



What Is Stress?

Pressure is a fact of life. It can arise at home or at work. There is no such thing as a pressure-free world.

In itself, pressure is not harmful. It is a driver to do everyday tasks. Where it can become harmful is when demands go beyond your ability to cope - the scales of the balance tip over and that is when pressure results in a stress type reaction.

People have differing abilities to deal with pressure, some actually thrive on it. But everyone has a point where the pressure becomes overwhelming. That's when there is a feeling now called 'stress'. You are not alone if you feel stressed; as many as one in five people, at any one time, could be feeling the same.

**How Do You
Recognise Stress?**

If you have prolonged pressure and think you are not coping, one of the first things you might notice are some health symptoms and unintentional changes in how you behave. The changes can vary from person to person. Many of the symptoms are not specific for stress and can occur in other medical conditions.

Psychological

- Lack of concentration
- Difficulty in making a decision
- Making frequent mistakes
- Forgetfulness
- Anxiety over small issues
- Irritability and over-reaction to small problems
- Emotional outbursts or crying

Physical

- Tension in the muscles of the neck, back or upper arms
- Frequent headaches
- Difficulty sleeping, early morning waking
- Changes in appetite
- Stomach problems, heartburn
- Chest pains

Behaviour

- Increased drinking or smoking
- Arguments with close relatives or work colleagues
- Lateness or absenteeism from work
- Poor performance at work

It is important to spot the symptoms at an early stage because it is usually possible to make changes to help the situation before any serious problems arise. The longer someone goes on without taking action, the more likely they are to damage their health and the more problems they are likely to face at home and at work.



What Do You Do If You Think You Might Have a Problem?

If you think you are developing a problem which relates to stress at work and you can't see a way out of it, it is important to seek some assistance. There are a number of people at work who can help you out, such as your line manager or the site HR. It may be helpful if you are referred to Occupational Health and Wellbeing at this stage.

If you prefer to talk to an independent health professional, you can make contact either with Occupational Health and Wellbeing yourself or with your own doctor. Occupational Health will listen to your problems in confidence and give practical advice to help you.

In any event, don't sit around and let things build up -- seek help.

What you can do about excessive pressure at work

- Tell your Manager if you have a problem
- Make an appointment with Occupational Health and Wellbeing for a confidential discussion about your situation
- Think of some practical solutions to the problems that you can discuss with your line manager
- Support others at work who may be experiencing stress – advise them to talk to their Manager
- Ask for further training to help with your job e.g. computer training, assertiveness or time management

What you can do about work related stress outside work

The following will not prevent work related stress but may help you to take care of yourself

- Eat healthily
- Do not smoke/drink or smoke/drink more than usual; although it may temporarily calm you down, it will have a negative effect on your long-term health. Also, alcohol is a depressant.
- Watch out for increase coffee and tea consumption as they contain caffeine – this may contribute to feelings of anxiety
- Ensure you take some physical exercise to use up the stress hormones which build up when you are under pressure
- Try relaxation techniques
- Talk to family and friends for help and support.

What to do after a work related stress absence from work

- Work with your Manager to address the stress issues as soon as possible
- Do not sit at home and brood on the issues – arrange a meeting with a suitable person in Premier Foods immediately
- Remember what caused the problem and, upon return to work try not to let the same thing happen again by discussing strategies with your line manager and, if possible, changing your way of working.

Further

Management Standards and Guidelines available from www.hse.gov.uk



Information

The MIND website at <http://www.mind.org.uk/>
Self-help website at <http://www.lltf.com/>