

# Managing Stress at Work

This is a UCC Staff Safety Representative Initiative

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## Overview

- \* What is stress?
- \* What causes stress at work?
- \* Risk assessment for stress
- \* Personal stress management
- \* Managing the employee with stress

## What is Stress?

Psychological stress occurs when the demands upon an individual exceed that individual's perceived ability to meet those demands



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## Stress

- \* Psychological stress is not, in itself, a medical condition. However, stress, particularly if it is unrelieved, prolonged or excessive, can lead to the development of mental health conditions
- \* The W.H.O. has called stress the “health epidemic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”
- \* Stress related to the workplace places a significant burden on the employee, the employer and society as a whole

## Mental Health Statistics

- \* Up to 50% will experience mental health issues in a lifetime
- \* 1 in 5 Irish people of working age suffering from mental health problems



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## Mental Health Issues

- \* Anxiety
- \* Depression
- \* Psychosis
- \* Schizophrenia

Most people, if properly treated and supported, can continue to work successfully

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## Mental Health Continuum

Mental Health - Mental Illness **Continuum**



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## How Does Stress Make Us Feel?

- \* A range of **feelings** including anxiety, fear, sadness, panic, guilt, anger and dissatisfaction with life
- \* A range of **behaviours** such as drinking, smoking and eating more or withdrawing from activities you usually enjoy
- \* A range of **physical symptoms** like fatigue, palpitations, chest pain and neck pain

## Common Symptoms of Stress

- \* Worry
- \* Panic attacks
- \* Tiredness
- \* Feeling on edge
- \* Anger
- \* Poor concentration
- \* Poor sleep
- \* Unable to switch off
- \* Feeling hopeless, tearful, irritable
- \* Drinking too much

## What Causes Stress?

- \* Common Causes of Stress
  - \* Exams
  - \* Problems at school or work
  - \* Relationships
  - \* Trauma
  - \* Grief
  - \* Illness or disability
  - \* Unrealistic expectations ('expectation-experience' gap)

## Stress Response

- \* The human body responds to events that provoke stress by activating the nervous system and specific hormones.
- \* These hormones speed up heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, and metabolism.
- \* The physical changes prepare you to react quickly to handle the pressure of the moment.
- \* This natural reaction is known as the stress response or 'fight or flight' response. This response improves your ability to perform well under pressure.
- \* It can also leave you feeling tense, excitable and anxious.
- \* Over time, if the stress is prolonged, excessive or unrelieved, it can lead to feelings of 'burnout'- a state of mental and physical exhaustion.

## Stress Management

- \* Not all stress is bad for us-most of us need some stress to motivate us to get things done
- \* Positive stress (or eustress) is good for us
- \* Negative stress (or distress) can have negative physical or psychological health effects, especially if prolonged or excessive or unrelieved

# Human Performance Curve



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# Stress Management

## Stress Reduction Kit

**Bang  
Head  
Here**

### Directions:

1. Place kit on FIRM surface.
2. Follow directions in circle of kit.
3. Repeat step 2 as necessary, or until unconscious.
4. If unconscious, cease stress reduction activity.

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## Stress Management

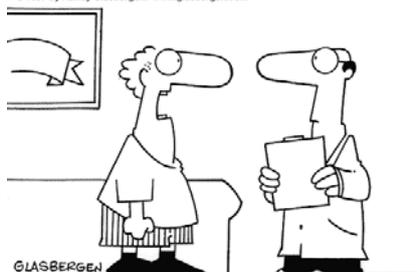
- \* Stress management offers a range of strategies to help you better deal with stress and adversity in your life. Managing stress can help you lead a more balanced, healthier life.
- \* Stress is an automatic physical, mental and emotional response to a challenging event and a normal part of everyone's life.
- \* When channeled positively, stress can lead to action and change.
- \* Negative stress can lessen your quality of life.

## Individual Differences

- \* Some people are better at managing stress than others- they are more resilient.
- \* Why?
  - \* Personality
  - \* Genetics
  - \* Life experiences
  - \* 'Realistically optimistic' outlook- ability to acknowledge life's negatives without dwelling on them
  - \* Social supports
  - \* Coping skills- adaptive or maladaptive
  - \* Lifestyle

## Stress Management

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"I'm learning how to relax, doctor—but I want to relax better and faster! I WANT TO BE ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF RELAXATION!"

## Resilience and Stress Management

- \* Emotional resilience can help us to withstand the pressure of everyday life and stressful situations



## Resilience

Resilience is like a green twig- it will bend but will not break

## Building Resilience

- \* Resilience is partly inborn, but we can all learn to develop out resilience to help us to withstand the major and minor challenges that life will inevitably bring our way.
- \* We can build our resilience by:
  - \* Developing stress management techniques
  - \* Challenging perfectionism
  - \* Building strong relationships at work and in your personal life
  - \* Responding to challenges by positive action rather than self-pity or blaming others
  - \* Accepting that life will change-and that life will be stressful. Some things are out of our control and worrying about them excessively will not help
  - \* Keeping things in perspective- is this really as bad as it seems?
  - \* Looking after yourself

## Stress Management

- \* Manage any physical conditions you have- high blood pressure, weight loss
- \* Practice relaxation- for example: breathing, yoga, massage, meditation
- \* Get regular exercise
- \* Eat healthily
- \* Try to get 7-8 hours' sleep a night
- \* Keep the situation in perspective-is it really as bad as you think?
- \* Don't catastrophise
- \* Talking to someone- a friend, family member or, if needed, a professional, really does help
- \* Don't wait until you are in crisis to seek help- the earlier you intervene, the better the outcome will be

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## Stress Management at Work

- \* Surround yourself with people who support you and make you feel good about yourself- "radiators" vs. "drains"
- \* Remember- you can spend a lot of wasted time trying to change the behaviour of others- instead change *how you respond* to that behaviour
- \* We have to teach others how we want to be treated
- \* Do not confuse the person with the role
- \* Don't personalise issues
- \* Set clear boundaries at work- work issues should stay at work and home issues should stay at home
- \* Track your 'yeses" and learns to say 'no'

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## Stress Management

THE PAIN STARTS IN MY HUSBAND'S LOWER BACK,  
THEN IT TRAVELS UP HIS SPINE TO HIS NECK,  
THEN IT COMES OUT HIS MOUTH AND INTO MY EARS.  
AND THAT'S WHY I GET THESE HEADACHES.



## The “Three A’s” of Stress Management

- \* Accept
- \* Alter
- \* Avoid

## The '4 D's' of Stress Management

- \* Particularly helpful for managing your inbox
  - \* Do
  - \* Defer
  - \* Delegate
  - \* Dump

## Stress Management

- \* Treat the problem, not the symptoms
- \* Early detection and treatment improves the chances of a positive outcome
- \* Learn how to recognise the symptoms of stress
- \* Where do you turn?
  - Self Help
  - Family and friends
  - Occupational Health
  - Counselling/Psychotherapy
  - GP

## Supports in times of difficulty

### Staff Charter

The UCC Staff Charter outlines the responsibilities of UCC as the employer and UCC staff as employees to each other. It is not a legal document and does not establish legal obligations on the University, but is intended to help create a positive and supportive work environment for all the staff of the University.

### Disputes - Policies

- UCC Grievance Procedure
- Duty of Respect and Right to Dignity Policy
- Dispute Resolution Procedure
- UCC Disciplinary Procedures
- Alternative Dispute Resolution Policy i.e. mediation

### Dispute Resolution Mechanisms in UCC

- The head of school/department/discipline is responsible for resolving disputes in their area of responsibility
- Employee relations team and/or local HR Managers are available to provide assistance and advice
- Welfare contact person, Sylvia Curran, is available for confidential one to one consultations
- Independent Staff Ombudsman appointed by the President and endorsed by both Management and Unions. <https://www.ucc.ie/en/staffombudsman/>

## Wellbeing Supports for Staff

UCC Staff Wellbeing

### Employee Assistance Programme (family support)

- 24 hour confidential point of support 1800 817 435 (free-phone). Staff and immediate family members (counselling only available to those over the age of 18). Covers workplace issues, relationship problems, balancing work and home life, stress, bereavement, depression, anxiety, parenting, health related problems, addiction
- Free Legal and Financial advice.

### Training/Activities

- Resilience, conflict management, stress management, Mental Health Awareness, nutrition talks, Lucky Dip classes, Art Relief, Yoga, Samsa.

### Seminars & Events

- Seminars on parenting, motivation, mindfulness
- Staff Money Management Event – advise on budgeting, tax, wills etc.

### Student & Staff Initiatives/Programmes

- Health Matters Day/New Year New You/Movember/Campus Runs

### Family Friendly Policies - <https://www.ucc.ie/en/staffpolicies/family/>

- Adoptive Leave/Carer's Leave/Force Majeure Leave/Flexible Working Hours
- Paternity Leave/Parental Leave/Maternity Leave/
- Returners Scheme

### Other Support Policies:

- Alcohol & Drug Misuse Policy
- Sick Leave Management Policy
- Mental Health policy (in development)



## Stress at Work

- \* Employers are expected to conduct risk assessments for health and safety hazards, including work-related stress.
- \* A five step approach to risk assessment is recommended.
  - \* Identify the hazards
  - \* Decide who might be harmed and how.
  - \* Evaluate the risk and decide what needs to be done.
  - \* Record your findings.
  - \* Monitor and review.

## Work Positive

- \* Work Positive is a comprehensive risk management process that incorporates a risk assessment covering the major causal factors associated with workplace stress.
- \* It was originally developed by Health Scotland and the Health and Safety Authority (HSA, Ireland) to help organisations identify the potential causes of stress at work in line with requirements under the requirement to prevent accidents and illness at work under the Health, Safety and Welfare at Work Act
- \* it is a stress audit tool which can be used to assist organisations in meeting the requirements of the Health and Safety Authority's risk assessment for psychosocial hazards - including work-related stress.

## HSE Management Standards

- \* HSE Management Standards cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health, lower productivity and increased accident and sickness absence rates.
- \* The HSE developed Management Standards for work-related stress. These reflect the six key aspects of work which have been identified as causal factors where people have become affected by work related stress.
- \* These aspects of work, if not properly managed, have been found in certain circumstances and under certain conditions, not always predictable, to have repercussions for employee mental and physical well being.
- \* As we cannot predict individual responses to stimuli and situations, and as we cannot fully control the workplace and the cultures we create, we must try to ensure that the 6 areas the Management Standards are concerned with are reasonably managed and monitored.

## HSE Management Standards



HSE UK Management Standards

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## HSE Management Standards

The Management Standards are:

- \* **Demands**-this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment
- \* **Control**- how much say the person has in the way they do their work
- \* **Support**- this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
- \* **Relationships**- this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- \* **Role** - whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles
- \* **Change**- how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

## Managing Stress for Managers

- \* As a line manager, you should be aware of potential signs that an employee may be experiencing difficulties.
- \* This does not require you to understand his or her mental health problem or diagnosis, but rather to identify and address the barriers to normal working life that the employee might experience.
- \* Understanding and a little accommodation may be all that some employees need to overcome an episode or difficult experience.
- \* If an employee is already off sick, a lack of contact or support from you might mean they feel unable to return. Early identification and action should be encouraged and seen as positive rather than negative.

## Signs of Difficulties

- \* Signs that an employee is under pressure or having difficulty coping can include:
  - \* poor performance
  - \* tiredness
  - \* increased absence
  - \* previously punctual employees turning up late
  - \* noticeable increase in alcohol consumption or smoking
  - \* Being in 'bad form' all the time
  - \* tearfulness.

## Dealing with Employees

- \* Use open questions, such as *"How are you doing at the moment?"* or *"Is there anything that we could do to help?"*
- \* Questions should be neutral and you should give the employee time to answer.
- \* If you have specific grounds for concern – such as poor performance, it is important to raise this at an early stage.
- \* Again the use of open, and non judgmental questions can elicit the key information from employees. For example, *"I've noticed that you've sometimes been arriving late recently and wondered if there was a problem?"*

## Dealing with Employees

- \* **How do I respond in a crisis?**
- \* People with mental health problems sometimes experience a crisis, such as breaking down in tears, having a panic attack, feeling suicidal or losing touch with reality. Should this occur there are a number of general strategies that you can use to help:
  - \* Listen without making judgements
  - \* Keep boundaries intact
  - \* Do not attempt to diagnose or offer any personal opinions
  - \* Provide reassurance and offer practical information
  - \* Ask them what would help them
  - \* Avoid confrontation even if they become agitated or aggressive
  - \* Ask them if there is anyone you would like them to contact on their behalf e.g. a friend or relative
  - \* Encourage them to get professional help.

## Designing 'Good Jobs'

- \* Job context – is there a balanced mix of tasks?
- \* Autonomy – can the employee influence the pace and sequence of activities?
- \* Scope for contact and report – can the employee call upon colleagues or superiors when they are experiencing problems at work?
- \* Pressure of work – are there any peak times or workload peaks?
- \* Working conditions that create problems – are there any factors in the working environment that create obstacles to completion or success?
- \* Personal characteristics – are the demands of the post commensurate with the skills and knowledge of the employee?
- \* Fear, ignorance or hostility from colleagues –any bullying or harassment that may arise needs to be addressed and removed promptly.

Thank You

