person-to-person.

4. Most individuals then start to 'let go' and **accept** the inevitable as they start to see the possibilities for the future.
5. People start to test out new things, adjust and **integrate** with the new situation.

REMEMBER:

Support is needed in successfully adjusting to the new situation. If you are unable to adjust successfully and resist the change, the transition will be ineffective.

You may be going through more than one issue. These may be both home- and work-related; therefore the recovery time will be longer.

Every individual is different and the time period for each phase on the change curve will vary from person to person.

NHS 24 are always here to help you and will work with you to provide support and guidance. You are not on your own.

Later on there is a useful list of contacts and resources to help you.

Stress-creating beliefs

Here are five major stress-creating beliefs listed below. Look at each one to see an alternative view which you may like to take on board to help you when dealing with stressful situations.

Stress Creating Belief	Alternative View
I must be perfect	People who are driven to be perfect are doomed to failure
I must hurry up	It is important to pace yourself, take adequate breaks and concentrate fully on one task at a time
I must please others	Don't take on other people's problems at the expense of your own work
I must try and work harder	Carry out your tasks correctly and accurately, looking for extra work that is not there leads to stress and wasted time
I must be strong during change	It is necessary to through a staged process to changes as you read previously. Adopting a macho attitude can lead to problems further down the line.

Under pressure people can think in one of two ways:

“I can't cope with this – I may as well give up”

“Now, I know that this will be difficult, but I can see where it's leading. I'll give it a go”

This is an example of negative thinking vs. constructive thinking

When under pressure take a few deep breaths, a few seconds to think about the situation and try to think constructively.

Control and Influence

In life we all have areas of concern. There are some areas you can directly influence and others you have no real control over.

Consider to what extent you think you can directly influence the following issues?

Your health

Completely – Partially - Not at all

Work problems

Completely – Partially - Not at all

Global Warming

Completely – Partially Not at all

Fluctuating Fuel costs

Completely – Partially - Not at all

Relationships

Completely – Partially - Not at all

Government

Completely – Partially - Not at all

There is no correct or incorrect answer.

Your areas of influence are where you can actually make a difference, so if you have identified 'Your health', 'Relationships' and 'Work problems', you might be right. Although you may have partial influence on others, stick to what you can do.

Steps you can take to manage pressure

As explained previously not all stress is bad.

A certain amount of stress is necessary to keep us motivated and focussed. Often the lack of stress is a stressor in itself. If correctly handled, stress can be used as a positive force.

You may not be able to avoid stress, but there are ways of controlling it. There are a number of key do's and don'ts in managing your personal stress.

Self awareness

To identify stress triggers it involves knowing where the stress is coming from. Remember - it may be from more than one source. Ask yourself, could any of the following be the triggers of your stress?

- Relationships
- Financial pressures
- Health concerns
- Change in responsibilities
- Excess workload
- Not enough workload
- Insecurity

Take steps to eliminate the source if you can.

Eating and drinking

Drink? Does it help you relax and get to sleep.

What about **over-eating too**.

- Alcohol may appear to reduce stress in the short term. However, it can quickly become a dependency and does not address the cause of stress, so don't rely on alcohol to unwind
- Eat correctly and get enough sleep. You will not be able to cope with any stress if you are physically exhausted.

Over commitment

Yes, I'll do that for you.

- Learn to sometimes say 'No'
- Don't try to please others all the time.

Communication

Well I'm afraid you're going to have to find time to do it. We're all under more pressure now, you know.

- Learn to be more assertive and challenge unreasonable demands.
- Communicate - talk things over.

- Don't get angry.
- Use constructive feedback not confrontation.
- Talk to your line manager (more information on what to do if they are the source of the problem will be discussed later).

Organisation

- Plan and prioritise. (If your workload is too heavy ask your manager what needs to take priority.)
- Get organised - clear away clutter.
- Share and delegate.
- Establish a sensible work-life balance.
- Make sure you stop for lunch and take breaks throughout the day where possible.

Facing up

- Don't avoid pressures.
- Don't go 'into denial' with a problem.
- Don't fight the inevitable, go with the flow. Some battles are ok to lose. Think 'is it worth the stress?'
- Do what's important. Ask yourself 'is this what I want to do?' If not ask yourself why?
- Share problems with others - family, friend, and colleagues.

Resilience

I sometimes feel stressed when I have to work with certain people.

- Learn to recognise stress infectious people
- Develop resiliency skills.

Self discipline

- Manage your personal finances.
- Don't take on more than you can handle. Saying no is less stressful than having far too much to do and no time to do it.
- Each day is only 24 hours long. Work smarter not longer.

Keep a stress Diary

- This can help you narrow down and identify areas that cause you stress and may help you to focus on areas that you could/should change to reduce pressure – see example below - www.mindtools.com/rs/StressDiary.



Stress Diary

- For information about stress diaries, visit www.mindtools.com/rs/StressDiary.

Date and Time	Most Recent Stressful Event Experienced	How Happy do you Feel now? (Scale -10-10)	Your Current Mood	How Effectively are you Working now? (0-10)	Fundamental Cause of the Event	How Stressed do you Feel now? (0-10)	Physical Symptom Felt During Stressful Event	How Well did you Handle the Event?

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Changing your lifestyle to reduce stress

Make sure you have regular health checks (blood pressure and cholesterol) and talk to your GP about any minor issues such as aches and pains, disturbed sleep etc.

Are there some ways you could incorporate more exercise into your daily routine?

Exercise releases endorphins and other 'happy' hormones in your body and gives you a feeling of well being.

How about trying to:

- Cycle to work
- Use stairs instead of the lift
- Take a walk instead of the car

A word of warning though, beware of rushing into major exercise routines.

Give yourself the opportunity to relax e.g. walking, reading, breathing exercises, meditation etc.

We know that different people relax in different ways so it is important to find what works for you.

Relaxation is an important factor in releasing tense muscles and clearing and calming the mind, consider using breathing exercises – you can find out more about relaxation techniques from your GP or follow this link:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/ways-relieve-stress.aspx>

Allow yourself breathing space – treat yourself to something you enjoy

Be active, it can boost your mood, self esteem and body image, improve sleep and reduce reactions to stress. Exercise has been shown to reduce anxiety and treat depression.

Eat and drink more sensibly (fresh fruit/vegetables) and drink plenty of water. Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, not only in tea/coffee but also in fizzy drinks and high energy drinks.

Get a good night's sleep

Find someone you can talk to; a partner, friend, colleague, GP or counsellor

Pace yourself – be realistic about what you can tackle and learn to say no

Some people may find spiritual practice helps either in religion or in something less structured like meditation –if can also provide the added benefit of social support

Help Available at NHS 24

It is important to the Service that you come to work, are happy to be here, are effective and you feel that you are well supported.

One of the most important steps in dealing with stress is to recognise that it's causing you a problem. There's no embarrassment or shame associated with stress.

Your line manager is there to provide help - or advise you in how to obtain help - should you need it.

If you do not wish to talk to your own line manager, you can approach other managers, HELP EAP (which you will learn about shortly), Health and Safety Leads, HR or You may also contact your Union who offer various supportive measures. For information please refer to the intranet or contact one of your local representatives

HELP EAP

Available to everybody is 'HELP' : Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)'.

This service is available to you 24/7 365 days a year, and is totally confidential. Telephone number is 0800 032 9849 You can also access the service from home, Website: www.sg.helpeap.com

HELP Employee Assistance Programme can help you tackle a range of issues. some examples include :

Managing Money - Managing debt

Work - Return to work, dealing with conflict, stress

Family Crises - Bereavement, ill health

Personal Life - Relationships, Post natal depression, Family

Illness - Terminal illness, drug/alcohol abuse

Retirement - Coping with change

Personal Crises- Divorce, abuse, miscarriage

The gives example of a few issues that 'HELP' can assist with. When you call, the service representative will listen to your questions or problem and, if possible, help you over the phone.

The service provides assistance - not just counselling.

If in doubt, just call **Freephone 0800 587 5670**

Useful contacts and resources

There are a number of places you can get help.

You can access information at your local library, Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Health and Safety Executive's 'stress' pages <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/>

You could also contact the following organisations:

- Breathing Space - <http://breathingspace.scot/> or 0800-838587
- Stress awareness - www.in-equilibrium.co.uk or 0131 476 5027
- SAMH <https://www.samh.org.uk/> 0141 530 1000
- Alcoholics Anonymous <http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk> 0800 9177650
- Narcotics Anonymous <https://ukna.org/> 0300 999 1212
- Compassionate Friends <http://www.tcf.org.uk> 0345 123 2304
- The Samaritans <http://www.samaritans.org> 08457 909090

If you are a Manager there is also a Managers Guidance which you should read.