

Managing Workplace Stress



Stress... just the word may be enough to set your nerves on edge. Everyone feels stressed from time to time. Some people may cope with stress more effectively or recover from stressful events quicker than others. It's important to know your limits when it comes to stress to avoid more serious health effects. Stress can also have a big impact on your work environment. This course highlights the causes of stress at work and outlines steps an employer can take to help prevent job stress.

This page intentionally blank

OSHAcademy Course 765 Study Guide

Managing Workplace Stress

Copyright © 2022 Geigle Safety Group, Inc.

No portion of this text may be reprinted for other than personal use. Any commercial use of this document is strictly forbidden.

Contact OSHAcademy to arrange for use as a training document.

This study guide is designed to be reviewed off-line as a tool for preparation to successfully complete OSHAcademy Course 765.

Read each module, answer the quiz questions, and submit the quiz questions online through the course webpage. You can print the post-quiz response screen which will contain the correct answers to the questions.

The final exam will consist of questions developed from the course content and module quizzes.

We hope you enjoy the course and if you have any questions, feel free to email or call:

OSHAcademy
15220 NW Greenbrier Parkway, Suite 230
Beaverton, Oregon 97006
www.oshatrain.org
instructor@oshatrain.org
+1.888.668.9079

Disclaimer

This document does not constitute legal advice. Consult with your own company counsel for advice on compliance with all applicable state and federal regulations. Neither Geigle Safety Group, Inc., nor any of its employees, subcontractors, consultants, committees, or other assignees make any warranty or representation, either express or implied, with respect to the accuracy, completeness, or usefulness of the information contained herein, or assume any liability or responsibility for any use, or the results of such use, of any information or process disclosed in this publication. GEIGLE SAFETY GROUP, INC., DISCLAIMS ALL OTHER WARRANTIES EXPRESS OR IMPLIED INCLUDING, WITHOUT LIMITATION, ANY WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. Taking actions suggested in this document does not guarantee that an employer, employee, operator or contractor will be in compliance with applicable regulations. Ultimately every company is responsible for determining the applicability of the information in this document to its own operations. Each employer's safety management system will be different. Mapping safety and environmental management policies, procedures, or operations using this document does not guarantee compliance regulatory requirements.

Revised: January 19, 2022

This page intentionally blank

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Course Introduction | 1 |
| Course Components..... | 1 |
| Module 1: Stress in Today's Workplace..... | 2 |
| What is Job Stress? | 2 |
| Scenario..... | 2 |
| Scope of Stress in the Workplace | 3 |
| Job Stress Causes | 4 |
| Scenario..... | 4 |
| Impact of Stress on Employer | 5 |
| NIOSH Approach to Job Stress | 5 |
| Job Conditions That May Lead to Stress | 6 |
| Module 1 Quiz..... | 8 |
| Module 2: Job Stress Effects on Workers | 10 |
| Job Stress Ailments | 10 |
| Early Warning Signs of Job Stress | 11 |
| Job Stress and Health: What the Research Tells Us..... | 11 |
| Scenario..... | 12 |
| Environmental Risk Factors..... | 12 |
| Individual Risk Factors | 13 |
| Coping With Stress..... | 13 |
| Module 2 Quiz..... | 15 |
| Module 3: Preventing Job Stress | 17 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Stress Prevention Programs..... | 17 |
| What Can Be Done About Job Stress? | 17 |
| Minimizing Stress in the Workplace | 18 |
| Stress, Health, and Productivity..... | 19 |
| Healthy Organizations..... | 19 |
| Training | 20 |
| Early Intervention | 21 |
| Continued Support..... | 21 |
| Stress Prevention Guidelines | 21 |
| Steps Towards Prevention | 22 |
| Step 1 — Identify and Analyze the Problem..... | 22 |
| Step 2 - Design and Implement Interventions | 23 |
| Step 3 — Evaluate the Interventions | 24 |
| How to Change the Organization to Prevent Job Stress..... | 25 |
| Key Messages for OSH Personnel | 25 |
| Module 3 Quiz..... | 27 |
| Module 4: Managing Stress | 29 |
| Pre-Event Planning..... | 29 |
| During the Crisis-At the Scene | 30 |
| After the Crisis..... | 31 |
| Importance of Stress Management | 31 |
| Module 4 Quiz..... | 33 |
| Endnotes | 35 |

Course Introduction

Stress — just the word may be enough to set your nerves on edge. Everyone feels stressed from time to time. Some people may cope with stress more effectively, or recover from stressful events quicker, than others. It's important to know your limits when it comes to stress to avoid more serious health effects.

Stress can also have a big impact on your work environment. This course highlights the causes of stress at work and outlines steps an employer can take to help prevent job stress.

Course Components

Once you complete this course, you will have knowledge of the following components:

- stress in today's workplace
- causes of workplace stress
- job conditions that may lead to stress
- impact of stress on the employer
- job stress and employee health
- stress prevention programs
- minimizing stress in the workplace
- managing stress before, during, and after a crisis

Module 1: Stress in Today's Workplace

The [American Institute of Stress \(AIS\)](#) reveals that 80 percent of us feel stress on the job and almost half say they need help in managing that stress.

What is Job Stress?

Job stress is commonly thought of as physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension in response to perceived demands and expectations employees experience in the workplace. It is also influenced by their relationships with co-workers, supervisors, and managers.

It's important to think of stress as a continuum. The type of stress employees experience depends on what they believe and feel. Stress is about taking or losing control on the job as follows:

- **Negative stress**, or distress, may result in harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. If employees no longer believe they have adequate KSAs and, consequently feel they are not in control, the stress they experience will more likely be negative. Signs and symptoms of negative stress in employees include increased blood pressure, insomnia, taking unsafe shortcuts, inattention, and irritability.
- **Positive stress**, also called eustress, is physiological response employees experience when good things happen, and they feel in control. If employees believe they have adequate knowledge, skills, abilities (KSAs), and feel in control of the job, the stress they experience will be most likely positive. They will think, "I can do this," and they feel confident in meeting performance expectations. Positive stress may result in increased productivity, working safe, helping other employees, and improved morale.

Scenario

The longer he waited, the more David worried. For weeks he had been plagued by aching muscles, loss of appetite, restless sleep, and a complete sense of exhaustion. At first he tried to ignore these problems, but eventually he became so short-tempered and irritable that his wife insisted he get a checkup. Now, sitting in the doctor's office and wondering what the verdict would be, he didn't even notice when Theresa took the seat beside him. They had been good friends when she worked in the front office at the plant, but he hadn't seen her since she left three years ago to take a job as a customer service representative. Her gentle

poke in the ribs brought him around, and within minutes they were talking and gossiping as if she had never left.

"You got out just in time," he told her. "Since the reorganization, nobody feels safe. It used to be that as long as you did your work, you had a job. That's not for sure anymore. They expect the same production rates even though two guys are now doing the work of three. We're so backed up I'm working twelve-hour shifts six days a week. I swear I hear those machines humming in my sleep. Guys are calling in sick just to get a break. Morale is so bad they're talking about bringing in some consultants to figure out a better way to get the job done."

"Well, I really miss you guys," she said. "I'm afraid I jumped from the frying pan into the fire. In my new job, the computer routes the calls and they never stop. I even have to schedule my bathroom breaks. All I hear the whole day are complaints from unhappy customers. I try to be helpful and sympathetic, but I can't promise anything without getting my boss's approval. Most of the time I'm caught between what the customer wants and company policy. I'm not sure who I'm supposed to keep happy. The other reps are so uptight and tense, they don't even talk to one another. We all go to our own little cubicles and stay there until quitting time. To make matters worse, my mother's health is deteriorating. If only I could use some of my sick time to look after her. No wonder I'm in here with migraine headaches and high blood pressure. A lot of the reps are seeing the employee assistance counselor and taking stress management classes, which seems to help. But sooner or later, someone will have to make some changes in the way the place is run."

Scope of Stress in the Workplace

David's and Theresa's stories in the previous tab are unfortunate, but not unusual. Job stress has become a common and costly problem in the American workplace, leaving few workers untouched. For example, recent studies report the following:

- One-fourth of employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives. (*Northwestern National Life*)
- Three-fourths of employees believe the worker has more on-the-job stress than a generation ago. (*Princeton Survey Research Associates*)
- Problems at work are more strongly associated with health complaints than are any other life stressor—more so than even financial problems or family problems. (*St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Co.*)

A 2017 [StressPulse survey](#) released by [ComPsych](#) found that 59% of employees report being in the high-stress category, with workload and people issues being the top work stressors. Only a small percentage of the employees surveyed did not claim to suffer from stress at work. Causes of work stress identified in the survey are as follows:

1. 39% cited workload
2. 31% cited people issues
3. 19% cited juggling work and personal life
4. 6% cited lack of job security
5. 5% said none of the above (I'm not stressed)

Job Stress Causes

early everyone agrees job stress results from the interaction of the worker and the conditions of work. Views differ, however, on the importance of **worker characteristics** versus **working conditions** as the primary cause of job stress. These differing viewpoints are important because they suggest different ways to prevent stress at work.

According to one school of thought, differences in individual characteristics such as personality and coping style are most important in predicting whether certain job conditions will result in stress. In other words, what is stressful for one person may not be a problem for someone else. This viewpoint leads to prevention strategies that focus on workers and ways to help them cope with demanding job conditions.

Although the importance of individual differences cannot be ignored, scientific evidence suggests certain working conditions are stressful to most people. The excessive workload demands and conflicting expectations described in David's and Theresa's stories are good examples. Such evidence argues for a greater emphasis on working conditions as the key source of job stress, and for job redesign as a primary prevention strategy.

Scenario

In 1960, a Michigan court upheld a compensation claim by an automotive assembly line worker who had difficulty keeping up with the pressures of the production line. To avoid falling behind, he tried to work on several assemblies at the same time and often got parts

mixed up. As a result, he was subjected to repeated criticism from the foreman. Eventually he suffered a psychological breakdown.

Impact of Stress on Employer

The World Health Organization calls stress the health epidemic of the 21st century. The cost to American employers is estimated at \$300 billion per year. It is a hefty price tag comprised of several general factors, including:

- lower productivity
- absenteeism
- staff turnover
- workers' compensation
- medical insurance and related expenses

Stress is the number one productivity issue. Most employers would agree stress links directly to loss of profits. For example, sixty percent of lost workdays each year can be attributed to stress. In addition, an estimated 75 to 90 percent of visits to health care providers are due to stress-related conditions, costing employers in increased health care costs.

The Wall Street Journal recently reported one third of people surveyed considered quitting their jobs because of stress and 14 percent actually did.

NIOSH Approach to Job Stress

On the basis of experience and research, the [National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health \(NIOSH\)](#) favors the view that working conditions play a primary role in causing job stress. However, the role of individual factors is not ignored.

NIOSH believes exposure to stressful working conditions (called job stressors) can have a direct influence on worker safety and health. But as shown below, individual and other situational factors can intervene to strengthen or weaken this influence.

Examples of individual and situational factors that can increase distress at work include:

- The need to take care of an elderly or sick family member

- Having increased financial obligations with the bank or IRS
- Emotional problems like grief, depression, or low self-esteem

Examples of individual and situational factors that can help to reduce the effects of stressful working conditions include the following:

- Being able to balance the day between work and family or personal life
- Having a support network of friends and coworkers
- Developing a relaxed and positive outlook

Job Conditions That May Lead to Stress

The Design of Tasks: Heavy workload, infrequent rest breaks, long work hours and shiftwork; hectic and routine tasks that have little inherent meaning, do not utilize workers' skills, and provide little sense of control.

Example: David works to the point of exhaustion. Theresa is tied to the computer, allowing little room for flexibility, self-initiative, or rest.

Management Style: Lack of participation by workers in decision-making, poor communication in the organization, lack of family-friendly policies.

Example: Theresa needs to get the boss's approval for everything, and the company is insensitive to her family needs.

Interpersonal Relationships: Poor social environment and lack of support or help from coworkers and supervisors.

Example: Theresa's physical isolation reduces her opportunities to interact with other workers or receive help from them.

Work Roles: Conflicting or uncertain job expectations, too much responsibility, and too many "hats to wear."

Example: Theresa is often caught in a difficult situation trying to satisfy both the customer's needs and the company's expectations.

Career Concerns: Job insecurity and lack of opportunity for growth, advancement, or promotion; rapid changes for which workers are unprepared.

Example: Since the reorganization at David's plant, everyone is worried about their future with the company and what will happen next.

Environmental Conditions: Unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions such as crowding, noise, air pollution, or ergonomic problems.

Example: David is exposed to constant noise at work.

Module 1 Quiz

Use this quiz to self-check your understanding of the module content. You can also go online and take this quiz within the module. The online quiz provides the correct answer once submitted.

1. _____ of employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives.
 - a. One-half
 - b. One-fourth
 - c. Three-quarters
 - d. 75%

2. Which of the following is/are more strongly associated with health complaints?
 - a. Family life
 - b. Financial problems
 - c. Work problems
 - d. Personal issues

3. This leads to prevention strategies that focus on workers and ways to help cope with demanding job conditions.
 - a. Working conditions
 - b. Personality traits
 - c. Management style
 - d. Worker characteristics

4. The cost of stress to American employers is estimated at _____ per year.
 - a. \$500 billion
 - b. \$300 billion
 - c. \$100 billion
 - d. \$150 billion

5. _____ of lost workdays each year can be attributed to stress.

- a. 40%
- b. 60%
- c. 50%
- d. 25%

Module 2: Job Stress Effects on Workers

Stress sets off an alarm in the brain, which responds by preparing the body for defensive action. The nervous system is aroused and hormones are released to sharpen the senses, quicken the pulse, deepen respiration, decrease appetite, and tense the muscles.

This response (sometimes called the fight or flight response) is important because it helps us defend against threatening situations. The response is preprogrammed biologically. Everyone responds in much the same way, regardless of whether the stressful situation is at work or home.

Short-lived or infrequent episodes of stress pose little risk. But when stressful situations go unresolved, the body is kept in a constant state of activation, which increases the rate of wear and tear to biological systems. Ultimately, fatigue or damage results, and the ability of the body to repair and defend itself can become seriously compromised. As a result, the risk of injury or disease escalates.

Job Stress Ailments

Many studies have looked at the relationship between job stress and a variety of ailments. Mood and sleep disturbances, upset stomach and headache, and disturbed relationships with family and friends are examples of stress-related problems that are quick to develop and are commonly seen in these studies.

There are several warning signs of job stress. Here are just a few:

- headache
- sleep disturbances
- difficulty in concentrating
- short temper
- upset stomach
- job dissatisfaction
- low morale

These early signs of job stress are usually easy to recognize. But the effects of job stress on chronic diseases are more difficult to see because chronic diseases take a long time to develop and can be influenced by many factors other than stress. Nonetheless, evidence is rapidly accumulating to suggest stress plays an important role in several types of chronic health problems, including cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, and psychological disorders.

Early Warning Signs of Job Stress

There are several warning signs of job stress. Here are just a few:

- headache
- sleep disturbances
- difficulty in concentrating
- short temper
- upset stomach
- job dissatisfaction
- low morale

Job Stress and Health: What the Research Tells Us

Cardiovascular Disease

Many studies suggest psychologically demanding jobs which allow employees little control over the work process increase the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Musculoskeletal Disorders

On the basis of research by NIOSH and many other organizations, it is widely believed job stress increases the risk for development of back and upper-extremity musculoskeletal disorders.

Psychological Disorders

Several studies suggest differences in rates of mental health problems (such as depression and burnout) for various occupations are due partly to differences in job stress levels. Economic and lifestyle differences between occupations may also contribute to some of these problems.

Workplace Injury

Although more study is needed, there is a growing concern stressful working conditions interfere with safe work practices and set the stage for injuries at work.

Psychological Injuries

Employees may also experience psychological injuries from aggressive or violent incidents that occur in the workplace. Psychological injuries from aggression can occur from either cumulative events or as a result of a traumatic event. For more information on workplace violence, please see OSHAcademy course [720 Preventing Workplace Violence](#).

Scenario

St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company conducted several studies on the effects of stress prevention programs in hospital settings. Program activities included (1) employee and management education on job stress, (2) changes in hospital policies and procedures to reduce organizational sources of stress, and (3) establishment of employee assistance programs.

In one study, the frequency of medication errors declined by 50% after prevention activities were implemented in a 700-bed hospital. In a second study, there was a 70% reduction in malpractice claims in 22 hospitals that implemented stress prevention activities. In contrast, there was no reduction in claims in a matched group of 22 hospitals that did not implement stress prevention activities.

-Journal of Applied Psychology

Environmental Risk Factors

Physical and chemical risk factors (as well as biological agents) can influence employees' comfort and performance within the work environment and contribute to work-related stress.

Environmental sources of work-related stress include:

- noise
- temperature and humidity
- lighting
- vibration

- air quality
- unguarded plant and machinery

Individual Risk Factors

People respond to work-related stress differently. This can be related to a person's previous experiences, coping styles, personality style, available support, and physiological factors.

Differences in people's responses to stress do not reduce employers' legal duty and responsibility to minimize exposure to work-related stress.

Coping With Stress

The effects of stress tend to build up over time. Taking practical steps to maintain your health and outlook can reduce or prevent these effects. The following are some tips that may help you to cope with stress:

- Seek help from a qualified mental health care provider if you are overwhelmed, feel you cannot cope, have suicidal thoughts, or are using drugs or alcohol to cope.
- Get proper healthcare for existing or new health problems.
- Stay in touch with people who can provide emotional and other support. Ask for help from friends, family, and community or religious organizations to reduce stress due to work burdens or family issues, such as caring for a loved one.
- Recognize signs of your body's response to stress, such as difficulty sleeping, increased alcohol and other substance use, being easily angered, feeling depressed, and having low energy.
- Set priorities - decide what must get done and what can wait, and learn to say no to new tasks if they are putting you into overload.
- Note what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.
- Avoid dwelling on problems. If you can't do this on your own, seek help from a qualified mental health professional who can guide you.

- Exercise regularly - just 30 minutes per day of gentle walking can help boost mood and reduce stress.
- Schedule regular times for healthy and relaxing activities.
- Explore stress coping programs, which may incorporate meditation, yoga, tai chi, or other gentle exercises.

Module 2 Quiz

Use this quiz to self-check your understanding of the module content. You can also go online and take this quiz within the module. The online quiz provides the correct answer once submitted.

- 1. Workers who must take time off work because of stress will be off the job for about _____.**
 - a. 10 days
 - b. 20 days
 - c. 5 days
 - d. 1 month

- 2. Which of the following is/are signs of workplace stress?**
 - a. Headache
 - b. Sleep disturbances
 - c. Upset stomach
 - d. All of the above are correct

- 3. It is widely believed job stress decreases the risk for development of back and upper-extremity musculoskeletal disorders.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 4. Environmental sources of work-related stress include which of the following?**
 - a. Low humidity
 - b. Good lighting
 - c. Quiet atmosphere
 - d. Unguarded plant and machinery

5. You should recognize these common signs to your body's response to stress.

- a. Difficulty sleeping
- b. Increased alcohol
- c. Feeling excited
- d. Both A and B are correct

Module 3: Preventing Job Stress

All employee reports of work-related stress and psychological injuries as a result of work-related stress need to be investigated in a timely manner. The investigation should identify all the factors that contributed to development of the injury or work-related stress occurring.

An investigation will assist in preventing future exposure of employees to psychological risk factors and improve the organization's approach to preventing psychological injuries in the future. Investigations should not be about finding someone to blame, rather looking for ways to prevent or minimize employees being exposed to psychological risk factors in the future.

Stress Prevention Programs

The design and appropriate solutions of a stress prevention program will be influenced by several factors, including:

- size and complexity of the organization
- available resources
- unique types of stress problems faced by the organization

In David's company, for example, the main problem is work overload. Theresa, on the other hand, is bothered by difficult interactions with the public and an inflexible work schedule.

What Can Be Done About Job Stress?

The fictional examples of Theresa and David in module 1 illustrate two different approaches for dealing with stress at work.

Stress Management: Theresa's company is providing stress management training and an employee assistance program (EAP) to improve the ability of workers to cope with difficult work situations. Nearly one-half of large companies in the United States provide some type of stress management training for their workforces. Stress management programs teach workers about the nature and sources of stress, the effects of stress on health, and personal skills to reduce stress (for example, time management or relaxation exercises. Typically, EAPs provide individual counseling for employees with both work and personal problems.) Stress management training may rapidly reduce stress symptoms such as anxiety and sleep disturbances; it also has the advantage of being inexpensive and easy to implement. However, stress management programs have two major disadvantages:

- The beneficial effects on stress symptoms are often short-lived.
- They often ignore important root causes of stress because they focus on the worker and not the environment.

Organizational Change: In contrast to stress management training and EAP programs, David's company is trying to reduce job stress by bringing in a consultant to recommend ways to improve working conditions. This approach is the most direct way to reduce stress at work. It involves the identification of stressful aspects of work (e.g., excessive workload, conflicting expectations) and the design of strategies to reduce or eliminate the identified stressors. The advantage of this approach is it deals directly with the root causes of stress at work.

Minimizing Stress in the Workplace

There are many steps you, as an employer, can take to help minimize stress in the workplace. Here are a few examples:

- Set the tone by treating coworkers with respect and valuing their contributions.
- Hold regular staff meetings to plan, problem solve, recognize accomplishments, and promote staff cohesiveness.
- Clearly communicate the rationale behind procedural or supervisory changes and performance expectations.
- Create a formal employee suggestion system and encourage staff to contribute.
- Resolve conflicts early and quickly.
- Prepare workers for concrete tasks they may perform through technical training.
- Acknowledge work is often stressful and connect staff to professional help if necessary.
- Promote an atmosphere where attention to one's emotional state is acceptable and encouraged rather than stigmatized or disregarded.

Stress, Health, and Productivity

Some employers assume stressful working conditions are a necessary evil. In other words, companies must turn up the pressure on workers and set aside health concerns to remain productive and profitable in today's economy. But research findings are challenging this belief.

Studies show stressful working conditions are actually associated with increased absenteeism, tardiness, and intentions by workers to quit their jobs, all of which have a negative effect on the bottom line.

Recent studies of so-called healthy organizations suggest policies benefiting worker health also benefit the bottom line. A healthy organization is defined as one that has low rates of illness, injury, and disability in its workforce and is also competitive in the marketplace.

Healthy Organizations

A healthy organization is defined as one that has low rates of illness, injury, and disability in its workforce and is also competitive in the marketplace.

Researchers have identified organizational characteristics associated with both healthy, low-stress work and high levels of productivity. Examples of these characteristics include the following:

- recognition of employees for good work performance
- opportunities for career development
- an organizational culture that values the individual worker
- management actions consistent with organizational values

However, managers are sometimes uncomfortable with this approach because it can involve changes in work routines or production schedules, or changes in the organizational structure.

As a general rule, actions to reduce job stress should give top priority to organizational change to improve working conditions. But even the most conscientious efforts to improve working conditions are unlikely to eliminate stress completely for all workers. For this reason, a combination of organizational change and stress management is often the most useful approach for preventing stress at work.

Training

It is important everyone in the workplace understands the symptoms of stress, how to handle work-related stress, and most importantly how to get help by reporting it. Employers should provide instruction and training on the process and encourage reporting instances of work-related stress.

Training and instruction may include information on:

- workplace's commitment to supporting and maintaining a positive work environment that values employee health and well-being
- each of the psychological risk factors
- early warning signs of a stress response
- individual and organizational measures used to prevent work-related stress from occurring
- workplace procedures and policies
- how to report work-related stress and psychological risk factors
- how work-related stress reports will be responded to, including time frames
- where to access support within the workplace and outside of the workplace

Information about work-related stress can be given to workers in a number of ways including:

- talking directly with employees by holding team meetings, tool box talks or speaking one-on-one with them
- handing out company newsletters or pamphlets
- including information sheets in pay slips
- displaying posters around the workplace
- through email messages or intranet announcements

Early Intervention

Early intervention is the key to supporting employees who experience work-related stress. Ideally, early intervention means assisting an employee before symptoms develop into an injury. However, this may not be possible as employees may not report their symptoms to their employer before an injury develops. In this case, as soon as the employer is made aware of the injury, an early intervention program should be commenced, where appropriate.

Below are seven key elements to early intervention for preventing psychological injury:

1. Develop procedures for early intervention on how to support employees exhibiting early warning signs. The policy or guidelines should state that support is provided regardless of whether the employee has submitted a Workers' Compensation claim, or whether their claim has been accepted.
2. Provide training and information to line managers on the early warning signs, and how to respond appropriately.
3. Ensure early contact is made with the employee to offer assistance.
4. Engage early and expert assessment to identify employee needs.
5. Ensure the employee and supervisor are involved in developing an agreed plan to enable the employee to remain at work or return to work.
6. Establish employee access to effective medical treatment and evidence-based therapeutic interventions if there is a psychological condition.
7. Provide flexible workplace solutions to support the individual at work.

Continued Support

Managers should continue to follow up with employees who have reported an injury to ensure their safety and health and provide support. Additional counseling may be required on an on-going basis for the employee.

Stress Prevention Guidelines

Although it is not possible to give a universal prescription for preventing stress at work, it is possible to offer guidelines on the process of stress prevention in organizations. In all situations, the process for stress prevention programs involves three distinct steps:

- problem identification and analysis
- intervention
- evaluation

For this process to succeed, organizations need to be adequately prepared. At a minimum, preparation for a stress prevention program should include the following:

- building general awareness about job stress (causes, costs, and control)
- securing top management commitment and support for the program
- incorporating employee input and involvement in all phases of the program
- establishing the technical capacity to conduct the program (e.g., specialized training for in-house staff or use of job stress consultants)

Bringing workers or workers and managers together in a committee or problem-solving group may be an especially useful approach for developing a stress prevention program. Research has shown these participatory efforts to be effective in dealing with ergonomic problems in the workplace, partly because they capitalize on workers' firsthand knowledge of hazards encountered in their jobs. However, when forming such working groups, care must be taken to be sure that they are in compliance with current labor laws.

Steps Towards Prevention

Low morale, health and job complaints, and employee turnover often provide the first signs of job stress. But sometimes there are no clues, especially if employees are fearful of losing their jobs. Lack of obvious or widespread signs is not a good reason to dismiss concerns about job stress or minimize the importance of a prevention program.

Step 1 — Identify and Analyze the Problem

The best method to explore the scope and source of a suspected stress problem in an organization depends partly on the size of the organization and the available resources. Group discussions among managers, labor representatives, and employees can provide rich sources of information. Such discussions may be all that is needed to track down and remedy stress problems in a small company. In a larger organization, such discussions can be used to help

design formal surveys for gathering input about stressful job conditions from large numbers of employees.

Regardless of the method used to collect data, information should be obtained about employee perceptions of their job conditions and perceived levels of stress, health, and satisfaction.

Objective measures such as absenteeism, illness and turnover rates, or performance problems can also be examined to gauge the presence and scope of job stress. However, these measures are only rough indicators of job stress at best.

Data from discussions, surveys, and other sources should be summarized and analyzed to answer questions about the location of a stress problem and job conditions that may be responsible. For example, are problems present throughout the organization or confined to single departments or specific jobs?

Survey design, data analysis, and other aspects of a stress prevention program may require the help of experts from a local university or consulting firm. However, overall authority for the prevention program should remain in the organization.

Here are some ways to obtain information from employees:

- Hold group discussions with employees.
- Design an employee survey.
- Measure employee perceptions of job conditions, stress, health, and satisfaction.
- Collect objective data.
- Analyze data to identify problem locations and stressful job conditions.

Step 2 - Design and Implement Interventions

Once the sources of stress at work have been identified and the scope of the problem is understood, the stage is set for design and implementation of an intervention strategy.

- Target source of stress for change.
- Propose and prioritize intervention strategies.
- Communicate planned interventions to employees.

- Implement Interventions.

It's important to target the source and determine the scope of the problem causing stress to develop an appropriate intervention strategy. To develop a effective intervention to the problem, you must determine the scope of the problem. The problem may be specific to an individual, a department, or existing company-wide.

- Some problems may be specific to certain employees and resistant to any kind of organizational change, calling instead for stress management or employee assistance interventions.
- Other problems such as excessive workload may exist only in some departments and thus require more narrow solutions, such as redesign of the way a job is performed.
- Certain problems, such as a hostile work environment, may be pervasive in the organization and require company-wide interventions.

Interventions will be different as the scope widens. Some interventions might be implemented rapidly (e.g., improved communication, stress management training), but others may require additional time to put into place (e.g., redesign of a manufacturing process).

Step 3 — Evaluate the Interventions

Evaluation is an essential step in the intervention process. Evaluation is necessary to determine whether the intervention is producing desired effects and whether changes in direction are needed.

Time frames for evaluating interventions should be established. Interventions involving organizational change should receive both short- and long-term scrutiny. Short-term evaluations might be done quarterly to provide an early indication of program effectiveness or possible need for redirection. Many interventions produce initial effects that do not persist. Long-term evaluations are often conducted annually and are necessary to determine whether interventions produce lasting effects.

Evaluations should focus on the same types of information collected during the problem identification phase of the intervention, including information from employees about working conditions, levels of perceived stress, health problems, and satisfaction. Employee perceptions are usually the most sensitive measure of stressful working conditions and often provide the first indication of intervention effectiveness. Adding objective measures such as absenteeism

and health care costs may also be useful. However, the effects of job stress interventions on such measures tend to be less clear-cut and can take a long time to appear.

The job stress prevention process does not end with evaluation. Instead, job stress prevention should be seen as a continuous process that uses evaluation data to refine or redirect the intervention strategy.

How to Change the Organization to Prevent Job Stress

To make sure interventions are effective and successful in reducing stress, adopt one or more of the following ideas:

- Ensure the workload is in line with workers' capabilities and resources.
- Design jobs to provide meaning, stimulation, and opportunities for workers to use their skills.
- Clearly define workers' roles and responsibilities.
- Give workers opportunities to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs.
- Improve communications - reduce uncertainty about career development and future employment prospects.
- Provide opportunities for social interaction among workers.
- Establish work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities outside the job.

Key Messages for OSH Personnel

OSH professionals and safety and health representatives play a key role in preventing and managing work-related stress. It is important for OSH professionals, safety and health representatives and employers to work together to prevent and manage work-related stress.

OSH professionals and safety and health representatives may assist the employer through conducting regular workplace 'walk-arounds' and assisting with the OSH incident investigations. They can also recommend to the employer the establishment, maintenance, and monitoring of programs, measures and procedures at the workplace. For example, a recommendation may include conducting an anonymous survey to obtain information on the psychological risk factors

employees may be exposed to in the workplace and whether employee health is being negatively affected.

Module 3 Quiz

Use this quiz to self-check your understanding of the module content. You can also go online and take this quiz within the module. The online quiz provides the correct answer once submitted.

- 1. An investigation into stress at the workplace will _____ the organization's approach to preventing psychological injuries in the future.**
 - a. improve
 - b. help
 - c. lower
 - d. both A and B are correct

- 2. _____ of large U.S. companies provide some type of stress management training for their workforces.**
 - a. One-half
 - b. Two-thirds
 - c. Three-quarters
 - d. 10%

- 3. This type of training involves the identification of stressful aspects of work to reduce or eliminate the identified stressors.**
 - a. Stress management
 - b. Organizational change
 - c. Environmental issues
 - d. Administrative controls

4. Which of the following is/are guidelines for preventing stress at work?

- a. Problem identification
- b. Surveys
- c. Intervention
- d. Both A and C are correct

5. Which of the 4 stress prevention steps would you communicate planned interventions to your employees?

- a. Step 1
- b. Step 2
- c. Step 3
- d. Step 4

Module 4: Managing Stress

Everyone who experiences a disaster is touched by it, including crisis response workers and managers. Good planning can limit health and psychological consequences, minimize disruptions to daily life, and contribute to the growth and empowerment of the individual experiencing the disaster.

Mental health, substance abuse, public health, medical, and emergency response systems face many challenges in meeting the behavioral health needs that result from disasters, such as the construction accident in the picture to the right. Management of the behavioral health consequences of disasters requires a range of interventions at multiple levels in the pre-event, event, and post-event phases.

Pre-Event Planning

There are many preventive measures you, as a supervisor, can put into place before an event occurs which can minimize stress. A thoughtfully planned communications strategy can decrease the impact of stress while accomplishing the goal of delivering accurate and timely information within the organization and to the public.

A clear understanding of roles and procedures is critical to helping individuals manage stress. Training and preparedness in incident management procedure are key to stress management.

Here are some suggested action steps that may help you and your workers cope with stress in a more effective manner:

- Establish clear lines of authority and responsibility to minimize stress by eliminating confusion about who reports to whom.
- Provide regular training on stress management techniques.
- Create a facility evacuation plan and practice drills on a regular basis.
- Develop guidelines to help workers prepare for deployment.
- Maintain an updated list of family members' contact information for each employee.
- Have a pre-established plan for how employees will check on their families, if disaster strikes during work hours.

During the Crisis-At the Scene

At the disaster scene, you, as a manager, can provide certain supports for workers to handle stress and help them effectively perform the tasks at hand.

Here are some tips:

- Clearly define individual roles and re-evaluate if the situation changes.
- Institute briefings at each shift change that cover the current status of the work environment, safety procedures, and required safety equipment.
- Partner inexperienced workers with experienced veterans. The buddy system is an effective method to provide support, monitor stress, and reinforce safety procedures.
- Rotate workers from high-stress to lower-stress functions.
- Initiate, encourage, and monitor work breaks, especially when casualties are involved.
- Establish an area that separates workers from the scene and the public. At longer operations, establish an area where responders can shower, eat, change clothes, and sleep.
- Provide security for staff at facilities or sites in dangerous areas, including escorts for workers going to and from their vehicles.
- Reduce noise as much as possible by providing earplugs, noise mufflers, or telephone headsets.

During the crisis, it is normal to experience stress, but remember stress can be identified and managed before it gets out of hand. You are the most important player in managing your stress during a crisis.

Here are some ways to manage stress during a crisis:

- Adhere to established safety policies and procedures.
- Encourage and support workers.

- Recognize that “not having enough to do” or “waiting” are expected parts of disaster mental health response.
- Pace yourself between low-and high-stress activities.
- Take regular breaks whenever you experience troubling incidents and after each work shift.

After the Crisis

The ending of the disaster assignment, whether it involved immediate response or long-term recovery work, can be a period of mixed emotions for workers. While there may be some relief that the disaster operation is ending, there is often a sense of loss and "letdown," with some difficulty making the transition back into family life and the regular job.

Here are some ways to minimize stress for workers after the crisis:

- Allow time off for workers who have experienced personal trauma or loss. Transition these individuals back into the organization by initially assigning them to less demanding jobs.
- Develop protocols to provide workers with stigma-free counseling so workers can address the emotional aspects of their experience.
- Institute exit interviews and/or seminars to help workers put their experiences into perspective and to validate what they have seen, done, thought, and felt.
- Provide educational workshops around stress management and self-care.

Importance of Stress Management

Stress management is key to emergency management. Successful stress management is built on prevention and planning, a solid understanding of roles and responsibilities, support for colleagues, good self-care, and seeking help when needed.

Crisis response professionals may be repeatedly exposed to unique stressors during the course of their work. Successful implementation of any stress management plan requires overcoming some obstacles and barriers, including priority setting, resource allocation, organizational culture, and stigma.

Taking action to prevent and reduce stress is a critical element of effective emergency management and supports those in crisis response professions in their collective healing and recovery.

Module 4 Quiz

Use this quiz to self-check your understanding of the module content. You can also go online and take this quiz within the module. The online quiz provides the correct answer once submitted.

- 1. _____ and _____ in incident management procedures are key to stress management before a crisis occurs.**
 - a. Training, preparedness
 - b. Communication, training
 - c. Preparedness, communication
 - d. Knowledge, training

- 2. Before a crisis occurs, provide _____ on stress management techniques.**
 - a. monthly
 - b. regular
 - c. weekly
 - d. daily

- 3. During a crisis, management should clearly define individual roles and re-evaluate if the situation changes.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 4. Take _____ breaks whenever you experience troubling incidents.**
 - a. normal
 - b. hourly
 - c. regular
 - d. long

5. Which of the following is/are ways management can minimize stress for workers after a crisis?

- a. Transition individuals back into the organization
- b. Perform exit interviews
- c. Provide educational workshops
- d. All of the above are correct

Endnotes

1. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (2014). Managing Stress During a Crisis. Retrieved from:
https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/emergencypreparedness/resilience_resources/support_documents/supervisorintra/intradeployment_supervisors.html
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014). Stress: At Work. Retrieved from:
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/99-101/>
3. Government of Western Australia: Department of Commerce. (2014). Stress. Retrieved from:
<http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe/stress>
4. National Institute on Mental Health. (2014). Fact Sheet on Stress. Retrieved from:
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml>