What is work-related stress?

- Work-related stress has been defined by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work as “a pattern of emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological reactions to adverse and noxious aspects of work content, work organization and work environment. Stress is caused by a poor match between us and our work, by conflicts between our roles at work and outside it and by not having a reasonable degree of control over our own work.”

- More simply, work-related stress refers to the physical and psychological responses that arise when job demands exceed our ability to control and cope with those demands.

Who is affected by stress?

- Everyone can be affected by stress.

- Men have been found to be more vulnerable than women to stress from their work environments.

- Women have been found to be more vulnerable than men to stress that arises from their multiple roles both in and out of the workplace.

What are some stressful workplace situations?

- Lack of adequate training and clear job expectations.

- Lack of control and consistency of work demands.

- Lack of job autonomy and ability to self-direct work tasks.

- Lack of reward and recognition at work.

- Lack of career development opportunities.

- Unrealistic deadlines.

- Lack of job engagement.
Lack of variety or meaningfulness of work
Accelerated pace of work
Poor workplace relationships (co-workers, supervisors)
Gossip
Bullying, discrimination or harassment
Change (reorganization, mergers, restructuring)
Job insecurity
Work hazards (e.g., Unsafe equipment, poor ventilation, noise, overcrowding or poor spacing, etc.)

What are some consequences of excess stress?
Disruption in eating and sleeping patterns
Psychological disorders (e.g. anxiety or depression)
Substance abuse
Poor self-care (exercise, diet, sleep)
Elevated stress levels have also been found to make workers more vulnerable to:
  - High blood pressure
  - Musculoskeletal disorders/injuries
  - Weakened immune system
  - Headaches and migraines
  - Impaired digestion
  - Ulcers
Increased susceptibility to accidents, incidents and injury on the job
- Impaired relationships with coworkers, supervisors, friends, and family
- Burnout
- Aggravation of existing physical or psychological health conditions

**What is the relationship between stress and depression?**

- Individuals reporting high levels of work stress in psychological demands have an elevated risk of major depression in comparison to those individuals experiencing lower stress levels
- Individuals reporting lack of ability to make independent work decisions, job insecurity, and lack of social support in the workplace are more likely to experience major depression
- Individuals that have jobs with high psychological demands but have a limited ability to use skills and authority to address these psychological demands have been found to have higher rates of depression
- Individuals reporting a lack of support from co-workers and supervisors and high levels of stress were found to have higher rates of depression than individuals with co-worker support and lower stress levels
- The incidence of depression was found to be more likely in high strain (high psychological demands and low decision making authority) jobs
- Workers suffering from depression are more likely to take time off work (short- and long-term disability) and tend to be less productive than workers not suffering from depression

**What can employers do to help employees manage workplace stress?**

- Provide employees with increased participation in decision-making processes
- Provide more opportunity for using and developing employees’ skills
- Workloads should be made manageable for employees
- Provide sufficient rest times and breaks
- Rearrange or redesign workspaces to lower stress hazards (e.g., minimize noise, ensure appropriate ventilation, etc.)
- Provide flexible work arrangements so that employees are better able to balance work and family commitments
- Provide a workplace where bullying and harassment are not tolerated
- Ensure that employees have appropriate training, skills, and resources needed to meet job demands
- Provide employees with increased autonomy, to the extent reasonably possible

What can individual employees do to manage workplace stress?
- Learn good self-care skills, such as those provided in AS@W
- Learn and practice relaxation and other stress-management methods
- Engage in physical exercise
- Ensure proper nutrition and make healthy food choices
- Engage in good self-care (e.g. taking time for personal interests and hobbies)
- Spend time with family and friends
References


How was Antidepressant Skills at Work developed?

The guide was developed by British Columbia Mental Health and Addiction Services (BCMHAS), an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. The guide and accompanying materials have been authored by Dr. Dan Bilsker, Dr. Merv Gilbert, and Dr. Joti Samra – registered psychologists and scientist-practitioners with expertise in issues relating to workplace mental health. These psychologists are with the Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare (COMH), which is affiliated with the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA), Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University. The guide was written on the basis of a review of the scientific literature; consultation with employers, unions, mental health providers and employee groups; and adaptation of existing self-care depression programs.

How can the manual be accessed?

The manual is available for viewing and free download at http://www.comh.ca/antidepressant-skills/work/ or from www.bcmhas.ca/research. Individuals or organizations are free to print and make multiple copies of the guide, with permission from COMH (info@comh.ca). Print copies and audio CDs are available at a low cost from Rebel Communications (604-214-9695 or 1-866-678-5484 or info@rebelcom.ca).

For further information about AS@W and associated resources and materials, please visit www.comh.ca/selfcare. This information will be updated on a regular basis.