



THE BURNT CHEF  
PROJECT

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A work-related stress guide for  
employers

The Burnt Chef Project



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# Introduction



No matter where you are in the world Occupational Health and Safety Acts will be present. These are designed to ensure the health and safety of every individual, in every position, in every workplace.

Employers have a duty to provide, so far as is reasonably practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risks to the health of employees.

Employees have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of others in the workplace, and must follow procedures and cooperate with actions their employer takes to comply with OHS Acts and OHS Regulations (OHS Laws).

Work-related stress is an acute and/or ongoing state of exhaustion that leads to physical, mental or emotional exhaustion and prevents people from functioning safely and within normal boundaries.

Work-related stress affects a person's health, increases the chance of workplace injuries occurring, and reduces performance and productivity within the workplace.

This publication will assist employers and persons with duties under OHS laws to comply with those laws in relation to work-related stress in the workplace. The advice provided is applicable to any workplace however independent research and advice should always be sourced. **This is to be used only as a guide.**

## Definitions

### Body clock

Our body clock, or circadian rhythm, regulates physical and mental functions according to day and night. This is why some employees may struggle to adjust to shift-work as it can disrupt regular (day-oriented) functioning.

### Safety critical work

This is work for which there may be an increased risk of incident, injury or harm when employees are impaired by work-related stress. For example, operating certain plant or patient care that involves making critical decisions where there may be significant consequences if errors occur.

### Forward shift rotation

A forward rotation means that the direction of shifts rotates from a day shift to an evening shift and then to a night shift. A backward shift rotation would be from day-to-night-to-evening. A forward (clockwise) shift rotation is recommended to provide the best opportunity for recovery between shifts.

### Shift-work

Shift-work involves working outside normal daylight hours (7am to 6pm).

### Sleep debt

Sleep debt is the cumulative effect of not getting enough sleep and can lead to work-related stress.

# 2

## What is work-related stress



### Types of work-related stress

It is normal to feel tired or drowsy after prolonged physical, mental or emotional effort at work. Work-related stress, however, is an acute and/or ongoing state that leads to physical, mental or emotional exhaustion and prevents people from functioning safely. Working long hours, with intense mental or physical effort, or during some or all of the natural time for sleep, can cause work-related stress. All of these have obvious implications for workplace and public safety. Work-related stress can also have long-term effects on health.

There are three broad categories of work-related stress: physical, mental and emotional, which can occur together or separately. Although different, they are equally serious.

- Physical work-related stress is pronounced physical exhaustion and reduced ability to engage in physical activities, such as manual labour.
- Mental work-related stress is pronounced mental exhaustion and reduced ability to engage in cognitive activities, such as making decisions.
- Emotional work-related stress is pronounced emotional exhaustion and reduced ability to engage in emotional activities, such as empathising with or caring for others.

Figure 1 – Types of work-related stress



Work-related stress

### What causes work-related stress?

Work-related stress can be caused by working long hours or by working during some or all of the natural time for sleep. Work-related stress can also result from an imbalance between the demands of someone's job, such as the physical, mental or emotional exertion required to perform a task, and the personal and work resources provided to support a person to manage these demands.

For example, not enough mental and physical recovery time between shifts, or insufficient tools or manager support, may cause workers to become work-related stressed.

Adequate sleep, recuperation time and support are essential to prevent work-related stress or, when work-related stress does occur, to restore balance and promote recovery.

### Is work-related stress the same as burnout?

Work-related stress usually involves feelings of emotional exhaustion and difficulty caring for others, and can also involve feelings of frustration, depression, hyper vigilance, avoidance, fear, and intrusive thoughts.

Emotional fatigue might also be referred to as compassion fatigue in the context of work that requires empathy or caring for others. Work-related stress is not the same as burnout, although they are related – emotional exhaustion and the inability to care for others are key components of burnout.

Burnout also involves a person feeling ineffective, and other types of work-related stress can contribute to burnout.

# What is work-related stress

## Effects of work-related stress:

All three types of work-related stress can result in serious short-and long-term health issues, some of which are described in Table 1.

The factors that contribute to work-related stress can disrupt a person's body clock, which can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of certain medications, such as those used for asthma and diabetes. Lack of sleep can also worsen neurological conditions and mental health issues, such as epilepsy and depression.

Although work-related stress can accumulate over a long period of time, work-related stress due to sleep loss is usually reversible after several nights of good quality sleep.

## Benefits of preventing work-related stress in the workplace

Preventing and reducing work-related stress may lead to:

- better health and safety outcomes
- fewer workplace incidents and injuries
- reductions in absenteeism and staff turnover
- better performance and productivity.

## Work-related stress compared with blood alcohol content:



Being awake for 17 hours impairs performance to the same level as having a 0.05 blood alcohol content.



Being awake for 20 hours impairs performance to the same level as having a 0.1 blood alcohol content.

## Short-term effects of work-related stress:



### PHYSICAL EFFECTS

- reduced performance
- slower reaction time
- impaired hand eye coordination
- increased blink rate
- heavy eyelids
- blurred vision
- head drooping
- feeling tired after sleep
- headache



### EMOTIONAL EFFECTS

- difficulty concentrating on task
- lapses in attention
- difficulty remembering what you are doing
- failure to communicate important information
- risk-taking behaviour
- disorganisation
- lack of situational awareness
- accidentally doing the wrong thing (error) or not doing the planned thing (omission)
- impaired judgement



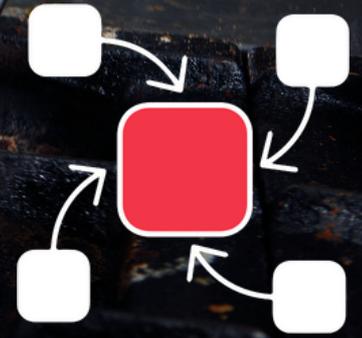
### MENTAL EFFECTS

- more quiet than usual
- withdrawn
- lack of care for others
- increased stress levels
- reduced motivation
- lacking energy
- anxiety
- decreased tolerance
- mood disturbances
- emotional outbursts
- irritability

## Long-term effects of work-related stress:

- heart disease
- diabetes
- high blood pressure
- gastrointestinal disorders
- burnout
- depression
- anxiety
- negative effects on existing health issues, such as asthma, epilepsy or diabetes reduction in effectiveness of some medications
- potential link with some cancers

# 3 Factors that contribute to work-related stress

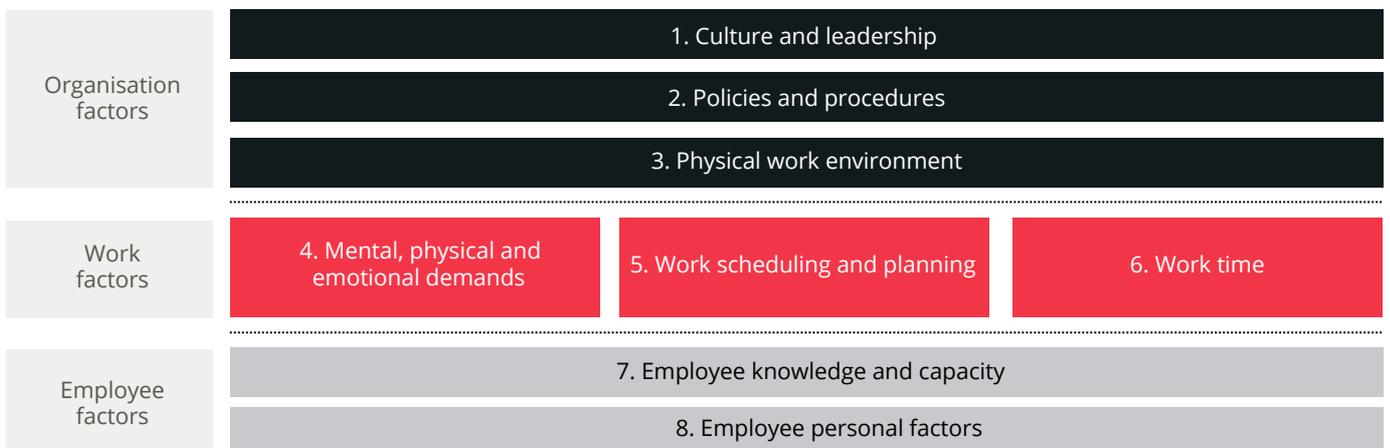


As an employer, you have a duty under the Health and Safety Act to provide and maintain for your employees, so far as is reasonably practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risks to health.

In line with their duty to eliminate and reduce risks to health, employers must monitor workplace conditions. This should include identifying hazards and assessing associated risks that may lead to work-related stress.

This section provides an overview of the different factors that can contribute to work-related stress. These factors include the direct impacts of the work a person does, as well as the indirect impacts of their workplace environment and individual factors.

Figure 2 – Diagram of organisation, work and employee factors



# Factors that contribute to work-related stress

## Factors that contribute to the risk of work-related stress

To effectively prevent work-related stress in the workplace, it is important to understand the different factors, that contribute directly or indirectly to work-related stress.

Key factors that can impact work-related stress and the mental wellbeing of employees can be categorised as follows:



### **Organisation or workplace-level factors, such as:**

- work environment, remote or isolated work
- leadership and culture (including how people relate to each other)
- workplace policies and practices such as recognition and reward, change management



### **Work and task-level factors, such as:**

- high or low job demands
- role clarity, control and conflict
- work duration, scheduling and shift work
- physically or mentally demanding work involving heavy, repetitive or prolonged manual handling or concentration for extended periods of time



### **Employee or individual factors, such as:**

- job knowledge and capability
- personal factors such as health and sleep

These factors can be interrelated and may have a cumulative effect on work-related stress. All factors present at the workplace should be considered.



# Factors that contribute to work-related stress



## Organisational factors

### CULTURE

An organisation's culture creates the unwritten rules that guide employees' behaviour, including how they interact with each other, interpret and respond to change or events, and what they choose to prioritise.

A positive organisational culture that prioritises safety plays an important role in the prevention and management of work-related illness and injury, including work-related stress.

These cultures can be created by ensuring leadership behaviours and workplace policies and practices, such as rewards for safe behaviour and consequences for unsafe behaviour, are aligned with improved health and safety outcomes. Management practices that prioritise a safety culture include:

- Vocal and active promotion of employee safety
- Committing to seeking out and implementing new and improved ways of doing things
- Developing policies and procedures to prevent and manage work-related stress, and ensuring they are implemented and promoted
- Rewarding or recognising managers and employees who prioritise safety
- Ensuring accountability for managers and employees who do not prioritise safety
- Providing genuine opportunities for employees to raise issues and have input into decision-making
- Making employees' roles and responsibilities clear
- Encouraging and enabling teams to work well together, and with other groups across their workplace, to solve problems and get work done
- Ensuring employees have, or are provided with, the skills, knowledge, support and resources they need to do their work safely
- Role modelling safe work practices

### LEADERSHIP

Leadership at all levels plays an essential role in creating a positive culture that prioritises safety. Active and visible commitment to prevention and management of workplace work-related stress from the top down is critical for driving positive change and ensuring work-related stress risk is managed continuously and well.

In particular, leaders, managers and supervisors should take responsibility for:

- Setting and enforcing health and safety objectives and accountabilities
- Ensuring effective health and safe systems of work are in place to identify and control risk
- Developing and promoting policy and key initiatives to support safety
- Allocating resources to the prevention and management of workplace work-related stress
- Consulting with Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) and employees and creating opportunities for employees to speak up about risks and their ideas for managing these
- Role modelling compliance with policies and other desired behaviour
- Providing the support, information, feedback and resources for employees to do their job and manage work demands, including additional support during difficult events such as organisational change or downsizing
- Setting realistic workloads
- Managing expectations from the top down to ensure employees are not unfairly disadvantaged for adhering to reasonable work hours
- Providing support and assistance for employees who are experiencing difficulties

# Factors that contribute to work-related stress



## Organisational factors

### POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Policies and procedures that prioritise safety and accountability are important foundations for effective work-related stress risk management. Other organisational policies and procedures can also play an important role in supporting or inhibiting appropriate work-related stress risk management by impacting physical and psychosocial factors, for example:

- Job design
- Policies that influence levels of job demands and control
- Reward and recognition policies
- Policies that ensure appropriate employee support and consultation
- Procedures for managing workplace conflict and ensuring fair treatment
- Rostering policies that ensure sufficient sleep opportunity is given to employees
- Procedures for managing situations where there is a higher workload/demand than expected (escalation framework).

### PHYSICAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

The physical work environment, including harsh or uncomfortable environmental conditions, can contribute to the risk of work-related stress. Heat, cold, inadequate lighting and vibration are some of the environmental conditions that can make employees tire sooner and impair performance. Poor environmental design, such as not having opportunities to separate oneself from the public and take adequate rest, can also impact work-related stress.



## Work factors

### WORK DEMANDS

The demands of work can contribute to employees becoming impaired by work-related stress. Concentrating for extended periods of time, performing repetitious or monotonous work, multiple or simultaneous demands, meeting tight or unreasonable deadlines, and performing work that requires continued physical or emotional effort can lead to physical, mental and emotional exhaustion, which increases the risk of work-related stress. Work-related driving is an example of a task requiring sustained attention.

### WORK DURATION

The way working periods are planned and scheduled, such as when employees are next required to work night and extended shifts, can increase the risk of work-related stress and illness. Work-related stress can result from failing to allow employees enough time for travel to and from work or to recover through sleep, relaxation and socialisation.

### SCHEDULING AND PLANNING

The time of day that work is performed can impact on the risk of work-related stress. Working at times when employees are biologically programmed to sleep can disrupt an employee's body clock and lead to work-related stress. Regular disruption of the body clock has also been linked to an increased risk of illness, such as certain types of cancer, mood disorders, cardiovascular disease, and metabolic disorders.

# Factors that contribute to work-related stress



## Employee factors

### KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Employees must be provided with the appropriate training and information to ensure they know how to comply with safety objectives and accountabilities, and also to ensure they are able to meet or manage the demands of their role.

### PERSONAL FACTORS

There may be factors contributing to employee work-related stress and sleep deprivation that exist beyond the workplace, which are specific to the person who is affected. For example, lifestyle factors such as child care responsibilities, voluntary work, having more than one job, personal stressors such as family violence, impact of a person's social life, or the home environment. Refer to Appendix 3 – Tips on avoiding work-related stress.

### PERSONAL FACTORS

While employers do not have control over employee activities outside of work, if they choose, they can have a role in promoting healthy lifestyles which may help to prevent illness, injury and have benefits for work-related work-related stress. Employees also have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety.



### Resources for workplace-based health promotion include:

- Stress Risk Assessment (HSE)
- Workplace health (GOV.UK)
- Workplace Health Promotion (CDC America)

# 4 Risk management approach to work-related stress



As an employer, you have a duty under most H&S Acts to provide and maintain for your employees, so far as is reasonably practicable, a working environment that's safe and without risks to health. This duty includes providing and maintaining systems of work that are, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health.

When fully put into effect, the measures in this section can help you eliminate or reduce the risk of work-related stress at your workplace. Employers must involve employees in the consultation process, as well as their HSRs, if there are any.

A risk management approach ensures work-related stress risks are identified, understood, monitored and controlled. A risk management approach recognises that each situation has its own characteristics, which should be assessed to decide the best way of improving health and safety. An effective risk management system should methodically and comprehensively ensure your employees' health and safety by addressing three key areas:



- Preventing harm by identifying physical and psychosocial hazards for work-related stress, predicting and implementing measures to prevent work-related stress and associated issues



- Monitoring and early intervention by monitoring work-related stress risks and signs of employee work-related stress across work hours, and intervening to prevent issues or restore capacity until employees have an opportunity to recover



- Supporting recovery by providing opportunities to recover and overcome exhaustion.

## Employers must:

- provide training, information, instruction and supervision for all affected employees
- provide a system for monitoring the health of employees and conditions at the workplace
- have a system for employee consultation

In addition, an effective work-related stress risk management system should include:

- Policies that prioritise safety and accountability
- Approaches for holding leaders and managers accountable for upholding safety policies and procedures, including the support and resources for implementation and monitoring of work-related stress prevention
- A non-punitive system for reporting and managing employee work-related stress
- An approach to monitoring employee work-related stress and procedures for intervening when employees are identified as being at risk of work-related stress-related incidents or injuries an incident reporting and investigation procedure
- A process for deciding and initiating action and change following an incident and investigation
- A system for reviewing the effectiveness of risk controls and elements of the work-related stress risk management system

# Risk management approach to work-related stress

## THE RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESS

There are four key steps in the risk management process. As you complete each step, you must consult with employees and/or their Health and Safety Representatives (if any).

### Step 1

#### Identify work-related stress-related hazards

Identify with your teams all the work-related stress-related hazards that could cause harm.

### Step 2

#### Assess the risks

Assess the nature of the harm that could be caused by the hazards identified in step 1, including how serious the harm could be and the likelihood of it happening.

### Step 3

#### Control the risks

Select risk control measures on the basis of highest protection and most reliability (refer to the hierarchy of control). Determine and implement the most effective control measure/s that are reasonably practicable in the circumstances.

### Step 4

#### Monitor and review hazards and control measures

Ensure controls are working as planned and, when necessary, improved.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSULTATION

A successful risk management process involves consultation between employers and employees and/or their Health and Safety Representatives. Consultation is a requirement under the most H&S Acts. The points at which consultation must, so far as is reasonably practicable, occur are:

- When the organisation identifies work-related stress is a hazard in the workplace
- When the organisation reviews how work-related stress is currently managed
- When changes are proposed to work schedules and working procedures
- Prior to new work schedules and working procedures being introduced
- At each step of the risk management process.

In addition, consultation:

- Should take place after an incident or near miss occurs where required by the Health and Safety regulations and should take place in all other circumstances
- Should take place where there are indications of work-related stress affecting the health and safety of employees
- Should be undertaken to help identify training needs for work-related stress management.

Consulting employees at each step of the risk management process encourages everyone to work together to identify work-related stress-related hazards and risks and implement effective control measures.

Consultation also helps to raise awareness about the risks and consequences associated with work-related stress as a workplace hazard and buy-in for any proposed actions.

# Risk management approach to work-related stress

## Step 1

### Identify work-related stress-related hazards

The first step in the risk management process is to identify the factors associated with physical, mental and emotional work-related stress risk.

**It is essential to consider all the factors that might contribute directly and indirectly to work-related stress risk across the workplace, the work and employees.**

It is often not enough to only consider the most obvious cause (e.g. scheduling or work duration). Organisations should use a number of sources to fully understand the extent and severity of work-related stress-related risks, such as:

- Consultation, communication and co-operation with employees and their HSRs
- Workplace walk-through inspections to identify issues
- Relating to environment, equipment, materials, substances, and tasks
- A review of organisational records, reviews and data analyses – such as hours of work records, alcohol or drug incident logs, rosters and exit interviews
- Employee survey or sick leave data that might indicate mental or emotional work-related stress

You should also consider the organisation and management of work, as well as your culture, leadership practices, current policies and procedures. Considering current best practice and research on work-related stress and consulting industry or employee associations that may be able to assist with risk identification and assessment can also be helpful.

### WORKPLACE INSPECTION

A workplace 'walk-through' inspection is a useful way of identifying hazards. It is a systematic way of gathering and recording information quickly to ensure hazards are not overlooked. Appendix 2 may help identify issues to be considered during the walk-through inspection and risk assessment process. This can be done with an HSR or an employee who works in the area to capture useful insights.

### REVIEW OF ORGANISATIONAL RECORDS AND DATA ANALYSES

Workplace data can provide valuable information to help inform the decision-making process in the assessment of risks. A review of relevant records and other workplace data can help determine potential work-related stress risks including the likelihood of employee health and safety being affected, potential severity of the consequences of work-related stress, and to decide upon control measures so far as reasonably practicable.

The data should be analysed to establish a baseline for monitoring changes in reporting, measuring improvement, and to monitor and analyse trends.

The data can be used to support decision-making and setting priorities for further investigation, assessment, action or review.

A holistic approach should be undertaken to inform and verify any conclusions drawn from workplace data, considering factors such as:

- Reviewing data across an adequate period of time to ascertain common themes and trends (an adequate period of observation to draw conclusions)
- Ensuring multiple relevant data sources are used and conclusions are not drawn from the data in isolation (for example, consult with employees and review other trends)
- Ensuring data selected is reflective of all relevant employee experiences, not just a select few
- Using both lead (a measure preceding or indicating a future event) and lag (a measure for previous events) indicators

Data collected in this step can also be used to support Step 4 through ongoing monitoring of any trends or emerging risks and as a baseline to support review.

# Risk management approach to work-related stress

## INTERACTION WITH OTHER HAZARDS

When taking a risk management approach to work-related stress, it is very important to consider how work-related stress might interact with other workplace hazards. The level of risk associated with some hazards, such as manual tasks and exposure to hazardous chemicals, heat, and noise, may increase when working extended hours.

## MANUAL TASKS

The risk of a musculoskeletal injury increases during an extended shift due to the cumulative effects of muscle work-related stress, strains and sprains, that is, the risk of injury is significantly higher during a 12-hour shift than during an eight-hour shift. Employees who perform repetitive manual tasks should have regular rest breaks. Injuries usually occur towards the end of a shift.

## EXPOSURE LEVELS

Exposure to hazards, such as noise, heat and chemicals, may also increase during extended working hours. Exposure should be carefully monitored, and exposure levels adjusted. National and international exposure standards are usually based on five x eight-hour working days per week. Seek expert advice when adjusting exposure levels.

Exposure during a 10-hour work day, for example, may not equate to 1.25 times the exposure experienced during an eight-hour shift. The reduced recovery time after being exposed to a hazard during an extended shift also needs to be accounted for. Aim for best practice, keep all exposures significantly below the specified standards and allow for daily variations in exposure levels.

## Step 2 Assessing work-related stress risks

Risk assessment is a way of deciding which hazards need to be addressed and in what order. Risk assessment should indicate the likelihood of the risks causing harm, the anticipated severity of any harm caused, and the actions required to control the risks.

Depending on the risk and information available, a risk assessment may be as simple as a discussion with your employees, or it may be more complex and involve specific risk analysis tools and techniques recommended by safety professionals.

The following questions, in conjunction with Appendix 2, will support you assess work-related stress risks in your workplace:

- How likely is work-related stress to occur?
- How severe are the possible consequences – i.e. could the hazard cause death, serious injuries, illness or minor injuries to employees and/or in turn expose others to risks to their health or safety?
- Where, which and how many employees are likely to be at risk of becoming impaired by work-related stress?
- How many employees are likely to be harmed at the workplace, or external to the workplace – i.e. driving home or work-related tasks?
- Is there a domino or cumulative effect of failed control measures?
- Could a small error escalate to a much larger error with more serious consequences?
- Is there any information regarding previous workplace incidents, or near-misses, as a consequence of work-related stress?
- Has anything changed recently that might impact existing risks or controls? Changes might include new employees or leaders, new schedules, increased sick leave, downsizing, or conflict.
- Do control measures exist and are they adequate?
- What other control measures need to be put in place?
- How urgently does this action need to be taken?

The risk assessment should place the work-related stress risk factors in order of priority and those with the highest level of risk should be addressed first. It is also important to recognise factors can be interrelated and therefore should not be considered in isolation.

# Risk management approach to work-related stress

## Step 3

### Controlling work-related stress Risks

#### HIERARCHY OF CONTROL

If your assessment has identified actual or potential harm from exposure to physical and/or psychosocial hazards, the next step is to control work-related stress risks assessed as requiring risk controls. Under OHS laws, work-related hazards that present a risk to physical and/or psychological health and safety must be eliminated so far as is reasonably practicable or, if not reasonably practicable, the risks must be minimised so far as is reasonably practicable.

Some control measures are more effective than others. The ranking of controls from the highest level of protection and reliability to the lowest, is known as the hierarchy of control. It is important to work through the hierarchy of control to help you eliminate or minimise risks. Control measures should be matched to the hazards identified and assessed in steps 1 and 2 of the risk management process. When deciding on risk controls, you should also check whether any measures currently being used to address the problem are effective and that new or additional control measures do not introduce additional hazards.

Work design is often the best way to directly address work-related stress risk. This might include planning and scheduling to manage work duration and the effects of shift work on employees' body clocks. Control measures relevant to several aspects of work design are described later in this section.

However, remember to consider both direct and indirect contributing factors when deciding on controls, and how they might interact to impact the effectiveness of these controls. For example, if a new scheduling process is the most appropriate control, consider if your leaders will support compliance with this new process and whether managers and employees have the skills and knowledge to comply.

While preventing harm is your first priority, an effective work-related stress risk management system also supports intervening early to manage issues and promote recovery. You should consider these aims when deciding on your broader risk management activities.

The risk control measures outlined in the next sections show where they are most effective for a) preventing harm, b) intervening early to manage issues as they occur, and c) supporting recovery.

Work-related stress can arise from a combination of direct and indirect factors and therefore the most effective way to reduce the risk is to implement a combination of risk control measures.

It can help to find out what others in your industry are doing to prevent work-related stress and incorporate any appropriate risk control measures into your own work-related stress prevention program.

#### CONTROLLING RISKS: PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL DEMANDS OF WORK

Table 3 provides an overview of measures that can be used to address the risks associated with the physical, mental and emotional demands of work. These are listed in the order of the hierarchy of control, with controls to eliminate risks at the top. These controls should be considered first, before considering other options.

# Risk management approach to work-related stress

Table 3 – Risk controls related to work demands

Managing work demands (overload and underload)	Prevention	Intervention	Recovery
The following controls are generally useful to manage all kinds of work-related stress related to work demands:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>eliminate excessive physical, mental and emotional demands</li> </ul>	X		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reduce unnecessary demands and schedule safety critical work outside low body clock periods (i.e. not between 2am and 6am and, to a lesser degree, between 2pm and 4pm)</li> </ul>	X		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>redesign the job to include a variety of tasks, relevant to the skillset of the position introduce job rotation to limit buildup of mental, emotional and physical work-related stress</li> </ul>	X		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>introduce job rotation to limit buildup of mental, emotional and physical work-related stress</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>use rest periods and breaks (in addition to scheduled meal breaks)</li> </ul>	X		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>manage workload and work-pace change caused by equipment breakdowns</li> </ul>	X		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure work demands gradually increase towards the middle of the shift and decrease towards the end</li> </ul>	X		

## Type-Specific Controls

Physical	Mental	Emotional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>find ways to reduce necessary physical demands, for example, by using up-to-date machines, pre prepped lines, and equipment (e.g. ergonomic furniture, lifting equipment and anti-work-related stress matting for repetitive tasks performed while standing)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>redesign or adapt tasks to reduce specific aspects of cognitive overload (e.g. providing visual messages to an employee who otherwise receives high levels of auditory information)</li> <li>redesign or adapt tasks to reduce specific aspects of cognitive underload (e.g. cancelling an auditory alarm while monitoring activities)</li> <li>reduce hazards, risk complexity and role conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>create opportunities for staff to support each other, for example, support groups</li> <li>make discussions on coping with emotional challenges part of regularly scheduled meetings, not just in response to issues</li> <li>emphasise positive encounters with those being cared for (e.g. patients) and acknowledge any positive outcomes</li> </ul>

# Risk management approach to work-related stress

## CONTROLLING RISKS: WORK DURATION

Table 4 provides an overview of measures that can be used to address the risks associated with work duration. These are listed in the order of the hierarchy of control, with controls to eliminate risks at the top. These controls should be considered first, before considering other options.

Table 4 – Risk controls related to work duration

Work duration	Prevention	Intervention	Recovery
The following controls are generally useful to manage all kinds of work-related stress related to work duration:			
• eliminate or reduce the need to work extended hours or overtime	X		
• Avoid working arrangements that incentivise excessive work hours	X		
• minimise weekly work hours to 48 hours or less to prevent errors and promote sleep	X		
• limit shifts to 12 hours, including overtime	X		
• develop a working-hours policy on daily work hours, maximum average weekly hours, total hours over a three-month period and work-related travel	X		
• control overtime, shift-swapping and on-call duties	X	X	

# Risk management approach to work-related stress

## CONTROLLING RISKS: WORK SCHEDULING AND PLANNING

Shift scheduling and planning is an important work-related stress risk management approach that can be supported by scheduling software, such as technology leveraging bio-mathematical models. Such software can enhance the quality of data used to develop appropriate schedules and help manage irregular operations. Software can also be used to monitor work-related stress risk during shifts, and support analysis of work-related stress impact in accidents. However, like all technology, the use of this software requires appropriate human interpretation.

Tables 5, 6 and 7 provide an overview of measures that can be used to address the risks associated with scheduling and planning, including:

- adequate staffing
- managing shift work
- managing night shift.

Table 5 – Controls related to adequate staffing

Adequate staffing	Prevention	Intervention	Recovery
The following controls are generally useful to manage all kinds of work-related stress related to adequate staffing:			
• schedule an adequate number of employees and other resources to do the job to avoid placing excessive demands on staff	X		
• use workforce planning to appropriately schedule leave and other staff commitments such as training	X		
• ensure you have a process for managing unplanned absences to manage workload and work pace and support recovery	X	X	
• provide appropriate recovery time for staff who have been affected by unplanned absences and inadequate staffing			X
• ensure adequate skill level of employees and/or supervision	X		

# Risk management approach to work-related stress

Table 6 – Controls related to managing shift work

Managing shift work	Prevention	Intervention	Recovery
The following controls are generally useful to manage all kinds of work-related stress related to shift work:			
• set start times after 7am, where possible, to enhance sleep opportunity before shifts	X		X
• use a forward-rotation shift system (i.e. morning to afternoon, afternoon to night)	X		
• offer alternative arrangements to employees who may have difficulties adjusting to working hours	X		X
• monitor collective employee attention and performance during shifts to prevent work-related stress or intervene when stress is detected	X	X	
• try to ensure at least 12 hours between shifts	X		X
• provide breaks to support recovery – for mental work-related stress, breaks should be frequent and of short duration (contain information about napping in a safe and recovery orientated manner)	X		X
• allocate shift workers consecutive days off, including some weekends	X		X
• provide adequate breaks between shifts to allow employees enough recovery time (including travel, family time, leisure and socialising, and exercise time)	X		X
• try to fit shift times in with the availability of public transport and provide alternative transport at end of overtime/long shifts	X		X
• set shift rosters ahead of time and avoid sudden changes of shifts to allow employees to plan leisure time and recovery time	X		X
• provide adequate leisure, rest, exercise and sleeping facilities for employees required to remain on-site between shifts	X		X
• allow time for communication at shift handovers	X		X
• enable staff to speak up if they are feeling work-related stress and unable to work without risk and clear actions to be considered to reduce risk of work-related stress-related incidents, such as adjustment of work distribution/allocation	X	X	

# Risk management approach to work-related stress

Table 7 – Controls related to night shifts

Managing night shifts	Prevention	Intervention	Recovery
The following controls are generally useful to manage all types of work-related stress related to nightshift work:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>eliminate unnecessary night work and rearrange schedules so non-essential work is not carried out at night</li> </ul>	X		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>keep sequential night shifts to a minimum (where possible, no more than three nights in a row)</li> </ul>			X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide an adequate period of non-work following a sequence of night shifts (a minimum of two nights is recommended)</li> </ul>	X		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>allow regular “night workers” periods of normal night sleep to catch up on their sleep debts</li> </ul>	X		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that rosters allow for at least two full nights’ sleep after the last night shift</li> </ul>	X		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>arrange shifts / contact with employee so that day sleep is not restricted or interrupted</li> </ul>	X		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>except for emergencies, give at least 24 hours’ notice before night work – where possible, provide an even longer period of notice so that employees have time to adjust their activities</li> </ul>	X		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enable staff to speak up if they are feeling work-related stress and unable to work without risk</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consider taking 15 – 20 minute naps during scheduled breaks to help temporarily restore alertness; be aware this is a lower order control and may negatively impact sleep quality after a shift (not a tool for enabling extended shifts on a routine basis). Consideration should be given for provision of a suitable place to nap.</li> </ul>		X	

# Risk management approach to work-related stress

Controlling risks: Environmental conditions

Table 8 provides an overview of measures that can be used to address the risks associated with environmental conditions.

Table 8 – Controls related to environmental conditions

Environmental conditions	Prevention	Intervention	Recovery
The following controls are generally useful to manage all types of work-related stress related to environmental conditions.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>monitor temperature changes and avoid working during periods of extreme temperature</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>install adjustable benches and seats in appropriate areas such as kitchens or receptions</li> </ul>	X		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>install low noise fans and equipment in noisy areas</li> </ul>	X		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>install cooling devices and/or provide access to cooled areas in hot work environments</li> </ul>	X		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>install ventilation and mechanical cooling devices in hot, confined work environments such as kitchens</li> </ul>	X		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide cooldown areas in hot work environments</li> </ul>	X		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide adequate facilities for rest (including separation from working environment/customers etc.), sleep, meal breaks, onsite accommodation (if appropriate) and other essential requirements, such as clean bathroom facilities</li> </ul>	X		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure the workplace and surroundings are well lit, safe and secure with separate changing facilities for different genders</li> </ul>	X		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide bright, well-lit environments to support wakefulness especially in dark kitchen areas</li> </ul>	X	X	

# Risk management approach to work-related stress

## TRAINING

As an employer you must provide information, instruction, training and supervision to employees, as is necessary, to enable them to work in a way that is safe and without risks to health.

Training can support employees to manage the requirements and demands of their role, understand and identify work-related stress and associated risks, understand and comply with H&S responsibilities and policies. Training is an important part of a risk management approach to work-related stress but is not effective on its own and must be used in conjunction with other controls.

Necessary training and information should be available to employees on all shifts, covering:

- Any specific knowledge and skills a person needs to fulfil their role effectively, or to manage new and/or temporary responsibilities
- H&S responsibilities of everyone in the workplace
- Body clock and sleep processes (including sleep hygiene and sleep disorders)
- Risk factors for each types of work-related stress (physical, mental and emotional)
- Signs and symptoms of each type of work-related stress in self and others
- Self-assessment tools and risk management strategies
- Procedures for preventing work-related stress, such as incident reporting
- Health and lifestyle factors that may contribute to work-related stress or impede good quality sleep, and
- Balancing work and life demands

Additional training for officers, managers or other employees with responsibilities for managing work-related stress risk and/or rostering should be provided, covering:

- How to identify the causes of work-related stress and potential consequences
- Understanding and applying relevant legislation
- Obligations and responsibilities for various roles
- Development and implementation of risk management strategies, such as work scheduling, to eliminate or minimise work-related stress-related risk so far as reasonably practicable
- Effective control measures for work-related stress, such as work scheduling
- The importance of a workplace culture that supports work-related stress management, and
- Other positive leadership practices relevant to the context and cultural aspirations, such as effective communication, conflict management, change management, leading teams, and so on.

### Step 4

## Monitoring and review of control measures

Not all control measures will work as effectively as intended, and they may not remain effective over time as things change.

It is therefore essential to engage in ongoing monitoring and review of control measures, learn from experiences and make changes as necessary. High-risk hazards will require more frequent review. This process may require steps 1 and 2 (identify and assess risks) to be repeated to ensure all risks have been controlled for so far as reasonably practicable.

Remember, consultation with employees is an important part of this process, which will likely involve trialling and refining control measures and considering employee feedback, new technology and changes in knowledge.

Having a monitoring and review process and plan in place will help you clarify your review objectives and the actions you need to take to make sure your review is successful.

# 5

## Implementing risk management systems

### Ensuring success

Implementing an effective risk management system and ensuring risk management approaches and controls work as intended is not always straightforward. Although your proposed actions or changes may be appropriate and even necessary, they may require others to change how they do their work and how they work with others. They may challenge some fundamental assumptions about what is the 'right' way to work. For example, some people may find it difficult to support risk controls that protect employees if they are concerned about the impact on the public.

It is therefore important to consider how you bring about necessary change, and if the change is large or disruptive enough, you should engage all your stakeholders and make a plan for change. Consider the following areas when planning your approach:

#### ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT

Senior management commitment is critical to the success of any significant organisational initiative. Risk management programs require upfront resources (including people, money and time) but, in the long-term, have been shown to provide considerable savings. Senior leaders should be visible and active in promoting change initiatives. Gaining employee commitment through frequent and open communication is also necessary to successfully change employee attitudes and/or behaviour. You should consider:

- Developing a stakeholder map to identify all stakeholders and understand their needs, for example, clinical staff may have different needs compared to H&S staff

- Conducting an impact analysis to identify who will be impacted and how – use this information to plan how to assist identified individuals or groups to manage change

#### CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Some H&S Acts require consultation between workplace parties (employers, employees and Health and Safety Representatives, if any) in order to control workplace risks to health and safety. When managing the risk of work-related work-related stress, input from employees to assist in identifying and addressing risk factors is crucial.

Employers should already be consulting with employees throughout the risk management process and should continue to do so for implementation.

Consulting with employees may help you to:

- Understand their experiences, needs, ideas, and concerns
- Understand what risk control measures are effective encourage promote and encourage workplace adoption of solutions (i.e. risk control measures) that are to be put in place
- Identify if control measures are working

Clear communication at all points in the change (before, during and after) is essential for ensuring everyone is on the same page and knows what they need to do.

# Implementing risk management systems

## **EFFECTIVE CHANGE MANAGEMENT**

- Employers must decide what risk control measures they will use in the workplace to control change management risks that might lead to work-related work-related stress
- Planning change management and its communication across a workforce can help control risks and helps employers meet their obligation to ensure they provide a working environment that is safe and without risks to health, so far as is reasonably practicable
- Control measures should target the work environment and focus on job design and working conditions. Risk control measures should address communication before and during a change process, ensuring effective consultation and participation take place and ensuring job roles are revised should any changes occur. Feedback is critical

# 6 Case studies

A range of case studies are provided below that show potential work-related stress risk factors in workplaces across different roles. The case studies show the hazards and the most effective risk controls measures.



## Successful Stress at Work or Depression Claim

### BACKGROUND

£300,000 in compensation for a victim of negligent work stress-related depression. After a 10-year battle lawyers secured compensation and justice for Tom, a former Manager after he developed severe depression leading to a nervous breakdown.

Tom alleged his psychiatric injury was caused by the negligence of his employers by giving him an unrealistic workload and level of responsibilities over several years, increasing the burdens on him at work while removing the resources and assistance needed to do his job effectively. He was working excessive hours including covering additional shifts without notice and was unable to take his full holiday allocation.

His employers were handed a letter from his GP warning of the toll work pressures were having on his health. He was referred to occupational health and an action plan drawn up to improve the situation. Unfortunately, that action plan was never implemented by his manager, who was distracted by her own grievance against her manager. Tom's condition deteriorated, leading to his breakdown six months later and his permanent ill-health retirement, over 10 years early.

Sadly, Tom's wife left him the autumn after his breakdown. Tom considered the marriage only broke down because of the toll his depression had taken on their relationship.

The defendant argued that Tom was exaggerating his illness and was fit for work about two years after his nervous breakdown and blamed Tom himself for his breakdown, alleging contributory negligence in choosing to work excessive hours and argued his main problems arose from his 'unrelated' marriage breakdown.

Following a two-week trial and hearing the judge found that negligent work stress was the cause of the claimant's original nervous breakdown/severe depression and the loss of his job. However, he also found Tom would have had to stop work anyway a year later due to the psychological impact of his marriage breakdown.

Extracted from *brachers.co.uk*



# Case studies



## Risk Assessment: Case Study

### BACKGROUND

A restaurant company runs its operations 7 days a week with breakfast, lunch and dinner services every day.

All shifts are permanently allocated to employees.

There is no limit placed on the number of consecutive days both full time and agency staff can work and staffing levels are lower than the average demand during peak service times.

Critical pieces of equipment in both Front of House and Back of House areas were faulty and impacted service.

The company did not think it had risk of work-related stress until it undertook a health and safety review of retention rates, exit interviews and internal wellbeing surveys.

The review revealed that a high proportion of staff leaving or taking sick leave had often worked more than 6 days in a row with less than 11 hours between shifts and little time for adequate breaks.

### RISK ASSESSMENT

The review revealed there were no effective work-related work-related stress risk controls during the peak service periods, for example:

- no limit was placed on the number of hours that could be worked
- there was no monitoring of the number of shifts actually worked
- the continuous shift roster provided insufficient recovery time (days off) for employees, and
- consistent late finishes and early opens were restricting employees' sleep, leading to accumulation of a sleep debt as well as increasing health risks.

### CONTROL MEASURES

The review recommended the following work-related risk control measures be implemented:

- recruit more part time members of staff to cover peaks in demand
- reduce menus to limit the variety of mise en place required before each service
- give the Front of House and Back of House supervisors permission to shut close bookings for walk ins when necessary
- implement an organisation-wide work-related stress-management system to manage and monitor the number of weekly hours worked by each employee
- place a limit on the number of continuous days and nights that can be worked in a fortnight
- introduction of POS software to monitor productivity in real time
- employees must have a minimum of six days off every month.

# Example risk assessment on work-related stress in a small business



## SETTING THE SCENE

This company bakes bespoke celebration cakes and has nine employees. Work can peak at particular times of year, eg there are more weddings in the summer which is also the time when more employees take leave. Several employees have complained about feeling stressed because of heavy demands and conflicting deadlines. The owner is concerned that employees may become ill and take time off work. This would also put remaining employees under additional pressure. The owner decided to do a stress risk assessment.

## HOW THE RISK ASSESSMENT WAS DONE

The manager followed the guidance at [www.hse.gov.uk/risk](http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk).

- To identify the hazards, the manager:
  - looked at HE's stress web pages at [www.hse.gov.uk/stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress), to learn about stress risk factors;
  - talked to members of staff to listen to their concerns and opinions about stress in the workplace.
- She then wrote down who could be harmed by the hazards and how.
- For each hazard, the owner wrote down what controls, if any, were in place to manage these hazards. Where she didn't consider existing controls good enough, she wrote down what else needed to be done to control the risk.
- She discussed the findings with staff and emailed the risk assessment to all employees. She put it into practice, making sure that each identified action was done and ticking each one off as it was completed. She also decided to make it part of training for new employees.
- The manager decided to review and update the risk assessment every year or straightaway if any major changes in the workplace happened.



### IMPORTANT REMINDER

This example risk assessment is not a generic risk assessment that you can just put your company name on and adopt wholesale without any thought. This would not satisfy the law – and would not be effective in protecting people. Every business is different – you need to think through the hazards and controls required in your business for yourself.

# Example risk assessment on work-related stress in a small business

DATE OF RISK ASSESSMENT: 17/03/17

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	What are you already doing?	What further action is necessary?	Action by who?	Action by when?	Done
<b>Demands</b>	All staff but particular attention to care workers and others directly supporting students with complex problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding what work-related stress is and what can cause it</li> <li>Making sure that staff don't have to support too many students and reducing the number where these students have complex problems</li> <li>Looking for signs of stress in employees</li> <li>Talking to employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring case loads</li> <li>Planning work to manage demands</li> <li>Taking on extra resource at busier times of year (eg term time)</li> <li>Talking to employees regularly to gather information, directly or via managers</li> <li>People may not identify time off sick as stress, so thinking about whether:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- there is an area/job that has high amounts of absence</li> <li>- employees complain about working in a particular area or doing a particular job</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			
<b>Control</b>	Staff working away from the main site  All staff, if they are not involved in decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Talking to all staff about how they feel about their work</li> <li>Having regular team meetings at the main site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review sickness absence data and your risk assessment with employees – asking what they think can be done and feeding back on these issues and ideas</li> </ul>			
<b>Support</b>	All staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training managers in spotting early signs of stress and how to manage it</li> <li>Providing details of employee assistance services for staff</li> <li>Staff can talk to managers if they are feeling stressed at work</li> <li>Staff are supported on return to work after a period off with work-related stress</li> <li>Training staff to manage issues around lone working and how to get support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training managers in supporting staff suffering from work-related stress</li> <li>Having a clear commitment to employee wellbeing and a culture of openness</li> <li>Reminding staff they can speak confidentially to managers or supervisors if they are feeling stressed at work</li> <li>Putting a structured support policy in place, eg after an incident of violence</li> </ul>			
<b>Relationships</b>	All staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promoting a positive working culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make sure employees work with different people regularly to help form positive relationships</li> </ul>			
<b>Role</b>	All staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defining all team roles</li> <li>Staff understanding what their duties and responsibilities are</li> <li>Discussions on performance, expectations and development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thinking about whether any staff are particularly vulnerable, eg those working alone, young workers</li> <li>Investigating whether there are roles where it is difficult to recruit or retain staff</li> </ul>			
<b>Change</b>	All staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Making sure changes are communicated openly, before they are made if possible, so everyone understands the effects they will have</li> <li>Monitoring effects of changes on stress levels so staff have the chance to provide feedback</li> <li>Establishing training needs following the change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly communicating results of inspections and the resulting changes to all sites</li> <li>Acting on staff feedback so any new pressures linked to changes are discussed</li> <li>Develop a feedback route for people who feel they need retraining</li> <li>Recognise that even minor changes can have knock-on effects – consulting beforehand may reduce the negatives</li> </ul>			

Assessment review date: 17/03/18

You should review your risk assessment if anything changes (eg following a case of stress-related ill health in the workplace or if there are any significant changes, such as new work activities).

For more information see [www.hse.gov.uk/stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress).