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takes effect in January

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Lowering stress benefits workers and employers

Employee stress is at a critical point. The Mercer Marsh Benefits' *Health on Demand 2023* report found that 47 percent of employees reported feeling stressed in everyday life. Everyone experiences stress occasionally, but when it continues for long periods of time, stress can harm our physical and mental health. Some examples of the harm that stress can cause include:

- Heart disease,
- High blood pressure,
- Anxiety,
- Depression, and
- Emotional outbursts.

Many different factors can cause stress, including problems at work, family conflicts, and financial trouble. Stress can seriously compromise the body's ability to repair and defend itself, meaning that workers who experience prolonged stress are more prone to health issues, risk of injury, and burnout. When the health of workers is threatened, so is the health of the organizations for which they work.

Employers, however, can help workers manage and reduce their stress levels. And studies suggest company policies that benefit workers' health also benefit the bottom line. For example, the World Health Organization estimated that for every dollar a U.S. employer spends on treating mental health issues, the employer receives a return of \$4 in improved health and productivity.

This month's Training Blueprint has an outline you can use to provide employees with information on the:

- Signs and symptoms of stress,
- Measures they can take to mitigate its effects, and
- Resources they can utilize if they're feeling overwhelmed.

The Employee Handout and Quiz can be used to reinforce learning. ♦



Adriana Lucas

Adriana Lucas joined J. J. Keller & Associates, Inc. in 2023 as an Associate Editor. She researches, develops, and updates content on transportation, human resources, and environmental topics. Adriana creates and edits content for the *Environmental Regulatory Alert* and *Employee Safety Training Advisor* newsletters. She has over four years of writing and editing experience.



TRAINING BLUEPRINT — STRESS

Dealing with stress

Everyone experiences stress occasionally. In the American Psychological Association's 2022 Stress in America survey, 76 percent of adults reported they experienced at least one symptom of stress in the previous month (such as headaches, fatigue, and feeling nervous or sad), and 27 percent of adults said that most days, they're so stressed they can't function.

Overview

Stress can cause medical, psychological, and occupational suffering. A stressed employee doesn't operate at peak performance, and the organization suffers. Additionally, research has found that stress can be a factor in developing mental illnesses like anxiety and depression.

Employers have the unique opportunity to help employees reduce stress.

Specific Training Elements

1. Introduce stress.

Stress refers to the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when obligations don't match a person's capabilities, resources, or needs. Don't confuse it with challenges, which energize and motivate us to learn new skills and master our jobs. When we meet a challenge, we feel relaxed and satisfied. Challenges are an important ingredient for healthy and productive work.

A challenge turns into stress when we're given demands that can't be met. Relaxation becomes exhaustion, and the sense of satisfaction is gone. The stage is set for illness, injury, and failure.

2. Discuss how people react to stress.

Everyone responds to stress in much the same way; the body prepares for defensive action. The nervous system triggers the release of hormones to sharpen senses, quicken the pulse, deepen respiration, and tense the muscles. Known as the "fight or flight response," the body is preparing for a physical emergency.

Short-term and infrequent episodes of stress pose little risk. But as stress continues, the body remains in a constant state of activation. This increases the rate of wear and tear to the biological system and can result in fatigue or damage. And since the body's ability to repair and defend itself is compromised, the risk of injury and disease escalates.

Stress-related health problems can start with disturbed sleep, an upset stomach, headaches and muscle aches, and alcohol or drug abuse.

3. Identify how to recognize stress.

Early signs of stress that develop quickly and are easy to recognize include:

- Frustration and irritability,
- Impatience and worry,
- Lack of self-confidence,
- Distraction and inattention,
- Mood changes,
- Relationship problems with family and friends, and
- Anger and violence.

Stress is more likely to be managed when a person has a:

- Balance between work and family;
- Support network of family, friends, and coworkers; and
- Relaxed and positive outlook.

Using time management techniques or relaxation exercises are two methods that help people cope with stress. Other examples include talking about stress, practicing deep breathing, and releasing stress through exercise.

4. Introduce generalized anxiety disorder.

Occasional anxiety is an expected part of life, but anxiety disorders involve more than temporary worry or fear; the anxiety doesn't go away and may get worse over time. People with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) display excessive anxiety or worry. A person with GAD may:

- Worry very much about everyday things;
- Have difficulty concentrating;
- Know they worry more than they should;
- Have trouble relaxing;
- Be easily startled;
- Have trouble falling or staying asleep;
- Feel tired all the time;
- Have headaches, muscle aches, stomach aches, or unexplained pains;
- Have a hard time swallowing;

- Tremble or twitch;
- Be irritable, sweat a lot, and feel light-headed or out of breath; and/or
- Have to go to the bathroom a lot.

People who think they may have GAD should talk to a doctor about the symptoms. The doctor should conduct an exam to make sure an unrelated physical problem isn't causing the symptoms. The doctor may refer the person to a mental health specialist.

GAD is generally treated with therapy, medication, or both. Therapy teaches people different ways of thinking, behaving, and reacting to situations to help them feel less anxious and worried. Antianxiety medications and antidepressants are commonly used to treat GAD.

5. Introduce depression.

A person may have depression if they:

- Feel very tired, helpless, and hopeless;
- Are sad most of the time and take no pleasure in their family, friends, or hobbies;
- Have trouble working, sleeping, eating, and functioning; and
- Have felt this way for a long time.

When a person has depression, they have trouble with daily life for weeks at a time. Depression is a serious illness that needs treatment. Different people have different symptoms, some of which include:

- Feeling sad or “empty”;
- Feeling hopeless, irritable, anxious, or guilty;
- Losing interest in favorite activities;
- Feeling very tired;
- Not being able to concentrate or remember details;
- Not being able to sleep or sleeping too much;
- Overeating or not wanting to eat at all;
- Having thoughts of or attempting suicide; and
- Having aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems.

6. Discuss treatment options.

The first step to getting the right treatment is to visit a doctor or mental health professional. He or she can do an exam or lab tests to rule out other conditions that may

have the same symptoms as depression and can also tell whether certain medications a person takes could affect their mood. The doctor should:

- Get a complete history of symptoms, including when the symptoms started, how long they've lasted, and how intense they are;
- Know whether they have occurred before and, if so, how they were treated; and
- Ask whether there's a history of depression in the person's family.

Antidepressants are often prescribed, and they can take several weeks to work. Therapy can also help treat depression by teaching new ways of thinking and behaving and changing habits that may be contributing to the depression. Therapy can help a person understand and work through difficult relationships or situations that may be causing or worsening their depression. As a person continues treatment, they should gradually start to feel better.

7. Describe methods employees can use to reduce stress.

The factors that cause stress (called “stressors”) are unique to every person, but these methods can help nearly everyone when they feel overwhelmed:

- Don't skip paid time off. Everyone needs rest and the opportunity to recharge.
- Fully unplug from work when you're not at work.
- Spend time with others. Talk to family or friends about your feelings.
- Divide large tasks into small ones. Don't try to do too many things at once.
- Stick with any treatment plan you're on. Remember that it can take time to work.
- Try not to make important life decisions when you're stressed. Discuss major decisions with others who know you well.

If your company has an employee assistance program, let workers know about the resources it provides for coping with stress and other personal issues. ♦



Key to remember: Everyone experiences stress, but excessive stress can lead to physical and mental health issues. By recognizing the signs and symptoms of stress and knowing where to turn for help, employees can help themselves and each other stay healthy.



Employee Handout — Don't ignore excessive stress

It might not “just” be stress. Your well-being depends on both your physical and mental health.

Stress

Stress refers to the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when obligations don't match a person's capabilities, resources, or needs. Some signs of stress include:

- Frustration and irritability,
- Impatience and worry,
- Lack of self-confidence,
- Distraction and inattention,
- Mood changes,
- Relationship problems with family and friends, and
- Anger and violence.

Stress can be a factor in the development of mental illness.

Anxiety

People with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) are extremely worried, even when there's no reason to worry. They're very anxious about just getting through the day. They think things will always go badly. At times, worrying keeps people with GAD from doing everyday tasks.

A person with GAD may:

- Worry very much about everyday things;
- Have difficulty concentrating;
- Know they worry more than they should;
- Have trouble relaxing;
- Be easily startled;
- Have trouble falling or staying asleep;
- Feel tired all the time;
- Have headaches, muscle aches, stomach aches, or unexplained pains;
- Have a hard time swallowing;
- Tremble or twitch;
- Be irritable, sweat a lot, and feel light-headed or out of breath; and/or
- Have to go to the bathroom a lot.

Depression

Everyone feels sad sometimes, but these feelings usually go away after a few days. When you have depression, you have trouble with daily life for weeks at a time. Depression is a serious illness that needs treatment.

You may have depression if, for a long time, you:

- Feel very tired, helpless, and hopeless;
- Are sad most of the time;
- Take no pleasure in your family, friends, or hobbies; and/or
- Have trouble working, sleeping, eating, and functioning.

Get help

Treatment helps these conditions. Don't be afraid to get help. Start by talking to your doctor or mental health professional, or make use of your company's employee assistance program.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, get help quickly:

- Call a doctor;
- Call 911 for emergency services;
- Go to the nearest hospital emergency room; or
- Call the toll-free, 24-hour hotline of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or text HELLO to the Crisis Text Line at 741741. ♦

Quiz — Don't ignore excessive stress

For each question, circle whether you think the statement is **True** or **False**.

- | | | |
|--|------|-------|
| 1. Depression can mean you don't enjoy your hobbies anymore. | True | False |
| 2. Stress can leave you feeling frustrated. | True | False |
| 3. Anxiety means you worry a lot about everyday things. | True | False |
| 4. To get help, call your doctor. | True | False |
| 5. In a mental health crisis, call 911. | True | False |

NAME: _____

DATE: _____



Revised injury data e-reporting rule takes effect in January

Many employers annually submit injury data through OSHA's Injury Tracking Application by March 2 each year. OSHA finalized changes to the electronic reporting requirements that take effect January 1, 2024. The revision kept most of the previous rules but added significant obligations for certain employers with 100 or more employees at a single location. The agency also updated from the 2012 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes to the 2017 version.

In summary, establishments:

- Under 20 employees or exempt from keeping an OSHA 300 Log need not report;
- With 20-249 employees listed in Appendix A will send the 300A;

- With 250 or more employees required to maintain a 300 Log will send the 300A; and
- With 100 or more employees listed in Appendix B will send the 300 Log, 301 forms, and 300A. ♦



OSHA strengthens silica enforcement in stone fabrication, installation industries

A new initiative was established to supplement OSHA's National Emphasis Program for Respirable Crystalline Silica. It establishes procedures for prioritizing inspections in covered industries where workers face exposure to high levels of silica dust.

Manufactured countertops are associated with the highest silica levels, and in facilities that manufacture engineered stone, production operators, inspectors, and staff who perform maintenance and housekeeping activities could be exposed to hazardous levels of airborne silica-containing dust.

Industries subject to prioritized programmed inspections include those engaged in Cut Stone and Stone Product Manufacturing as well as Brick, Stone, and Related Construction Material Merchant Wholesalers.

Affected employers and stakeholders should receive information from OSHA on the initiative, including fact sheets on dust control methods and safer work practices for engineered stone manufacturing, finishing, and installation operations. ♦



OSHA keeps grip on rulemaking powers in huge court win

OSHA has the authority, by law, to issue permanent safety standards. However, one employer had hoped the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit would declare those powers unconstitutional and issue a permanent injunction to prevent OSHA from enforcing its standards.

Siding 2 to 1 with OSHA in Case No. 22-3772 on August 23, 2023, the court explained that through the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act, Congress required OSHA to determine the standards needed to keep workers safe and healthy. The court added that Congress gave OSHA significant discretion and a framework to do so. The court opinion concluded this delegation is constitutional.

The opinion also said the OSH Act puts boundaries on OSHA's discretion when issuing a standard, and when OSHA adopts a standard, the conditions must be reasonably necessary or appropriate to improve workplace safety and health. ♦



Answers to quiz on page 5:

1. True; 2. True; 3. True; 4. True; 5. True



Next Month's Topic: Confined Spaces

A permit and entry team are required to enter some confined spaces because the spaces contain serious hazards. Entry team members must understand the hazards and the importance of following proper procedures to protect themselves.

Expert Help: Questions of the Month

Question: How does an employee assistance program (EAP) work?

Answer: Generally, the EAP provider sets up a 24-hour 800 number for employees and their families to call for consultation on almost any issue. The service is always confidential and staffed by professional counselors. Consultation typically continues for a preset period of time. If the employee's problem hasn't been resolved within the established period or if further assistance is recommended, professional referrals are provided for additional counseling or treatment.

Question: What are ways organizations can change to help reduce job stress?

Answer: Some proven methods for reducing job stress in any organization include:

- Ensuring that the workload is in line with workers' capabilities and resources;
- Designing jobs to provide meaning, stimulation, and opportunities for workers to use their skills;
- Clearly defining workers' roles and responsibilities;
- Giving workers opportunities to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs;
- Improving communications and reducing uncertainty about career development and future employment prospects; and
- Establishing work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities outside the job. ♦



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Policyholders with as
near perfect protection,
as near perfect service
as is humanly possible,
and to do so at the
lowest possible cost.”***

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Our Founding Purpose***