

## Wellness

# Stress and your health at work Stress less by working on your wellbeing

Australians work some of the longest hours in the Western world, so it is not surprising many of us come home feeling exhausted and time-pressured. These feelings can contribute to stress and negatively affect our health and wellbeing. Here are some tips to help you stress less and stay well.

### Work wellbeing

#### Consider your work setting

Your physical working environment can affect your mental health. Your workspace should be comfortable and suitable for the work you do, with sufficient personal space and good lighting and ventilation. Having access to common areas where you can interact with your colleagues is important too, along with regular access to sunlight and fresh air. Talk to your manager or workplace health and safety officer if you have problems with your work areas.

#### Work on your posture and work habits

Having an ergonomically-designed workplace is no good if you slump in your seat or stretch too far to reach things you need. Organise your workspace so you are not putting strain on your body and don't maintain a fixed posture for too long. Take regular breaks too. How about trying Pilates, yoga or strength training at the gym to develop your core muscles and improve flexibility? Such steps can reduce your risk of workplace injuries and have a positive impact on both your physical and mental health.

#### Work to reduce job stress

Job stress increases the risk of mental health problems so talk to your manager or supervisor if your work seems consistently stressful or is overwhelming you. There could be many reasons for this including feeling that you don't have enough control over your workload or sufficient resources to do your job properly. If you're struggling to manage your work around caring for children or an elderly relative, see if

you can adjust your working hours around your caring responsibilities, or work from home sometimes. The Fair Work legislation enables flexible working in certain circumstances.

Managing your time more effectively can also help to reduce stress. Try regularly reviewing your priorities and making better use of technology to do things more efficiently. Communicate effectively with your colleagues and managers, and delegate if possible.

### Look after yourself outside work too

Managing your wellbeing outside work can help you cope better with work-related stress. Here are a few suggestions.

- **Work on your work-life balance.** Try not to over-commit to activities, especially at times when you're more likely to feel stressed. It's fine to say 'no' sometimes. Set boundaries with work too. Limit access to work emails and your availability to answer the phone outside of working hours. And make sure you have downtime to yourself to unwind and do something you enjoy, as well as taking your annual leave each year to get a proper break.
- **Get active.** Regular exercise helps reduce symptoms of anxiety and stress while also keeping you in good physical shape. 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days is all it takes to help improve both your physical and mental health.
- **Clean up your act.** Eating healthily is always something to strive for. Avoid smoking and try not to overdo the

caffeine – the nicotine in cigarettes and caffeine in coffee, cola and energy drinks are stimulants that may increase your stress levels. Limit your intake of alcohol too. It may help you feel more relaxed at first, but long-term drinking to cope with stress can lead to a range of health and social problems, including negatively affecting how well you can do your work.

- **Get enough sleep.** Lack of sleep decreases mental performance and can lower mood. Most working-age adults need an average 7–9 hours of good quality sleep each night.
- **Try deep relaxation.** Everyone has different ways of relaxing – whether it's reading, listening to music or watching TV. But it's also useful to have something extra. Deep relaxation techniques, such as progressive muscle relaxation and meditation, can help slow down breathing and heart rates, and relax muscle tension.

### Don't let stress build up – talk to someone

The ability to cope with work-related stress depends on the individual. However, prolonged stress shouldn't be left unmanaged as it can progress to mental illnesses like depression or an anxiety disorder.

You can get help from your manager, your Human Resources department or your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider (if applicable) initially. But if you feel stress has been consistently affecting your ability to carry out everyday life, you may need further help. Talk to your GP or a qualified mental health professional. And remember there are also 24-hour telephone support services, such as Lifeline (13 11 14) and organisations like beyondblue, who can help too.

### Further Information

-  **Safe Work Australia**  
[www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au)
-  **Beyondblue**  
[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)
-  **Mindhealthconnect**  
[www.mindhealthconnect.org.au](http://www.mindhealthconnect.org.au)

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