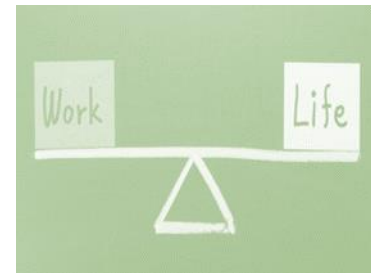


# Employees guide to stress recognition and reduction

*This guide is in line with the University's legal responsibilities for the health and welfare of its staff. The University believes that the effective management of all staff will ensure the success of the organisation and will reduce work-related stress. Where specific work practices are identified as stressors, the university will encourage the Dean of School/Director of Service to make reasonable adjustments to reduce workplace stressors. Individuals have a legal duty to take reasonable care of their own health and that of others especially if others may be adversely affected by an individual's action. Staff are strongly encouraged to discuss, at an early stage, any stress related issues with their manager, the Occupational Health Adviser or a member of Human Resources.*



*This guide should be read in conjunction with the University [Stress Management Policy](#) and [Managers' Guide to Monitoring Stress & Supporting Staff](#). It is intended to provide further information to staff on the causes of stress in the workplace and possible steps that can be taken to support staff.*

## Introduction

The aim of this guide is to provide information to all members of staff about stress, its common causes and effects and to identify actions that can be taken to lessen the harmful effects of prolonged stress. A measure of stress can be beneficial especially when it helps to motivate and stimulate an individual, however it can become a problem if the stressors become more than a person can comfortably tolerate, thereby causing distress. The result of this is often ill-health and a decrease in self-confidence, work efficiency and performance. Therefore, the early recognition of an individual's distress and an effective remedial action can benefit not only the individual concerned but also the workplace.

## What is stress?

The University adopts the definition of stress used by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), namely "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them", and which draws a clear distinction between pressure, which can be a motivating factor, and stress, which can occur when pressure becomes excessive.

### What is stress (HSE definition)

"the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them"

Stress is a state, not an illness, and where stress lasts for only a short time there is usually no lasting effect. However, if the stress is sustained over a longer period it can have a significant impact on physical and mental health, work performance, and morale. Reducing and preventing work-related stress therefore brings clear benefits to the University as well as to staff. The university has adopted the approach to the management and prevention of stress recommended by the HSE, which is based on the HSE's 'management standards'.

Stress is experienced when a person believes that demand is exceeding capacity to cope. Essentially, this reaction is experienced when a person finds it difficult to handle the pressures placed upon them. A stress reaction is an individual response and what may constitute stress for one individual may not be stressful for another. Similarly the type and severity of stress response varies from one individual to another.

## 6 key areas of causes of work related stress

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has identified six key areas that can be causes of work related stress. When considering the likelihood that a work activity could result in employees becoming stressed, it is necessary to first identify the potential hazards. The table below includes the factors identified by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) as being the most significant contributors to workplace stress.

 The HSE Management Standards <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm>

### Summary of HSE Management Standards

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 that they do not have conflicting roles
Change	How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

There is also an additional factor – personal factors - that can impact on ability to cope with work pressures. This latter factor becomes particularly relevant when conducting a stress risk assessment for a specific individual.

Personal factors	Staff are supported with any mental and physical health; bereavement or other traumatic events; dependant(s) with ill-health; financial, relationship problems etc.
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The [checklist](#), based on the HSE management standards, is intended to provide managers and staff with guidance on the practical steps they can take to identify and address potential sources of workplace stress.

## Causes of stress

There are varying sources of stress such as: family concerns; workplace relationships; work you are unable to complete or are ill equipped/trained to do; financial worries; personal and family ill-health; workload and ability to cope with it. Even positive events can be stressful e.g. holidays, weddings and moving house.

### Typical stressors at work

#### physical/environmental conditions

- excessive noise
- uncomfortable workplace temperatures
- inadequate lighting
- air pollution
- potentially harmful environments
- lack of privacy
- poorly designed equipment/workstation

#### cultural

- poor communications
- inadequate staffing levels
- lack of support
- inconsistent management style
- too little/too much supervision
- continual changes
- lack of participation in workplace decision making
- uncertainty about one's working future

#### interpersonal

- social/physical isolation
- poor relationships with manager / colleagues
- bullying and/or harassment
- frequent changes in type of leadership style

#### job content

- lack of variety
- repetitive or fragmented work
- under-usage of skills
- lack of training for type of work undertaken
- implementation of new technology
- conflicting demands of more than one manager

## Recognising stress in yourself and others

Stress can present itself through a wide range of physical, behavioural and/or psychological symptoms. **Common symptoms** include:

**Physical:** headaches; high blood pressure; sleep disturbances; nausea; tearfulness; muscular aches and pains; susceptibility to infections with an increase in cold/flu type illnesses etc. When stress is experienced over long periods the acute stress reaction may evolve into a chronic condition with the associated concerns of:- persistent high blood pressure; development of digestive disorders e.g. stomach ulcers; there is also an increased risk of strokes and heart attacks

**Behavioural:** poor concentration; memory loss; irritability; substance abuse (i.e. increase in intake of alcohol, coffee, tobacco); lateness; an increase in absenteeism; reduced work performance; more accidents at work and at home; an inability to achieve a good performance at work despite good intentions and plans; withdrawal from usual social contacts

**Psychological:** depression; misplaced anxiety; apathy; lack of motivation; poor concentration and memory; low self-esteem; fear of failure



[HSE guidance on work related stress](#)

## Stress reduction and management

If any of the aforementioned relate to you, the following solutions may help reduce or make you more resilient to stress.

### Employee responsibilities

It is essential that staff play an active role in contributing to their own wellbeing and development, as well as to the success of the School/Service and university, by using the resources available to carry out their role effectively. In order to minimise the risk of work-related stress, staff should:

- Be aware of the factors that may contribute to their stress and actions that they can take to improve their health and wellbeing.
- Bring to the attention of their manager any concerns they have about work-related pressures and stress.
- Inform their manager promptly if they feel they are suffering from stress or have concerns about other team members.
- Work with their manager to identify work adjustments to address their personal stress and/or work pressures within the team.
- Individual members of staff should be aware of the signs and symptoms of stress, and if they believe that they are suffering from stress should seek help from their line manager, Human Resources or the Occupational Health Service, or use the employee assistance programme.
- Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended – an employee assistance programme exists to provide a confidential, independent source of advice – counselling may be offered by telephone or in person.

### Identify personal stressors

If you can, work out what in particular stresses you and explore some practical ways to minimise the cause. There may be some issues you cannot change immediately, but there may be others you can alter or avoid

### Look after yourself

- Take up exercise – you may find learning a relaxation exercise or attending a yoga class beneficial – alternatively, you may find that vigorous exercise such as swimming or walking has a greater effect on you.
- Plan to eat an enjoyable nutritious diet, take a proper meal break and sit down and spend time over your food.
- Ensure you get enough sleep, plan a couple of early nights a week; find ways of relaxing and “switching off” – often getting involved with a hobby/interest that demands intense focus and concentration is beneficial.
- Plan your time and try to keep to schedule.
- When feeling rushed you should deliberately slow down and take more time over every action than you need (or than your stressed state is making you take).
- Tackle one thing at a time.
- Make a list of priorities and stick to it – do the easiest first – you get a feeling of achievement as you proceed through the list.

## Where to get help and support

### Internally

**Manager** - Where stress is work-related, discuss your concerns with your manager in the first instance to see what solutions may be available.

**Occupational Health Service** - You can speak to your line manager about referring you to the [Occupational Health Service](#). You can discuss your concerns with them. OH will offer help and advice on a short or long term basis in identifying personal stressors and in identifying assistance to help deal with these stressors.

**Human Resources** – [Human Resources](#) will, on a confidential basis, discuss with you and advise on how to deal with issues causing stress. The university provides a number of opportunities for staff development. [Staff Development](#) provides a variety of courses which you may find very useful, such as bullying and harassment in the workplace; counselling skills, assertiveness training; managing sickness absence; management skills course; recognition and reduction of stress; conflict resolution; presentation skills and supervision skills.

**Health & Safety** – [email](#), [website](#)

**Sports Centre [EN]gage** - Various activities are available to help alleviate tension and reduce stress. A personal "one to one" fitness assessment can be undertaken and assistance given to find the fitness programme that is tailor-made to suit you. [Engage website](#).

**Trade Unions** - General support and advice. Information on the Unions can be obtained by contacting UNISON or EIS/ULA.

**Staff counselling - MCL Medics** - This exists to provide a confidential, independent source of advice. Counselling may be offered by telephone or in person. [MCL Medics website](#).

### Externally

**General Practitioner** - Your own GP is a good source of advice and can often recommend remedies to assist or may refer you to a local support group/class.

**Evening classes and leisure activities** - For example, yoga, rambling, walking. Enquire at your local council for local classes.

**Friends and family** - Friends and family are a good source of support; try not to deal with your problems alone. Often openly expressing problems can in itself be beneficial.

 [NHS Inform](#) t: 0800 22 44 88