Fact sheet
Stress in the workplace

- Employers need to consider the impact of stress on their people. Job stress is a significant occupational hazard
- Being proactive in managing job stress benefits both your people and your workplace
- Not all stress is bad – it can be motivating and helpful
- Manageable challenges at work can see increases in productivity and creativity

What is job stress? [1,2,3,4,5,6]

Job stress is the harmful physical and emotional response resulting from a situation where the demands of a job are not matched by the resources provided to get the job done. Job stress is now recognised as a significant occupational hazard (psychosocial risk/hazard). The NZ Wellness in the Workplace 2017 survey found stress was up 23% compared to previous years[7].

A Mental Health Foundation (MHF) survey of 335 New Zealand workplaces, conducted in March 2018, found the top three causes of poor mental health in the workplace were high workloads, poor work/life balance and stressful work.

Health Navigator notes that, in general, stress at work is increasing. High workloads are cited as the main cause of the increase, but is not the only reason. Job insecurity, possible redundancy and long hours cause stress as well. Harassment, bullying and conflict are additional factors alongside poor work/life balance and low social supports.

Minimising/Managing job stress – a proactive and organisational approach [5,8,9]

Being proactive in managing job stress benefits both your people and your workplace. Workplaces have a legal responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 to manage risks to mental health and wellbeing just like they do any other health and safety risk. This requires an integrated approach where both the work conditions creating stress and the impacts of stress on individuals are addressed. This approach should:

1. Aim to prevent workplace stress or minimise the impact through **creating a psychologically healthy and safe environment**.
2. Have systems to support staff who have been impacted by stress.
3. Provide opportunities for staff to strengthen their skills and resiliency.

*Is it **safe**?*   *Is it **supportive**?*   *Will it **strengthen** wellbeing?*

Safe
Manaakitanga
Psychologically healthy environment

Supportive
Āwhinatia
Fair & empathetic approaches

Strong
Kia Tautoko
Boosting mental wellbeing & resilience

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To reduce the impact of stress, workplaces should consider processes and ways of working that enhance the Three Rs:

Refuel
Whakatipu

Looking after wellbeing and cultivating energy to refuel.

Resolve
Whakatika

Identifying stressors and finding solutions that help resolve the causes of stress.

Relax
Whakatā

Switching on the relaxation response to restore and rest.

Stress and productivity [9]

Stress and anxiety can lift performance and ability and help us respond to immediate issues, so in small doses experiencing stress can increase productivity and creativity. Researchers Nixon, Yerkes and Dodson[11] showed that there is an optimal point where we are given enough challenge to work at our peak. But if stress continues to increase, or if people don't have the opportunity to recover and recharge, the benefit is quickly lost and productivity decreases, illness, accidents and injuries increase and it has a negative impact on the organisation's culture.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ACTIVITIES

Comfort Zone

Frustration

Fatigue

Boredom

Exhaustion

Dissatisfaction

Bad Health

RUST OUT

BURNOUT

STRESS GROWTH
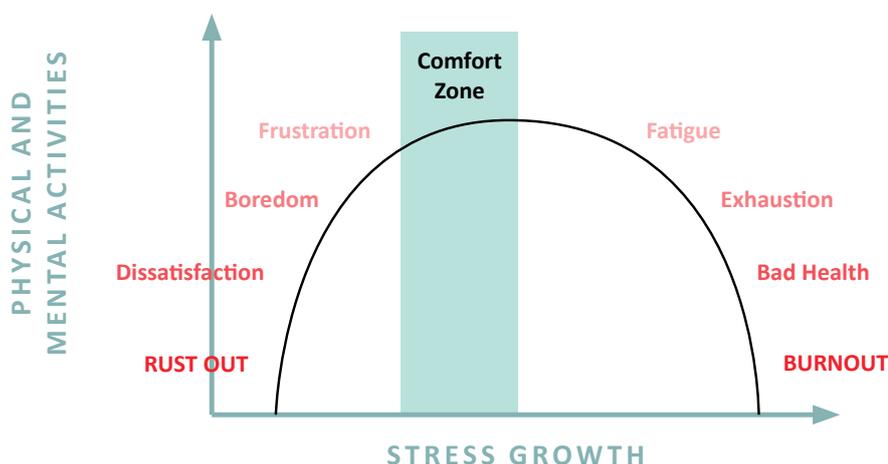
Good stress:

- Motivates us and focuses our energy, helping us improve our performance
- Lasts only a short time
- Is within our coping abilities
- Makes us feel excited

Distress, or bad stress:

- Causes anxiety or concern and generally decreases job performance
- Can be short or long term
- Feels beyond our coping abilities
- Feels unpleasant

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Common causes of stress at work [1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9]

Workload – Physical, mental and emotional demands

Control – Control over work, clarity of role

Reward & recognition – Perceived balance of effort and rewards, feeling valued

Job and social support – Workplace, supervisor, co-worker and whānau

Workplace fairness – How people are treated and rewarded, how decisions are made

Values, ideals and motivations – are values, motivations or expectations in conflict

Physical environment – hazards or demands the environment creates

For more on How work impacts mental health

Signs for stress at work

If individuals or teams are experiencing stress in the workplace, you may see:

Arguments
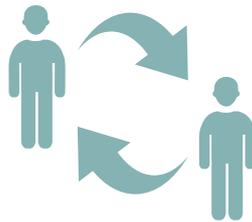
Higher staff turnover

More reports of stress

More sickness absence

Decreased performance

More complaints and grievances

When these signs are present or when staff raise concerns about stress, workplaces have a role and responsibility to assess the impact work may be having on their people's health and to take action to minimise, eliminate or manage.

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