

# Good Health is Good for Business

## Why should employers be concerned about workplace stress?

Stress is a normal occurrence. However, with increasing demands of work and home life, stress on the job is a problem causing physical, mental, and financial consequences for employers as well as employees. Studies show that stressful working conditions are associated with increased absenteeism, tardiness, and intentions by workers to quit their jobs — all of which have a negative effect on a company's success. Employers, managers, supervisors, and business owners have many reasons to consider the stress level of their workers and what can be done to minimise its effects.

### Financial

- Stressed employees take more sick days and file more disability claims than do contented employees
- Disgruntled employees often quit after extensive investment has been made in their training, and another person has to be trained in their place
- Job stress can result in decreased productivity impacting revenue and profit

### Emotional

- Stressed workers may become depressed, overly anxious or angry
- Alcohol and other drugs (AOD) are sometimes thought to reduce stress. The reality is that AOD can create more stress. How? Alcohol and other drugs can cause health conditions, decision making impairment and legal problems that in turn create a more stressful reality.
- Stressed workers are more likely to smoke, have poor nutrition and be physically inactive. These three factors lead to heart disease and strokes.

### Safety

- People who are overly stressed are less attentive and can accidentally damage equipment or injure themselves or others
- At the extreme, stress can lead to violent, abusive or threatening behaviour in the workplace

In addition, the NSW Work Cover Authority states, “the implementation of stress management in the work place is the employers’ responsibility under the health & safety act 1983 - Duty of Care” (Occupational Health & Safety Act). Clearly no employer can afford to ignore their responsibilities when it comes to workplace stress.

### Employee health affects the bottom line

High-conflict work environments, heavy workloads and financial pressure are an enormous drain on your employees, and high stress levels lead to thousands of stress-related WorkCover claims every year. In November 2005, Medibank Private undertook research into a range of issues affecting Australian workers. 53% reported feeling overwhelmed with pressure and stress a “significant amount of the time” and 12% reported feeling depressed. The results found a measurable link between a person's health and lifestyle and how productive they are at work.

Workers with good health and lifestyle habits take less sick leave, are more satisfied with their performance and perform more effectively during working hours each month. Employees with poor overall health status are far more likely to be absent from work, and are nine times more likely to have sick days, compared to healthy employees.

## Comparison of the Australian worker

Unhealthy	Healthy
18 days annual sick leave	2 days annual sick leave
Self-rated performance 3.7 out of 10	Self-rated performance 8.5 out of 10
49 effective hours worked (F/T) pm	143 effective hours worked (F/T) pm
High fat diet	Healthy diet
Low energy levels and poor concentration	Fit, energetic and alert
Irregular sleep patterns	More attentive at work, better sleep patterns
Poor stress management techniques	Actively manages stress levels

Source: Medibank Private, "The Health of Australian Workers" November 2005

The study also found that a worker's health status impacts upon their productivity at work. The healthiest Australian employees are almost three times more productive than their unhealthy colleagues

### What can employees and employers do to reduce stress at work?

To reduce stress at work, employees should try to maintain a balance between work and family or personal life, a supportive network of friends and co-workers, and a relaxed and positive outlook. Tolerance to stress can be improved through the development of healthy life habits such as regular exercise, eating a well-balanced and nutritious diet, getting enough rest and taking on a positive outlook

It is also important that the workplace is a "healthy" organisation. Busy workplaces cannot always decrease the amount of 'stressors' that exist, however employers can help employees build up their stress tolerance through improving their general health and wellbeing and ensuring that they allow time to 'de-stress'.

As a result of implementing a stress resilience program there are benefits to the employer of 'healthy' employees...

- Reduced absenteeism
- Increased employee productivity and performance
- Improved staff retention
- Improved mental alertness and self-esteem
- Improved time management
- Improved workplace communication
- Improved job satisfaction via reduced stress
- Reduced incidence of other workplace injuries
- More energetic employees
- Reduced workplace conflict
- Improved staff commitment and morale

What next?

If your organisation is stressed contact us today!

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