



Guide to Work Life Balance

March 2022





Work Life Balance

Maintaining a work-life balance is about separating our personal and professional lives without allowing one to interfere with the other.

Both are important to us and neither should be neglected – after all work is good for us both from the financial aspect but also the social interactions and positive health effects it can bring. Having a healthy balance between the two is important for both our physical and mental health.

If the balance though is tipped because of workplace demands it creates an imbalance and can overwhelm our ability to enjoy a satisfying personal life outside of work resulting in feelings of stress.

Managing stress

Stress is a feeling of being under abnormal pressure. It can be caused by numerous factors including an increased workload, as well as an argument with a family member, or financial worries.

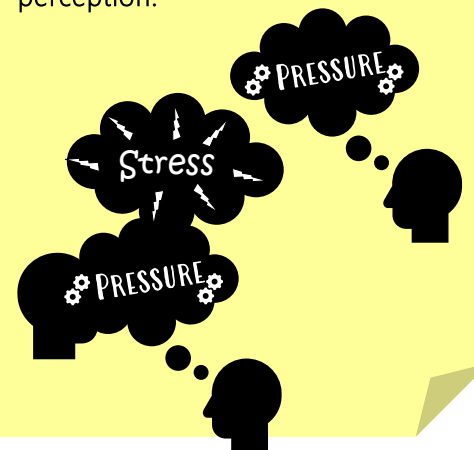
Stress is a natural reaction to many situations in life. Moderate amounts of stress can help us perform better in challenging situations, but too much or prolonged stress can lead to physical problems such as heart attacks, or mental illnesses such as depression.

Feeling unhappy about the amount of time you spend at work and neglecting other aspects of life because of work may increase your vulnerability to stress. You may find that these can have a cumulative effect with each stressor building on top of one another.

During this situation you may feel threatened or upset and your body might create a stress response. This can cause a variety of physical symptoms, change the way you behave, and lead you to experience intense emotions.

It is important that we manage our stress to keep it at a healthy level and prevent it from doing long-term damage to our bodies and minds.

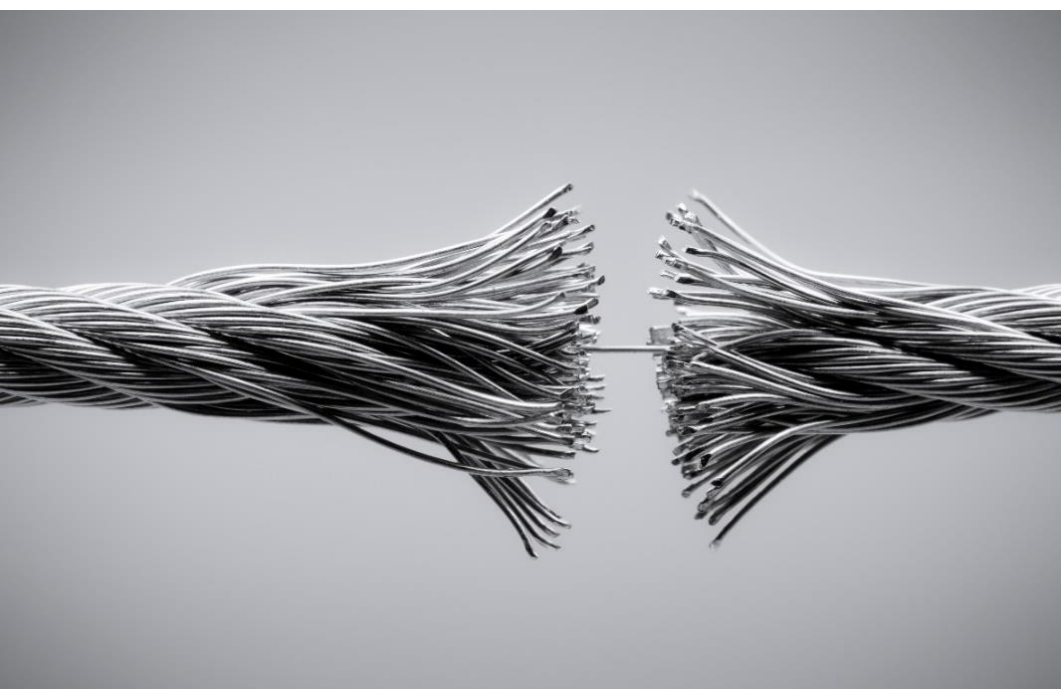
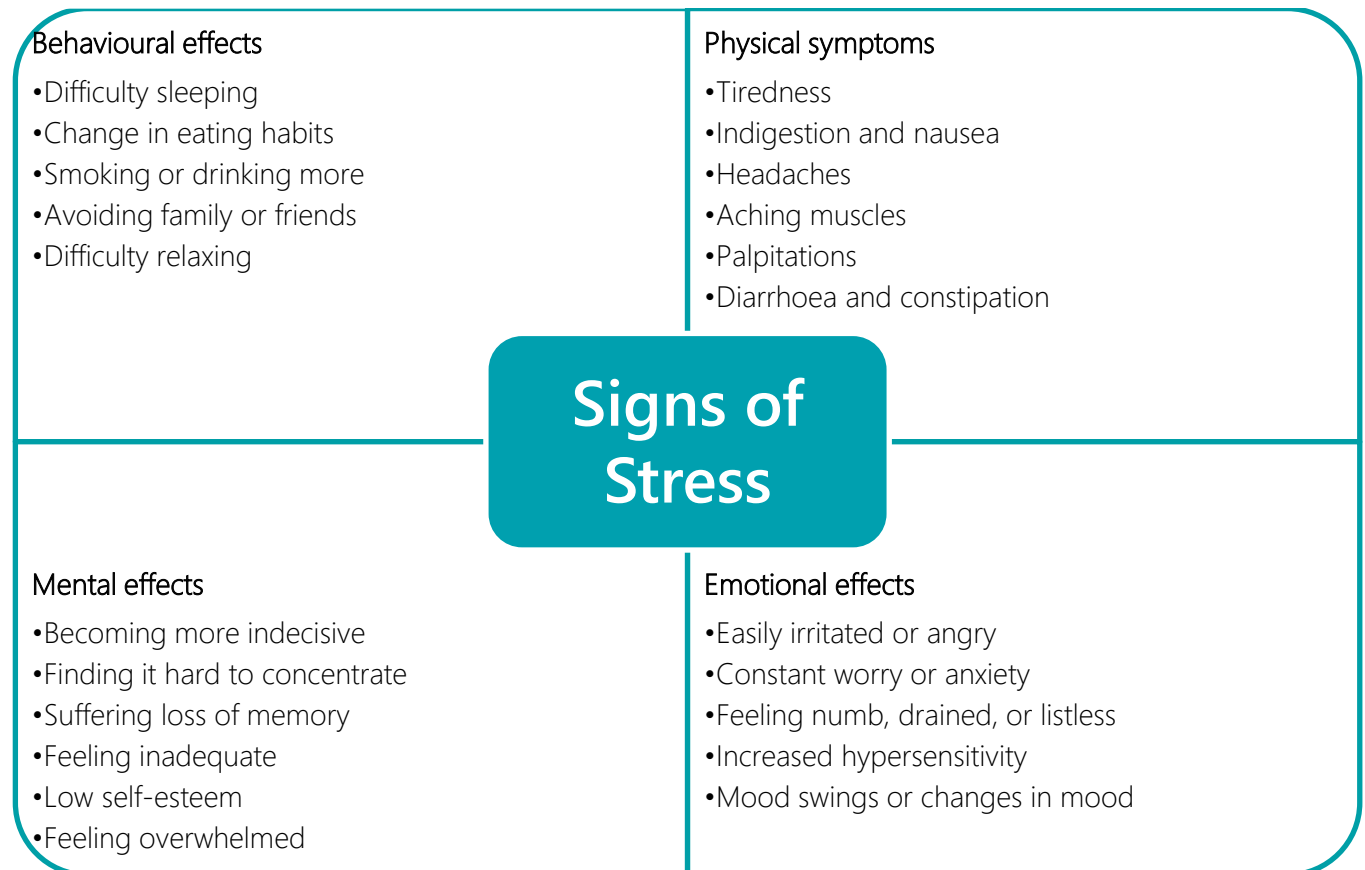
We all have a different threshold to stress – what one person finds stressful, another may find normal. The difference is our individual perception.



How you assess and respond to pressures or challenges is unique to you and depends on several factors including:

- your background and culture
- your skills and experience
- your personality
- your personal circumstances, and
- your individual characteristics.

When stress is affecting your health and wellbeing it is important to tackle it as soon as possible and while stress affects everyone differently there are some common signs and symptoms that you can look out for:



Symptoms like these are triggered by a rush of stress hormones in your body which, when released, allow you to deal with pressures or threats. This is known as the 'fight or flight' response.

Hormones called adrenaline and noradrenaline raise your blood pressure, increase your heart rate, and increase the rate at which you perspire. This prepares your body for an emergency response. These hormones can also reduce blood flow to your skin and reduce your stomach activity. Cortisol, another stress hormone, releases fat and sugar into your system to boost your energy.

As a result, you may experience headaches, muscle tension, pain, nausea, indigestion, and dizziness. You may also breathe more quickly, have palpitations, or suffer from various aches and pains. In the long-term, you may be putting yourself at risk from heart attacks and stroke.

All these changes are your body's way of making it easier for you to fight or run away and once the pressure or threat has passed, your stress hormone levels will usually return to normal.

However, if you're constantly under stress, these hormones remain in your body, leading to the symptoms of stress. If you're stuck in a busy office or on an overcrowded train, you can't fight or run away, so you can't use up the chemicals your own body makes to protect you. Over time, the build-up of these chemicals and the changes they produce can be damaging for your health.

Three steps to take when feeling stressed:

Realise when it is causing you a problem

- Try to make the connection between feeling tired or ill and the pressures you are faced with
- Look out for physical warnings such as tense muscles, over-tiredness, headaches or migraines

Identify the causes

- Sort your stress into three categories
 1. Stress has practical solution
 2. Stress will get better given time and
 3. Stress you can't do anything about
- Try to release the worry of those in the second and third categories and let them go

Review your lifestyle

- Could you be taking on too much?
- Are there things you are doing which could be handed over to someone else?
- Can you do things in a more leisurely way?

To act on the answer to these questions, you may need to prioritise things you are trying to achieve and re-organise your life. This will help to release pressure that can come from trying to do everything at once.



Here are some simple steps you can take to achieve work-life balance. They can be broken down into those we can do in the workplace and those that we can do personally.

Workplace Controls

Speak Up



Let your Line Manager know when work expectations and demands are too much. Make them aware of the source of the pressure and get assistance to address the issues. Engage them early, before it's too late

Work Smarter, not Longer



Prioritise work tasks into four categories:

- Urgent and important (limit this to 1 – 3 tasks)
- Important but not urgent
- Urgent but not important
- Neither urgent nor important

Allowing yourself a certain amount of time per task. Avoid less productive activities. You will get more done in a day and reduce stress levels.

Plan ahead



Be clear about what you intend to do during the week and when you will do it

Break Down Tasks



Break down complex tasks into manageable chunks.

Manage Energy Level



Tackle more demanding activities when energy level is high. Use lower energy times to do routine tasks.

Manage Distractions and Interruptions



Avoid distractions and learn to deal with interruption. Make clear to others when you are busy and when you are available for other things. All of us get stuck sometimes. Recognise when you need to seek advice from others.

Take Breaks



Take at least half an hour for lunch and get out of the workplace if you can. Don't eat lunch at your desk.

Manage Hours of Work



Keep track of your working hours over a period of weeks or months rather than days. Avoid working longer than normal schedules hours for extended periods of time.

Track the time you spend worrying or thinking about work when assessing your work-life balance. This is a legitimate part of work and a good indicator of work-related stress.

Separate Work and Home



Avoid bringing work home regularly. If you need to work at home, ensure that you only work in a certain area of your home and can close the door on it.

Personal Controls

Eat Healthy



This can reduce the risks of diet-related diseases. There is increasing evidence what we eat affects our mental health. Studies have shown that eating a Mediterranean type of diet is linked to better mental health.

You can also help prevent the development of stress by ensuring that your diet provides adequate amounts of brain nutrients such as essential vitamins and minerals, as well as water. See the Wood Guide to Healthy Diet [\[insert link\]](#) for more information.

Avoid drinking alcohol



Avoid drinking in excess because it makes stress worse:

- Disrupts sleep leaving you feeling tired and irritable and having a hangover the next day
- Makes concentrating more difficult
- It is a mood depressant which makes feelings of anxiety and depression worse
- Knowing you are drinking too much can cause additional stress.

Stick to the recommended limits of alcohol intake of fourteen units per week for both men and women. Relying on alcohol to cope is an unhealthy strategy. Find more positive ways of coping such as exercise, hobbies, socializing with family and friends, or deep breathing exercises.

Avoid Smoking



Tobacco use seems to make effects of stress less severe, a type of self-medication. This is because of the effects of nicotine which is a known mood-altering drug. The nicotine inhaled from tobacco reaches the brain in ten seconds and causes a chemical called dopamine to be released.

Dopamine causes an initial sense of calm and well-being which your body craves. The initial sense of calm and well-being contradicts with what is physically happening in the body, which includes:

- Increase in blood pressure and heart rate
- Tensing of muscles
- Constriction of blood vessels
- Reduction in available oxygen

Tobacco use increases the physical stress in the body which adds on to the mental and emotional stress. Use of nicotine overshadows the physical, mental, and emotional stresses. Stress is also known to make it harder for smokers to quit.

Exercise



Exercising is known to stimulate the production of endorphins in the brain which are the body's natural opiates. Endorphins help elevate mood and relieve stress. Endorphin release is also stimulated by listening to music, sniffing lavender, or eating vanilla and spicy food.

Physical exercise can be very effective in relieving stress. Being active not only has benefits for your mental health but also your physical health reducing the risk of heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. See the Wood Guide to Exercise [\[insert link\]](#). Here are some tips:

- **Consult** with a health professional before starting a new exercise routine, if you haven't exercised for some time or if you have health concerns.
- **Walk before you run**, build up your fitness level gradually. Exercise in increments, even brief sessions of activity offer benefits.
- **Love it**, pick an activity that you enjoy because you are also more likely to stick with.
- **Schedule it**, scheduling your exercise into your day-to-day life increases the potential that you will do it, just like attending appointments and work.

Personal Controls

- **Be flexible**, you may need to juggle the times when you exercise to accommodate family and work life. If you can't make your scheduled exercise, consider alternatives such as going for a stroll after work, get out with the kids, leave the car, get off the bus a couple of stops early, walk at lunchtime, take the stairs
- **Stick with it**, set SMART goals — specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-limited goals, and write it down. Have a friend join you, being committed to someone else is incentive.

Relax



Take time to relax. Striking the balance between responsibility to others and responsibility to yourself, can really reduce stress levels.

Remind yourself that it is okay to prioritise self-care – it is what will be of most benefit to you for your long-term health and wellbeing.

One way of doing this is to be mindful. ***Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.*** It involves paying attention to our thoughts and feelings in a way that increases our ability to manage difficult situations and make wise choices. Mindfulness can be practiced anywhere at any time. Here are some things to try:

- **Pay attention** - Take the time to experience your environment with your senses - touch, sound, sight, smell and taste. For example, when you eat a favorite food, take the time to smell, taste and truly enjoy it.
- **Live in the moment**. Try to intentionally bring an open, accepting, and discerning attention to everything you do. Find joy in simple pleasures.
- **Focus on your breathing**. When you have negative thoughts, try to sit down, take a deep breath, and close your eyes. Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Sitting and breathing for even just a minute can help.

Sleep



Good sleep is essential but is often the first thing to go when you become stressed. This can lead you to feeling more stressed. Here are some good habits to follow:

- Keep a bedtime routine, include some form of relaxation
- Keep a regular wake up time
- Avoid heavy meals two hours before bed
- No TV's or laptops in bedroom
- Keep room as dark as possible with blackout blinds
- Block out noise with a white noise app, a fan, or earplugs
- Avoid naps during the day
- Reduce coffee intake
- Be physically active

Worries and concerns can disrupt sleep so try and focus on them during day. If you end up bringing the worries and concerns home, try writing them down before you go to sleep. If necessary, keep a sleep diary to see what is happening.

Be Kind to Yourself



Try to keep things in perspective. Remember that having a bad day is a universal human experience.

When your inner critic or an outer critic finds faults, try and find truth and exception to what is being said.

If you stumble or feel you have failed, don't beat yourself up. Act as if you were your own best friend.

Take a few minutes each day to appreciate yourself.

Accept Help



Seek help early, whether it is speaking to family or friends, using local support organisations or your GP, family physician. Early intervention can prevent the development of more serious issues and help you achieve a better work-life balance

Dealing with stressful situations at work

We all deal with stressful situations at work sometimes and learning how to approach these is very important for your wellbeing. Tact is the ability to tell the truth in a way that considers other people's feelings and reactions. It allows you to give difficult feedback and say the right thing to preserve a relationship.

To develop tact, think carefully before you speak. Always consider how someone else might interpret your words. Pay attention to your body language, and never react emotionally.

However, make sure that you still get your message across, and that you continue to be appropriately assertive. Try using the following steps:



You can often prevent contentious and stressful discussions from turning bad by following these simple guidelines and avoid becoming stressed.