

Identify The Causes

It's much easier to overcome stress if you know what causes it.

Stress and job burnout can result from:

- **Lack of control.** Many people are unable to influence decisions that affect their job. For instance, the amount of work you do may be in response to others' demands and timetables, or your hours or tasks may be decided by someone else.
- **Unclear job expectations.** This often happens when there is no clear job description. You may feel uncertain about the degree of authority you have, or not have access to the necessary resources to do your work.
- **Stressful workplace dynamics.** Examples are working with an office bully, being undermined by colleagues, or having an overly interfering boss.
- **Mismatch in values.** If your values differ from the way your company does business or handles employee grievances, it may cause problems in the long term.
- **Extremes of activity.** When a job is always monotonous or chaotic, you'll need constant energy to remain focused. Over time this energy drain can lead to extreme stress and burnout.

Main source: Mayo Clinic at www.mayoclinic.com

“ A filing cabinet is a place where you can lose things systematically.”

T H Thompson.

Stress@Work

Regular stress can harm your physical and mental health, but you can learn to spot the symptoms early on.

What gets you stressed at work? Lack of acknowledgement and control is often cited as a main stressor, along with job insecurity, computer problems, and overwork. When your body is stressed it reacts by releasing the stress hormones *adrenaline* and *cortisone* into your bloodstream, which increase muscle tension, blood pressure, and heart rate.

As an occasional response, this won't do much damage, but when it becomes a regular occurrence, your risk of a number of ailments increases, including chronic headaches, muscle pain, heart disease, and depression.

Before you get to this stage, however, your body will have given you plenty of warning signs that you're under too much stress.

STRESS SIGNALS

Recognising the following signs is the first step in stress management.

Shallow breathing. Once adrenaline starts pumping, your breathing starts to become shallow.

Muscle tension. Muscles in the jaw, neck, and back can tighten, again in response to a surge in adrenaline. You're less likely to adjust your posture when you're stressed, thereby adding to the problem.

Indigestion. When you are stressed, hormones increase blood flow to the muscles, diverting it from the effort of digestion resulting in indigestion.

Headache. Stress may cause a tension headache which feels like a tight band around the back of your head.

Other stress signs include dizziness, pimples, mouth ulcers, sexual difficulties, tremor, and fatigue.

Some recommended stress-busting techniques include:

- regular exercise, including a walk during your work day;
- eating a healthy diet;
- developing humour and perspective;
- regular massage, yoga, tai chi, or Pilates to relax your muscles;
- maintaining your circle of friends and interests outside work; and
- seeking professional help to deal with your stress.

Main source: *Good Medicine* magazine; and Wellness program Management Advisor.



Stressful Self Talk

If you are unhappy about the way you are feeling, you might need to look at the way you are thinking. Do you recognise in yourself any of the following examples of stressful self-talk?

- I must be competent and perfect in everything I do.
- It's horrible when people don't act the way I'd like them to act.
- When people disapprove of me, it means I am wrong or bad.
- If I don't go to great lengths to please others, they will reject me.
- My worth as a person depends upon how much I achieve and produce.
- My way of looking at the world is the only way of looking at the world.

Source: *Hope Health Letter*.