

Stress at Work

What is stress?

Stress is the body's response to physical and mental demands.

Stress is not just a problem in our minds. Our bodies have an "emergency response" that occurs when we are under stress. For example, when we have to run for a bus, parts of our body gear up to deal with the emergency. This response helps us run fast enough to get the bus. Our heart rate and blood pressure increase. Sugar is released into the blood. Our breathing becomes faster. Other parts of our body slow down. Our digestion slows down. Our immune (disease-fighting) system partly shuts down.

Once we get on the bus, our bodies quickly relax. The body needs this time to rest and recover after being stressed. Workers are at risk for health problems when their bodies are always responding to stress and not easily able to return to a relaxed state.

Early signs of stress include

- headache
- upset stomach
- sleep problems
- difficulty concentrating
- quick to get angry

What is workplace stress?

We experience stress at work when we are not able to meet the demands of our job. You may not be able to meet the demands of your job for reasons such as

- the amount of time you have to finish a task
- the tools you have to do a job
- the workplace rules you must follow

The most stressful jobs place heavy demands on the worker but give the worker very little control over how to do the job. Stress can be made worse when you feel a lack of support from your supervisor and co-workers.

How stress at work affects your health

Stress can affect your health when you are exposed to stressful working conditions over a long period. Your ability to cope with stress decreases with time. Stress at work often affects your life outside work. It affects your

- mental and emotional well being
- behaviour
- physical health

People respond to stress in different ways. You may feel frustrated, angry or nervous. Your behavior may change. You may increase your use of alcohol or smoke more. You may not want to see friends and family.

Stress over a long period of time can also cause or worsen health problems such as

- heart disease
- diabetes
- stomach and bowel problems
- asthma
- depression and anxiety
- back, shoulder & neck disorders

What causes stress at work?

Physical work environment

Noise

Poor ventilation

Poor lighting

Too hot or too cold

Poor workstation or tool design

