



Stress Can Cause Health Problems

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has researched and studied the effects of stress on worker safety and health. Following are a few of their findings and suggestions for understanding the sources of stress in the workplace. Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Stress at work can lead to poor health and even injury. Job stress is often confused with challenges, but the two are not the same. A challenge energizes us psychologically or physically, and it motivates us to learn new skills and master our jobs. When we meet a challenge, we feel relaxed and satisfied. A challenge is an important part of healthy and productive work.

Brief or infrequent episodes of stress pose little risk to your health. But when stressful situations go unresolved for long periods of time, your body is kept in a constant state of activation, and this increases the rate of wear and tear to biological systems. Ultimately, fatigue and damage result, and your body's ability to repair and defend itself can become seriously compromised. As a result, your risk of injury or illness escalates. Early warning signs of problems with stress can include: headache, sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating, short temper, upset stomach, job dissatisfaction, and low morale. Stress also plays a vital role in several types of chronic health problems such as heart disease, musculoskeletal disorders, and psychological disorders.

The following issues should be evaluated to determine if they might be contributing to workplace stress:

- **The Design of Tasks:** Heavy workload, infrequent rest breaks, long hours, hectic or routine tasks that don't use worker's skills and provide little sense of control.
- **Management Style:** Lack of worker participation in decision-making, poor communication in the organization, and lack of family-friendly policies.
- **Impersonal Relationships:** Poor social environment and lack of support from co-workers and supervisors.
- **Work Roles:** Conflicting or uncertain job expectations, too much responsibility, too many "hats to wear".
- **Career Concerns:** Job insecurity, lack of opportunity for growth and advancement, rapid changes.
- **Environmental Conditions:** Unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions.

Talk to your supervisor about reducing workplace stress.