

Stress - Information for Employees

What is Stress?

Stress is the reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them which are not matched by their ability to cope. It is both a physiological and psychological reaction which occurs when people perceive an imbalance between the combined levels of demand placed upon them, both at home and/or at work, and their capacity to meet those demands. Stress can be positive and motivating in the short term, helping to achieve success; prolonged stress however, can lead to ill health.

The Health and Safety Executive have defined stress as *'The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them.'*

The objective should be to prevent stress;

- Risk assess to identify the causes and improve or eliminate these where possible.
- Deal with problems as they arise, to promote openness and 'blame free' culture.
- Provide rehabilitation and support of employees suffering from stress.

Impact of Stress on an Individual

Stress can cause adverse effects on the individual, including;

- Tiredness and irritability
- Reduced quality of work indecisiveness and poor judgement
- Loss of sense of humour
- Physical illness such as headache, nausea, aches and pains
- Poor sleep pattern or excessively 'jumpy'
- Increased sick leave
- Poor time keeping

Some Causes of Stress

There is rarely a single cause of stress and the causes may be interrelated, particularly the home / work interface. Causes of stress are referred to as stressors. Although not an exhaustive list below are some suggested examples of stressors. It is important to remember it is the individuals' reaction / perception to a stressor that counts not the managers / assessors reaction to the stressor.

Physical environment;

- Poor lighting,
- excessive noise, heat, cold or humidity,
- perceived threat or danger,
- excessive need to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE),
- poor work environment / poor housekeeping,
- overcrowding,
- poor transport, long journeys

Domestic;

- Marital breakdown,
- children leaving/returning home,
- family illness/ dependency,
- financial problems,
- poor housing,
- moving house,
- ill-health

Environment both work and external;

- Poor working conditions,
- Too much / too little work
- Repetitive or boring work,
- Lone working / social isolation
- inadequate pay,
- lack of control,
- unclear responsibilities / clarification of role,
- poor communication,
- lack of security,
- lack of tolerance of mistakes,
- authoritarian management style.

Indicators of stress at work:

Work performance alteration

1. Reduction in output or productivity
2. Uncharacteristic mistakes or errors of judgement
3. Poor concentration or decision making
4. Deterioration in planning and control of work
5. Increased absence

Change in attitude and behaviour

1. Loss of motivation or commitment
2. Working longer hours with diminished returns
3. Erratic or poor time keeping
4. Rapid changes in emotional mood
5. Increased use of alcohol and/or cigarettes

Alteration in relationships at work

1. Tension and conflict between colleagues
2. Poor relationships with clients
3. Increase in employee relations or disciplinary problems

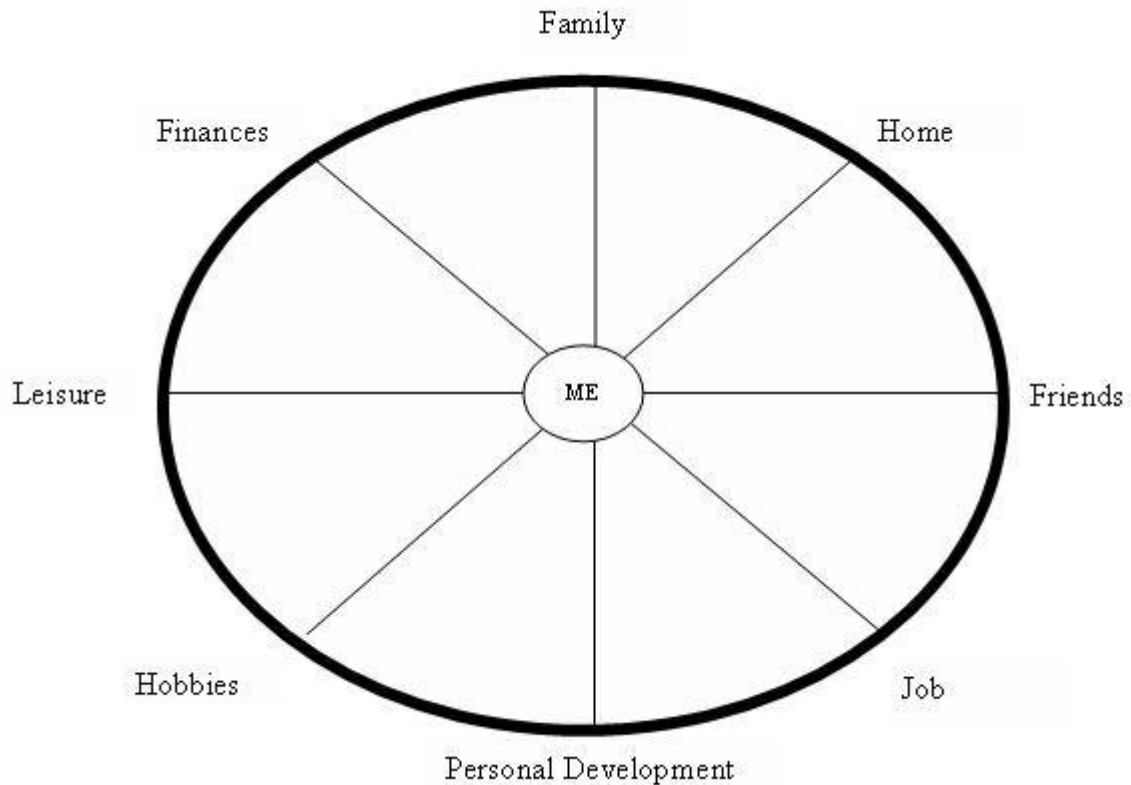
Self Assessment Tools

The University has put together a variety of tools to help you to assess your own stress level, which you may wish to try. Different individuals may prefer to use different tools and therefore have a look at what is available and use the one you feel most comfortable with.

- Stress Wheel
- Stress - Self Assessment Checklist
- Other External Sources of Stress Assessments

Stress Wheel

Look at the following diagram. It represents a wheel with eight spokes. Imagine yourself at the centre of this wheel, the hub that holds the wheel together. At the end of each spoke is a facet of your life. These are facets that are important to you as an individual; so think about what areas of your life you would put at the end of each spoke. The following image is purely an example to help you complete your own life wheel, you may prefer to change the spoke headings or add others.



Now think about each of these areas in turn and mark on the spoke where you feel you are in relation to your heading. If you feel that you have everything well controlled and can make no difference to that area mark yourself right out at the end of the spoke. If there are issues then bring your mark in nearer to the hub, the nearer the hub the more attention you require to pay to this area.

Once you have done this for each spoke, join the marks up. Ideally you want to have a rounded circle in the wheel. This would indicate that you have the main areas in your life balanced and controlled. Look at your wheel and decide which areas require attention due to the imbalance of the wheel; this will help you focus on where to make improvement.

Susceptibility to stress varies and is unique to each individual. How well you cope depends on your basic disposition, your ability to cope with pressure and the nature of the stressors. To some extent how you have coped with past experiences may affect how you deal with future stressful issues.

The results of this can either be kept confidential or you may wish to discuss certain aspects with your line manager, Occupational Health Adviser, Human Resources Manager, Staff Counsellor or your G.P., etc. Further Sources of Guidance and Advice are available.

Stress - Self Assessment Checklist

A self assessment checklist is available which you can print out and complete. The results of this can either be kept confidential or you may wish to discuss certain aspects with your line manager, Occupational Health Adviser, Human Resources Manager, Staff Counsellor or your G.P., etc.

Other External Sources of Stress Assessments

The Internet Health Library has an online assessment - How Vulnerable Are You to Stress? This is a simplistic assessment and although not as comprehensive as other stress assessments, it does provide a good basis for access to information available from the Internet Health Library.

An online test to assess your vulnerability to stress -

<http://www.internethealthlibrary.com/sq/stress/stress-assess.htm>

University of Edinburgh Contacts

Managers can seek guidance on managing stress within the workplace from the Occupational Health Unit. Where a member of staff has a stress-related issue, either the manager or the member of staff may wish to consider referral to the Occupational Health Unit and / or the University Staff Counsellor.

- Occupational Health Unit Contacts:
 - Mrs Janet Craig, Occupational Health Manager, 514302
 - Isabel Jack, Occupational Health Adviser, 508192
 - Daniel Richards, Occupational Health Adviser, 502209

- Staff Counsellor, 650 2513
 - A confidential answer phone. Leave a message and best contact number and your call will be returned as quickly as possible.