

Work Stress — Burnt Out and Fed Up!

Stress has been called the plague of modern civilization. Workers are facing increasing pressures at work, at home and in the community. This has led to an increase of physical and mental disease and disability.

What is work stress?

Stress is not a diagnosis it is a workplace hazard. The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety describes stress as: “The harmful physical and emotional responses that can happen when there is a conflict between job demands and the control an employee has over meeting these demands.

What are the health effects?

Our bodies react to stress by preparing for defensive action. Hormones are released to quicken our pulse, increase respiration, and increase blood sugar, cholesterol and fatty acid production and tense muscles. Other body functions such as protein synthesis, immune and allergic response systems slow down. This is called the general stress response or the “fight or flight” response.

In workplaces where we experience constant or repetitive stressors, the repeated, prolonged responses of the body leads to various illnesses.

Early symptoms:

- poor memory, indecision
- irritability
- reduced or increase appetite
- headache
- skin rashes
- insomnia

Chronic effects:

- ulcers
- migranes
- ulcerative colitis
- coronary heart disease
- stroke
- trigger diabetes
- anxiety, anger, self-blame, hostility, depression, withdrawal
- increased suseptability to infectious disease

What are the causes?

Stressors in the workplace fall into three categories.

Physical conditions

- noise (60 db and up)
- temperature
- poor ventilation
- inadequate equipment

Work organization — how a job is done:

- work overload (too much work)
- overly demanding work
- management styles
- repetitive and boring work
- incentive or quota systems
- role uncertainty and role conflict
- shift work
- technology
- violence and abuse

Social and Economic Conditions:

- layoff and unemployment
- discrimination
- job mobility

What can you do?

- ▲ **Take care of yourself** — seek medical attention and take sick leave if you are not fit to work
- ▲ **Support your fellow workers who take sick leave** as a result of the mental and physical effects of stress
- ▲ **Report sources of stress** to your local OH&S representatives — fill out a UNA OH&S form
- ▲ **Assist your local OH&S representatives** to identify, assess and eliminate or control workplace stressors



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United Nurses of Alberta