

Managing stress



Stress is more than just being busy. It's a biological and psychological response that occurs when we experience a threat, challenge or situation that we feel we do not have the resources to manage.

Stress is a normal response to difficult situations and a small amount of stress can actually be good for us. Ongoing or unmanageable stress, however, can have detrimental impacts.

Workplace stress, in particular, is a major risk factor for anxiety and depression. Work-related stress refers to the physical, mental and emotional reactions of employees who feel as though their work demands exceed their abilities to do the work. While stress itself is not a mental illness, when it becomes excessive and ongoing it can lead to mental and physical ill-health.

Work-related stress can be caused by many different workplace factors. Some common causes include:

- Long work hours
- Work demands, including inadequate time and resources to complete jobs, work that is monotonous or heavy workloads
- Lack of support from leaders or co-workers
- Job insecurity
- Conflict with colleagues
- Lack of role clarity
- Environmental stressors, such as noise or air quality in the workplace

Workplace stress affects 73 per cent of employees.

25% of all Australian workers take time off each year due to stress.

Stress costs Australian businesses more than \$10 billion a year.

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Signs and symptoms of stress

Physical	Psychological	Behavioural
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exhaustion or difficulty sleeping• Feeling restless or on-edge• Racing heart• Headaches• Muscle tension or aches• Digestive issues• Feeling constantly sick or run down	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low mood• Negative thoughts• Constantly worrying• Dwelling on the stressors• Feeling irritable• Poorer concentration and trouble remembering• Easily distracted• Indecisive• Feeling hopeless• Feeling unable to keep up with work demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Procrastinating• Not being able to complete work or home tasks• Withdrawing from social activities• Lack of interest in hobbies• Neglecting self-care• Increase in unhealthy behaviours, e.g. overeating, addiction, increased screen time.

Managing work-related stress



Identify your stressors

Write down which work situations create the most stress for you, and keep track of how you respond to these situation. Record your thoughts and feelings, as well as who was involved. This can help you keep track of regular work stressors and the way you deal with them.



Tackle your stressors

Once you have an understanding of why you are stressed - for instance too much work, difficulty juggling your work-life balance or learning how to use new technology at work - take steps to change the circumstances that are causing your stress. Sometimes, this will involve speaking with your workplace. Sometimes, it might involve making changes in your personal life to better manage the stressors.

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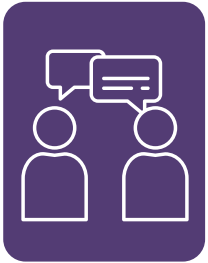
Think about your responses

How we respond to stress is important. Instead of attempting to deal with your stress by engaging in harmful behaviours or ignoring it altogether, focus on more effective forms of stress management. Sleep, exercise and a good diet all help - but also consider asserting your feelings or opinions in stressful situations, rather than becoming angry or defensive.



Take a break

Taking a break doesn't need to be taking time off work long-term. It can simply be setting aside a little time each day to recuperate. Make switching off from work a priority, as this will help you avoid the negative effects of chronic stress. When possible, take a long weekend trip or have a holiday so you can return to work feeling rejuvenated.



Talk to a manager

Your workplace has a responsibility to create a positive work environment free from psychosocial hazards. If your working environment is causing you stress, talk to a trusted leader or manager. Come up with an effective plan for managing the stressors you've identified. This will help your wellbeing and also ensure you can perform your best.



Seek professional support

Sometimes, speaking to a mental health professional is the best way to learn how to handle your stress. Chronic stress can develop into serious mental health concerns, so make it a priority to seek support when you need it. If you're unsure where or how to access support, your employers should be able to assist. Or, speak with a friend or family member.