

TOOL TYPE **HANDOUT**  
GEOGRAPHY **ALL**

LAST REVIEWED **10/11/16**  
SOURCE: **WELLNESSFITS**

## **WORKPLACE STRESS HANDOUT**

### **BENEFITS**

October is [Healthy Workplace Month](#) in Canada, which is aimed at increasing awareness of the need for a comprehensive approach to workplace health that's influenced by four elements of a healthy workplace, including mental health. Because workplace stress can impact an employee's mental health, it's important that you educate employees on workplace stress.

### **HOW TO USE THE TOOL**

Give this handout to workers to educate them on what workplace stress is, its signs and symptoms, and ways to deal with and manage it.

### **OTHER RESOURCES:**

[WellnessFits](#)

[Stress Prevention at Work Checklist](#)

[Infographic: Depression in the Workplace](#)

[Why Your OHS and Wellness Programs Should Work Together](#)

[OHS & Wellness Program Integration Checklist](#)

THIS TOOL AND HUNDREDS MORE AVAILABLE IN THE OHS TOOLBOX AT [www.ohsinsider.com](http://www.ohsinsider.com). Templates and tools from **OHS Insider** are provided for members of our service. Members may use this document as is or as a starting point to customize their own documents. **OHS Insider** assumes no responsibility for the effectiveness or legality of any of its online templates or tools. **Always consult your legal counsel and management before implementing any new policies or procedures.**

# WORKPLACE STRESS HANDOUT

## Understanding Workplace Stress

Stress in the workplace may have many causes or it may be the result of a single event. Stress affects us all differently. Things that you find stressful may not be a problem for your co-workers and things that they find stressful may not worry you at all. The result — positive or negative — depends on how you react to the stress and adapt to it.

Your reaction to stress can affect your mental and physical health, so you need to learn how to deal with it. We all have a different tolerance for stress; some people thrive on it, while others can cope with relatively little. Everyone's ability to cope with demands on them varies and even vary for the same person in their life. For example, we can usually handle less stress when we're sick, injured or are temporarily away from important people in our lives. Learn to recognize your early warning signs of being negatively affected by stress.

## Health Effects of Stress

Our bodies have a set of automatic responses to deal with stress that are very effective for the short-term. We need these "fight, flight or freeze" responses when facing immediate danger. Unfortunately, our bodies deal with all types of stress in the same way. When we experience a low level of stress for long periods our response system activates and doesn't get the chance to "turn off." That's where the problems begin.

## Signs and Symptoms of Stress

There are many different signs and symptoms that may indicate that someone is having difficulty coping with the amount of stress they're experiencing:

**Physical:** headaches, teeth grinding, jaw clenching, chest pain, shortness of breath, pounding heart, high blood pressure, muscle aches, indigestion, constipation or diarrhea, increased perspiration, fatigue, insomnia or frequent illness.

**Psychosocial:** anxiety, irritability, sadness, defensiveness, anger, mood swings, hypersensitivity, apathy, depression, slowed thinking or racing thoughts, or feelings of helplessness, hopelessness or being trapped.

**Behavioural:** overeating or loss of appetite, impatience, loss of temper, procrastination, increased use of alcohol or other drugs, increased smoking, withdrawal or isolation from others, neglect of responsibilities, poor job performance, poor personal hygiene, change in close family relationships or religious/spiritual practices.

## Dealing with Stress in the Workplace

Some of the most well-known stress-busting methods such as exercise or massage actually deal more with the physical effects of stress and don't do much to help us get at the root of what's creating stress for us. Try these tips first:

**Practice structured problem solving.** Most of us don't reflect often enough on what really is the source of stress or all the options we actually have available to us. Break down and identify a specific problem, brainstorm *all* the possible solutions, and then try one solution and evaluate the results.

**Talk it out.** Talk to a good friend or relative about your feelings. Also, talk to your co-workers and your boss about specific workplace stresses, particularly if they're new, increasing or affecting several people.

THIS TOOL AND HUNDREDS MORE AVAILABLE IN THE OHS TOOLBOX AT [www.ohsinsider.com](http://www.ohsinsider.com). Templates and tools from **OHS Insider** are provided for members of our service. Members may use this document as is or as a starting point to customize their own documents. **OHS Insider** assumes no responsibility for the effectiveness or legality of any of its online templates or tools. **Always consult your legal counsel and management before implementing any new policies or procedures.**

**Take charge of your situation.** Try not to just react or slip into habits without thinking. Take 10 minutes at the beginning of each day to prioritize and organize. Be honest with your colleagues, but be constructive and make practical suggestions. Be realistic about what you can change. Also, be aware that there are some stresses in the workplace you can have an impact on. Try changing how you approach your work, being more assertive about your needs and limits or talking to your supervisor.

### **What Else You Can Do to Manage Stress**

In many cases, the origin of the stress is something that can't be changed immediately. Therefore, you must find ways to help maintain good mental health. It's important to recognize the danger signs that say you're under too much stress and to act on them before they begin to affect your well-being. You might try some of the following ideas, many of which can be incorporated into a workday:

**Take things one step at a time** and don't neglect your physical health or your private life.

**Don't neglect exercise.** Even a brisk walk can do wonders!

**Eat a balanced diet.** Don't skip breakfast—your body needs all the energy it can get to fight stress. And cut down on sweets; simple sugars upset your blood sugar levels and can cause mood swings. Choose healthy fats (from non-animal sources) more often than saturated fats.

**Drink plenty of water.**

**Limit caffeine intake and alcohol.** Excessive caffeine can lead to interruption in sleep, irritability and nervousness. Alcohol can also impact mood, making some people feel low or depressed.

**Quit smoking.** The single best thing you can do to improve your health is to quit smoking.

**Laughing** is one of the easiest and best ways to reduce stress. Share a joke with a co-worker, watch a funny movie at home with some friends, read the comics, and try to see the humour in the situation. (It might be challenging but keep trying!)

**Learn to relax,** take several deep breaths throughout the day or have regular stretch breaks. Stretching is simple enough to do and only takes a few seconds. You can also try meditating, start yoga classes or listen to calming music.

**Don't forget the positive,** and make a point of feeling grateful and focusing on all the good things in your life, and even the successes and pleasure in each day.

**Release tension.** Have a massage, take up a hobby, pet an animal, listen to music that makes you want to sing or dance, hug and cuddle your family more, or have a hot bath.

**Practice spirituality** if it's a part of your life. It doesn't have to be organized religion or prayer; meditation or connecting with nature can be spiritual activities for many people.

**Express yourself through** art, music or creative writing. If these aren't talents you have or want to try, journal-writing is expression anyone can do.

**Talk to your doctor** or another health care professional.

**Call the Employee Assistance Provider** and ask about confidential, short-term counselling services for employees with problems that affect their work performance. Check with the human resources department for contact information.

THIS TOOL AND HUNDREDS MORE AVAILABLE IN THE OHS TOOLBOX AT [www.ohsinsider.com](http://www.ohsinsider.com). Templates and tools from **OHS Insider** are provided for members of our service. Members may use this document as is or as a starting point to customize their own documents. **OHS Insider** assumes no responsibility for the effectiveness or legality of any of its online templates or tools. **Always consult your legal counsel and management before implementing any new policies or procedures.**