

# **Stress - advice for employees**

## **What is stress?**

Stress is different things to different people, however the Health and Safety Executive have defined it as:

**"The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them."**

This guide will introduce you to the signs and causes of stress, as well as ways to overcome it and the support that is available.

## **What are the signs of stress?**

- Sleep disturbance/insomnia
- Muscle tensions
- Headaches, migraines and giddiness
- High blood pressure
- Lack of energy and tiredness
- Memory loss
- Anxiety or depression
- Nervousness
- Changing in eating habits whether is overeating or under eating
- Unhealthy behaviors like increased drinking or smoking,
- Sudden mood changes or loss of enthusiasm
- Drop in performance and lack of motivation
- Failure to meet deadlines or delegate
- Difficulty concentrating
- Absenteeism
- Declining working relationships/feeling isolated

## **Stress at work**

There are many factors that can contribute to work related stress, some of these include:

- Workload – too much/too little/work not being appreciated
- Having an unclear or ambiguous role/task
- Lack of direction, objectives or challenges
- Indecision from managers or lack of managerial support
- Difficult relationships
- Working conditions/long working hours
- Changes in the organisation
- Job insecurity
- Balancing work and home

## What can you do to help manage stress at work

- **Self awareness**– learn to recognise stress in yourself. Take control of your situation and set your own goals. Think about what gives you job satisfaction and when you feel good at work.
- **Work-life balance** - If you feel that you are struggling to cope with your workload it's a good idea to talk to your manager. Your manager may be able to advise of a solution to help ease your workload. Possible solutions may include; an extension to a deadline, additional help and support with a task or reorganisation of your tasks. If appropriate to your role working from home can offer a chance to catch up with your work. It is worth asking your manager about the possibility of flexible working or a reduction in hours, as this can sometimes be arranged.
- **Time management** - Try to manage your workload by planning the time you will need to complete tasks. It is a good idea to aim to only do one task at a time and to commit to that task until it is completed, this will help you to work more effectively and reduce pressure. Avoid being disorganised by de-cluttering your desk or workspace, as disorganisation leads to more stress.
- **Change environment** – Change such as restructuring can cause a great deal of stress for employees. In the current environment where change is prevalent it is very important you discuss any concerns you have with your manager.

## What you can do to try to manage your stress at home

- **Relaxation** -Relaxation decreases nervous activity and helps to lower blood pressure and reduce your heart rate. Everyone has different ways to relax, whether its taking time to read the newspapers on a Sunday morning, go for a walk or a swim, spending time with friends or family, meditation and yoga, having a massage etc. It's not always easy with a busy life but it is important to try to set aside sometime to relax and unwind. Feeling more refreshed at home will help you manage with stress in other areas of your life such as work.
  - **Healthy lifestyle.**
1. Try to eat healthier and take time to enjoy your food. The university has a number of catering outlets, which can give you the chance to get away from your desk or work area and have a proper break over lunchtime.
  2. Leave some time for exercising, it can help to reduce stress levels.

## Have you ever thought about cycling to work?

You can buy a bike at a reduced cost through our scheme – [click here](#)

3. Make sure that you allow enough time for sleep. It will give you more energy to cope with life's ups and downs.
4. Stop smoking - 1 in 2 people who use free local *NHS Stop Smoking Services* don't smoke four weeks later. Meet with *NHS* experts in your area to discuss ways to stop smoking. <http://smokefree.nhs.uk/>

### Support available in the university:

- Your line manager – talking to your line manager is the best place to start as they will be best placed to work with you to review your workload and how your role and team are organised.
- Training or coaching in coping with stress or time management. Look at the Learning and Development Centre website for further information on the courses available.  
<http://info.uwe.ac.uk/hr/ldc/events/listGeneralManagement.asp>
- HR department - you can talk to an HR Adviser about work issues especially if work is causing stress. HR may also refer you to an Occupational Health Nurse for further guidance on how best to support you.
- The **Employee Assistance Programme** offers staff access to a free **confidential telephone helpline service** available 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. The service offers information and advice on a whole range of personal, emotional, family, legal and financial questions that we all have to deal with from time to time and can affect us at both home and at work.  
**Call 0800 111 6387**
- Health and Safety unit – provide advice on stress please refer to their [webpages](#).
- **Trade Unions**– if you are member of a union they can provide support in dealing with stress at work. There are currently 3 trade unions at UWE - UNISON for support staff, UCU for Academics and UNITE for manual staff
- [The Living Centre](#) based in the Octagon provides a wonderful space for relaxation and spiritual exploration.

### Support available outside the university:

- If you are experiencing ongoing stress symptoms you may wish to contact your GP
- Family and friends
- Stress helplines e.g. [www.stressbusting.co.uk](http://www.stressbusting.co.uk)
- Anxiety and depression confidential helpline: 01622 717656, email them on [stressadvice@lycos.com](mailto:stressadvice@lycos.com) or go on their web page <http://stresshelp.tripod.com/>
- NHS helpline for people stressed about the credit crunch: 0300 123 2000
- <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Stress/Pages/Introduction.aspx>