



# Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace

## Stress

Positive mental health and wellbeing leads to positive life outcomes for staff and better results for your workplace. Staff who are mentally healthy have higher job satisfaction and self-esteem. They are more likely to be engaged with work tasks and the workplace, be more creative, make better decisions, problem-solve more efficiently and effectively, experience less stress and take fewer days off work.

The workplace can have a big influence on the mental health and wellbeing of staff while they are both present and away from work. One way of influencing the mental health and wellbeing of staff is by contributing to the following mental wellbeing component:

### Stress

This is measured in the WorkWell Staff Survey through the statement:

*"I am able to manage the demands of my work with little or no stress"*

#### How stress contributes to mental health and wellbeing

Stress is a harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when a person does not have the resources and support available to respond to physical or psychosocial demands and pressures. The overall health of an individual is negatively affected by exposure to stress. People can become stressed from things such as financial pressure, a relationship break down or pressure at work.

A high level of workplace stress is directly linked to enduring health problems including anxiety, depression, and cardiovascular disease. It is also linked to adverse health behaviours such as lack of exercise, poor diet, smoking, and heavy alcohol use.

#### How stress affects the workplace

Work or job stress refers to the distress that occurs when the demands of a job are not matched by the resources needed to get the job done, rewards, or control over an individual's work. Workplace stress is usually preventable. Reducing workplace stress can substantially improve the mental health and wellbeing of staff.



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Workplace stress negatively affects the workplace's culture, and ultimately the business bottom line, in a number of ways:

Productivity:	Organisational culture:	Higher accident and injury rates:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased turnover</li> <li>• Absenteeism - stressors cause illnesses which result in increased time off work</li> <li>• Presenteeism - staff at work feeling stressed, results in decreased quality and quantity of work. Staff may be at work but not on task.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less team work</li> <li>• Less buy in with company values</li> <li>• Greater counter productive work behaviours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More time off work because of injury</li> <li>• Staff on light duties because of injury</li> </ul>

### Take action: ways to reduce stress in your workplace

Involving staff in the development of stress interventions is key to the prevention and control of stress. This helps create interventions that best fit the situation, demonstrates organisational fairness and encourages staff to take control.

#### Organisational

- Job stress can be addressed by modifying work to reduce or prevent stressors and demands, and by improving the resources available to staff to meet the demands of their work.
- Prevent stress by addressing job stressors. Job stressors include:

Job Design	Work Environment	Relationships	Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working hours - inflexible or too long</li> <li>• Workload -too much or too little</li> <li>• Job expectations - unclear or unrealistic</li> <li>• Job insecurity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noise levels</li> <li>• Unsafe</li> <li>• Ergonomic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low level of support</li> <li>• Problems with supervisor</li> <li>• Problems with co-worker</li> <li>• Bullying or harrasment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient equipment</li> <li>• Low staff levels</li> <li>• Low level of support available</li> </ul>

- Improve the resources available to staff by ensuring access to:
  - the right equipment and training to do their work
  - adequate staffing levels
  - supportive management.
- There is an organisational commitment to stress prevention and psychological safety (making someone feel safe to be themselves).



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- If unable to prevent stress occurring, offer support that minimises the effects of stress, and stress related problems, once they have occurred.
- Implement a flexible working hours policy outlining the process for applying for changes to work hours or shifts.

### Environmental

- Ensure working conditions do not increase stress.
- Ensure a pleasant work environment.
- Develop an environment where there are appropriate times for fun and laughter.
- Ensure staff have the right equipment to do their job effectively, safely and efficiently.

### Individual

- Support staff to improve their response to stress.
- Promote the [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#).
- Offer stress management technique workshops focusing on positive mental wellbeing behaviours (e.g. emotional wellbeing, benefits of sleep, healthy food and exercise, healthy thinking, mindfulness, and positive communication).
- Provide and promote access to confidential support services for staff (e.g. Employee Assistance Programme).

### Find out more

#### Working Well: A workplace guide to mental health

The guide is designed as a resource for human resources professionals, health and safety managers, occupational health and wellbeing professionals and business managers:

[www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Our-Work/Open-Minds/Working-Well-guide.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Our-Work/Open-Minds/Working-Well-guide.pdf)

#### WorkSafe New Zealand: Stress and fatigue

Information on stress, fatigue, morale and what healthy work looks like:

[www.worksafe.govt.nz/worksafe/information-guidance/guidance-by-hazard-type/stress-fatigue](http://www.worksafe.govt.nz/worksafe/information-guidance/guidance-by-hazard-type/stress-fatigue)

#### Open Minds

The Open Minds videos and electronic resources provide managers with practical tips to help with conversations about mental health in the workplace: [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/open-minds](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/open-minds)

#### Five Ways to Wellbeing

Five Ways to Wellbeing is a set of five simple, evidence-based actions which can improve wellbeing in everyday life:

[www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Five-Ways-downloads/mentalhealth-5waysBP-web-single-2015.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Five-Ways-downloads/mentalhealth-5waysBP-web-single-2015.pdf)