

## **Stress Management**

It is always important to recognise our personal stress levels and how to manage stress effectively.

We need to establish how we handle pressure and stress, and to handle it as part of our daily routine rather than let it build up.

### **Stress is Good**

Not all stress is bad; it can be a good thing. We all need pressure to ensure that we perform effectively. What we need to do however is to recognise when we are getting too little or too much stress. Too little stress and we withdraw, become demotivated, lazy, lethargic and leave things to the last minute. Too much and we start reacting, suffer physical symptoms, become ill, emotional and can burn out. So, stress is a good thing so long as we manage it effectively, without stress we are not going to perform to our optimum.

### **Too much Stress**

So how do we know when we are getting too much stress? The symptoms we suffer can vary from one person to another. We can categorise the symptoms as; behavioural, emotional, physical and logical thinking. Are there changes in your behaviour? Do you lose your temper more easily? Do you get more headaches or nervous ticks? Do you find it difficult to think clearly? We can of course suffer from a combination of factors. These are just some examples of the symptoms, there are many others.

### **An Employers Obligation**

An employer is obliged under health and safety legislation to ensure the employees safety and well being is looked after and this includes managing stress. Work related stress has increased over the last few years and this results in an organisation losing out in all directions. For an individual the results of long term stress can lead to ill health and major sickness. The organisation has to recognise that stress is not a sign of weakness and be open to comments from employees about stress. They have to ensure that workplace conditions are conducive to reducing stress and act to reduce stress and risk factors. Staff need to be supported in all ways. The organisation should identify the main factors that exist and then manage the situation. Wherever possible actions should be introduced to reduce the stress factors. If staff feel that something is being done about it, it increases productivity and effectiveness.

## Handling Stress Negatively and Positively

The negative ways of dealing with stress result from us ignoring the factors and issues. We can just blot it out and ignore it completely in the hope that it will go away. This doesn't work with long term stress but can be a method in the short term. We may lose our temper or take it out on those who are close to you. We might change our behaviour and over or under eat. We could turn to alcohol or cigarettes; activities that only have a short-term gain. The negative ways of dealing with stress will do more harm than good especially in the long run.

The positive ways of dealing with stress focus on the 3 areas, relaxation, exercise and diet. These relate to implementing factors outside work and making them part of your routine. This will enable you to deal with stress and off load its negative factors. Make sure during the day you eat and drink regularly so that your body is able to function properly. Recognise when you need to have a break and take them regularly. Do things you enjoy in the evening or at the weekends that will help you relax. Combining these with exercise is often a good idea. Talking to someone about it is a good way of offloading positively. This is especially useful at work; it helps to tell a colleague or manager about the stress you are under. If you don't tell them, how can they help? When things get too much go for a walk, count to 10 before responding to someone who is pressurising you. It's always good to give yourself a treat to relieve the stress at that moment.

When it comes to Christmas think about getting yourself into the right frame of mind. Forget about the stresses of work; focus on your holiday. Plan your tasks ahead. Get your family and friends to share the workload. If you have the relative from hell coming to stay focus on how you can maintain a positive relationship. Give yourself some opportunity to wind down from work before launching yourself into the whole process. Make sure that if you have been stressed, come down slowly so that your body has time to adjust

At any time of year, it is important to focus on what is important to you. Get your priorities right at home and work. Make sure the balance in your life is right. Remember nobody else is able to do anything about it. Finally focus on the things, people and situations that you enjoy and find satisfying.