

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

Contents

Section	Contents	Page no
1	Introduction	3
2	What's the problem?	5
3	What's the legal position?	9
4	What is stress and what are the effects of stress?	15
5	What are the causes of stress?	24
6	What should we do about it?	28
7	What are the benefits of tackling stress?	33
8	References and resources	37
9	The Morpheus Way (the Morpheus stress audit)	39
10	The way forward	41

1. Introduction

If the newspaper headlines said one day “New epidemic – 76% of employees will be affected; half a million people are ill; 12.8 million working days lost; costs to British industry £13 billion” there would be uproar and calls for immediate action. These are all figures currently relating to stress at work.

Stress is the buzzword of the ‘noughties’; you can hear everyone saying “I’m stressed out”. Are they? And is stress real; is it a new phenomenon or has it always been with us?

This begs the question – what is stress – and, if it exists as much as we hear what are its effects and what should we be doing about it?

This paper attempts to answer these questions and focuses on work related stress although clearly this cannot be completely separated from non work causes (stressors) because individual work and non work stressors accumulate and can become ‘the straw that breaks the camel’s back’.

There are immense business benefits to be derived from having a motivated workforce working enthusiastically to meet challenging targets – contrast this with a stressed worker trying to meet unrealistic targets in an unsupportive culture.

Additionally employers are required by law to have a work related stress policy and to undertake a stress risk assessment: they are equally liable for employees’ mental health and well being at work as they are for their physical health and safety. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has tremendous powers to serve improvement notices, prohibition notices and fines. This is to say nothing of the damages awarded to staff who have made successful claims and the costs associated with defending claims in tribunals and courts.

A survey by ISMA (30) commissioned by the HSE showed that ignorance about stress was a major problem: when asked what obstacles there were to carrying out HSE guidelines, although 61% said it was lack of time, 50% said that it was lack of understanding about stress.

The purpose of this paper is to enable the reader to understand the key points and to come to a balanced decision on how to take the issue of work related stress forward in their organisation. There is no one way of going ahead and the strategy must both meet good practice and legislative needs and be sensitive and be practical for the organisation.

We at Morpheus Personal Development Ltd are here to help you with our wealth of experience and knowledge and a proven track record in advising and undertaking stress risk assessments. Please do not hesitate to contact us – we shall be pleased to offer practical, impartial advice to help you through this difficult area.

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

So, please read on and download this paper for colleagues within your organisation. It may also be published in newsletters and magazines subject to first obtaining our specific permission on each occasion and to identifying us as the authors. This paper is copyright and may only be copied in whole or in part subject these conditions.

2. What's the problem?

The CBI (Confederation of British Industry) survey on absence and labour turnover (1) reported that the direct costs of absences from work stands at £13 billion equating to £531 per employee per year.

A survey for the Department for Work and Pensions (2) concluded that stress is now the most significant health problem facing employees

What health problems affect your employees?	%
Stress	76
Back problem	63
Depression	57
Long term/chronic illness	46
Heart problems	29
RSI	24
Alcohol and drug problems	20
None of these	8

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) commissioned research (3) that indicates that-

- About half a million people in the UK experience work related stress at a level they believe is making them ill
- Up to 5 million people in the UK feel “very” or “extremely” stressed by their work
- A total of 12.8 million working days were lost due to stress, depression and anxiety in 2004/5

In its 2004/5 survey (12) it was estimated that half a million individuals in Britain believed they were experiencing work related stress at a level that was making them ill. The annual incidence of work related mental health problems was approx. 6800 new cases a year and that 245000 people first became aware of work related stress, depression or anxiety in the previous 12 months. There are no significant differences in the prevalence and incidence rates of self reported work related stress, anxiety and depression between countries in Great Britain nor between English Regions.

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

The HSE also commissioned the Bristol stress and health at work study (5) which revealed that 20% of a sample of 17000 randomly selected people in the Bristol area reported that they had very high or extremely high levels of stress at work. It also found that “the effects of high job stress upon acute gastro-intestinal symptoms, fatigue, tension, depression and anxiety, as well as a number of other symptoms were robust”. Analysis also found “that certain work characteristics were significantly associated with work stress, including items indicating that work issues interfered strongly with family life. Stress was also strongly associated with sick leave, GP visits and accidents. Overall participants reported the following self perceived stress at work levels –

Not at all stressful	Mildly stressful	Moderately stressful	Very stressful	Extremely stressful
9%	30%	44%	15%	3%*

*figures rounded to whole numbers

(There is a wealth of information in this report of 328 pages and its findings informed the development of the HSE’s Management standards).

Aon Consulting’s "Employee Risk @Work" study (7) surveyed 1500 employees across the UK and discovered that 76.6% had experienced workplace stress and 47% felt that organisations were not doing enough to create a work environment that is stress free. It also found that 30% of respondents believed that their managers lacked good people management skills and 20% that the cause of stress is lack of management support. 30.2% blamed the demands of their jobs. Goleman suggested (2002) that 70% of employees’ perception of the organisational climate is associated with the emotional intelligence of the leader; poorly managed workgroups are an average of 51% less productive and 44% less profitable than well managed groups; 80% of staff turnover is directly related to unsatisfactory relationships with one’s boss. Kivimaki et al (32) identified that employees who perceived their supervisors treated them fairly had 30% lower coronary heart disease incidents after adjustment for other risk factors.

In its eighth Management Agenda report Roffey Park reported that (8)-

- 92% of managers had experienced organisational change over the last two years
- 78% of managers were suffering from work related stress
- 52% of managers had experienced harassment at work – 27% had been bullied
- 25% had lost trust in their corporate leaders
- 45% of managers do not feel fully appreciated
- 65% admit that they are searching for ‘meaning’ in their working life
- 63% say that diversity is not actively managed in their organisations
- 27% feel that they have been discriminated against in some way

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

- 83% of managers are working consistently longer than their contracted week – 33% put in 11-15 extra hours and 9% work more than 15 additional hours each week. More men (85%) than women (79%) work longer hours
- 47% of managers say HR lacks credibility in their organisation
- 53% of HR practitioners are too reactive
- 27% feel that HR is out of touch

TUC research (9) indicates that stress is increasing with 58% of workers complaining of being stressed at work: the main reasons cited as being increased workloads, change in the workplace, staff cuts, long hours and bullying. Larger organisations had higher stress levels than smaller ones – the figure rose to 63% in businesses with over 1000 employees.

The TUC estimates that stress at work costs the UK economy £7 billion each year through sick pay and lost production. It accounts for 6.5 million lost working days and is greater in the public sector with 64% of public sector workers complaining of stress at work compared with 48% in the private sector. It is a greater cause of workplace hazard than RSI (37%) and back strain (31%). Other concerns cited were display screen equipment (32%), working alone (27%), long hours (25%), violence (22%) and chemicals and solvents (21%).

The TUC survey of health and safety representatives indicates that the top five causes of stress are workloads, change, staff cuts, long hours and bullying. Work related stress claims increased 12 fold from 516 cases to 6428 cases from 2003 to 2004.

The TUC estimates the total value of claims for compensation in the UK at £321 million.

In its “Relax” survey HAS (19) found that 64% of the companies surveyed reported that they had had to deal with a case or cases of stress. Only 51% of companies had measures in place to manage stress in the workplace: 69% indicated that stress management did not have a high profile within the organisation and 63% did not feel that they were sufficiently familiar with best practice guidelines on managing stress in the workplace.

The word “stress” is often misused – stress is not the normal reaction to pressures that are part of everyday living; for example an ICM survey (27) found that although 79% of people said they had suffered stress in the last year –

- 68% believed that stress is having a bad day
- 63% identified stress as dealing with difficult people
- 58% believed stress is having too much to do

These situations may create pressures and may be things that create stress (i.e. are stressors) in some individuals but they are not themselves stress. In section 4 we discuss in detail what stress is (and is not).

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

In the ICM survey (27) 64% believed that stress is an illness; this is not correct and although stress can lead to ill health and it is a very real emotional state it is not itself an illness. It also indicated that -

- 30% reported IT related pressures as a source of stress followed by
- Change in financial status (24%)
- Personal injury (24%)
- Travel to and from work (20% overall, 40% of 18-24 year olds and 24% in the South East)

Much is written these days of work/life balance; this suggests that the two are separate and easily segregated and this is not so. Stress built up at work impacts on non work life and non work stress cannot be left at the door of the workplace. Moreover the blending of work and non work activities and locations has been an increasing feature of 21st Century life. The mobile 'phone, emails and laptops all mean that people are more readily available over much longer periods – some would say '24-7-365'.

What's it like in America?

A 2000 survey (11) reported that-

- 65% of workers said that stress at work had caused them difficulties
- 10% said they work in an atmosphere where physical violence has occurred due to job stress
- 42% reported that verbal abuse and yelling is common
- More than 50% said they spend 12 hour days on work related duties and skip lunch due to job demands
- 34% had difficulty sleeping
- 19 had quit a previous job due to stress
- On Monday morning the risk of heart attack increase 33%

A review of 13 studies indicated a cost:benefit ratio of 1:3.48 in reduced health care costs and 1:5.82 in lower absenteeism (Aldana 2001)

And the EU-

28% of European workers reported work related stress problems. This amounts to about 41 million EU workers affected by work related stress each year causing around 600 million working days to be lost per year across the EU (24).

3. What's the legal position?

It is an employer's duty in law to make sure that employees (and others) are not made ill by their work. The duty is imposed or implied in both civil and criminal law. In the former the employer has a duty of care to protect employees from risks of foreseeable injury, disease or death at work. This principle was first identified in the House of Lords in the case of *Wilson's & Clyde Coal Co. Ltd v English* (1938). It was held that employers should provide and maintain –

- A safe place of work with safe means of access and egress
- Safe appliances and equipment for doing the work
- A safe system of work
- Competent fellow employees

Although this case relates to physical matters there is no reason why the principles may not be applied to mental health and well being. The duty of care is of a personal nature i.e. it applies to each person as an individual in the workforce.

The duty to ensure as far as is reasonably practical the health, safety and welfare of all employees arises in criminal law through the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. This duty arises equal in mental health and psychological well being as it is in terms of physical health and well being. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 updated in November 2001 state that "It is the duty of all employers to make sure that their employees are not made ill by their work. Where stress caused or made worse by work could lead to ill health, employers must assess the risk. If necessary, [they] must then take reasonable steps to deal with those pressures". These Regulations do not include the "as far as is reasonably practical" condition and oblige an employer to undertake a risk assessment of possible hazards including mental as well as physical health. A civil sanction i.e. damages is available for the tort of breach of statutory duty i.e. breach of the Management Regulations.

The criminal law is enforced by the HSE and Local Authorities which have power to serve improvement notices and prohibition notices and to bring criminal prosecutions in the magistrates or Crown Court. In civil law an employer is under a duty of care, both in law of contract and tort. In contract law there is an implied term that an employer will take reasonable care for the employee's health and safety at work and will also observe a duty of mutual trust and confidence.

Some other Acts are also relevant-

- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005* (www.drc-gb.org and www.disability.gov.uk)
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- Race Relations Act 1976 and Race Relations Regulations 2003 and Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- Employers' Liability Act 1969
- Public Order Act 1986
- Employment Rights Act 1996 (unfair dismissal and constructive dismissal)
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Public Interest Disclosure Act 1999 ('whistle blowing')
- Working Time Regulations 1998
- Display screen regulations 1992
- Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996
- Human Rights Act 1998 (www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hract)

*The DDA is of particular relevance: prior to 2005 a condition had to be "clinically well recognised" but this was lifted in December 2005 and the DDA definition is now "a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities". From a practical point of view "long term" may be interpreted as having lasted or is likely to last a minimum period of 12 months. This means that a claim for work related stress can be made under the DDA and that employers must consider putting "reasonable adjustments" in place (e.g. flexible working, counselling). There is no longer a registration scheme for disability. Reasonable adjustment should be made where necessary.

You must undertake a risk assessment to understand whether stress may be caused or made worse by work. In HSE guidance this involves (4)-

- Looking for pressures at work that could cause high and lasting levels of stress
- Deciding who might be harmed
- Deciding whether you are doing enough to prevent harm

A selection of legal cases (13)

- Williams v Reckitt and Coleman (1994) £55000
- Walker v Northumberland County Council (1996) £175000#
- Pocock v North East Essex Mental Health Trust (1998) £25000 (out of court settlement)
- Lancaster v Birmingham city Council (1999) £67000
- Noonan v Liverpool City Council (1999) £84000 (out of court settlement)
- Benson v Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (1999) £47000 (out of court settlement)
- Ingram v Hereford and Worcester County Council (2000) £203432 (out of court settlement)
- McLeod v Test Valley Borough Council (2000) £200000 (out of court settlement)

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

- Richards v Glamorgan fire Service (2000) believed to be in excess of £15000 (out of court settlement)
- Anonymous v Post Office (2000) £175000
- Gogay v Hertfordshire County Council (2000) £13424
- Tiquin v Abbey National disability discrimination £12100 plus £2500 injury to feelings
- Howell v Newport Borough Council (2000) £254362
- Barber v East Bridgewater School (2001) £100000 [later rejected by The House of Lords*]
- Long v Mercury Mobile communications Services (2001) £327000
- North v Lloyds TSB (2002) £100000
- Pratley v Surrey County Council (2002) It was held that the employer had no reason to know that the employee was suffering from stress related symptoms because she kept them secret and the employer was therefore not liable
- Hatton v Sutherland (2002) Court of Appeal held that there are no occupations that are intrinsically dangerous to mental health saying that “It is not the job but the interaction between the individual and the job which causes the harm”. This is a finding with which the HSE disagrees
- Young v The Post Office (2002) Court of Appeal an employer, knowing of an employee’s mental state, is under an obligation to not only design a less stressful working environment, but to ensure it is implemented
- Dunnachie v Kingston on Hull City Council (2004) Compensation was awarded by the Court of Appeal for injury to feelings as well as money loss and this case is likely to go to the house of Lords
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council v Olwen Jones £157541
- Benson v Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council £4700 out of court
- Rorrison v West Lothian College (1999) and Maryniak v Thomas Cook Ltd – both cases reinforce the need for employees to be suffering stress and not just the range of emotions that are part of life and to make their stressed condition known to their employer

#the true costs were more like £500000 when legal costs, sick pay and pension are included

*Hatton, Barber et al - The House of Lords (2004) has overturned awards for stress even if an employer operates an unsafe psychological working environment. It is the responsibility of an employee to alert the employer to the situation and if the employer has provided an opportunity for counselling they are unlikely to be held liable. This is a very grey area and we do not recommend that organisations rely on this ‘escape’ – see section 7 regarding primary, secondary and tertiary action. A guide for employees has been published jointly by ACAS, the International Stress Management Association and the HSE. (16).

The Appeal Court has ruled that employers could assume that employees were able to withstand “the normal pressure” of the job unless they were made aware of particular problems; while employers have a duty of care they cannot be held totally responsible

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

when employees withhold information about their state of mind. It has also said that liability is “likely to occur where the employer can reasonably foresee harm occurring due to stress at work and does not take reasonable action to address it”.

Therefore to form the basis for a claim an employee will need to show that the chances of stress occurring were reasonably foreseeable. The indications of harm to health must be plain enough for any reasonable employer to realise it should act (there must be a suitably supportive environment for the employee to voice concerns).

Psychological damage has been held to be an industrial injury. The Social Security Commissioners awarded industrial injury benefit to two NUT members who suffered serious psychological effects from incidents at work (10).

Generally speaking the following guidelines may be applied (20) –

- Employers must keep in touch with developing knowledge of occupational stress and the probable effectiveness of the precautions taken to meet it
- An autocratic or bullying style of management, unsympathetic to complaints of occupational stress is a factor that courts may take into account in deciding whether there has been a breach of duty
- Once an employer knows that an employee is at risk of suffering injury from occupational stress they must do something about it. This continues until something reasonable is done to help the employee.
- Employees who complain do not need to be forceful in their complaints. And need not describe their troubles and symptoms in detail. They may be suffering from depression, making it more difficult to complain. Their complaints should be listened to sympathetically.
- Certified sickness absence due to stress or depression should be taken seriously and enquiries should be made sensitively to assess what the employer can do to ease the situation.
- A management culture that is sympathetic to employees suffering from occupational stress and prepared to act to alleviate may make a real difference to the outcome.
- Monitoring employees known to suffering from occupational stress is mandatory
- If employees do not improve more robust steps may need to be taken to help them
- There is a statutory duty to carry out risk assessments

The Court of Appeal has given guidelines to employers regarding their obligations –

The employer should pay regard to the size of the enterprise and its administrative resources, as there are limits as to what can reasonably be expected of an employee.

Before considering what action should be taken, an employer must pay regard to-

- The magnitude of the risk of psychiatric injury occurring
- The seriousness of the potential injury

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

- The cost and practicability of taking action to prevent such an injury; and
- Whether these steps would actually prevent the injury from occurring

Whilst it may be reasonable to consider granting an employee:

- A sabbatical
- Transfer to another department
- Redistributing work
- Granting assistance

The Court of Appeal has also stated that –

- The ordinary principles of employer's liability apply to claims for psychiatric illness arising from stress at work
- Employers are generally entitled to accept at face value what employees tell them, unless there is a good reason not to do so
- No occupation should be regarded as intrinsically dangerous to mental health
- An employer is entitled to assume that an employee is able to withstand the normal pressures of the job unless they are aware of some particular problem or vulnerability
- For an employer to have a duty to take action, indications of impending harm to health must be apparent enough to show that the action should be taken
- An employer is only in breach of duty if he has failed to take steps that are reasonable in all the circumstances
- An employer who makes available a confidential counselling service with access to treatment is unlikely to be found in breach of duty

The HSE has considerable power to inspect and can exercise improvement notices and prohibition notices. The former require an organisation to take action and the latter actually shut down activities until improvement has taken place. The HSE can also impose a fine and take legal action.

The HSE has served improvement notices on –

- Coventry City Council
- Coventry Airport Handling Ltd
- West Dorset General Hospitals NHS Trust (not because people were suffering from stress but because they did not have a stress at work policy and had not conducted a stress audit)

The HSE has stated in its stress management advisory documentation that “An organisation that undertook a risk assessment based on the approach in HSE's current guidance (23) and identified major problems/issues, would be unlikely to be subject to

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

improvement action by HSE provided it could demonstrate it was taking steps to address those problems/issues”.

The Association of Insurance and Risk Managers has stated that “Stress is likely to become the most dangerous emerging risk to business in the early part of the 21st Century”

The HSE’s Management Standards (10) are not themselves regulations: in the Health and Safety Commission’s press release (26) launching the standards they stated “they are a non-legislative yardstick to help organisations meet their existing duty of care and their duty to assess the risks to work-related stress. The Standards highlight the components of good organisation, job design and management that keep stress levels in check and enhance productivity”.

The above outline illustrates the complex and developing nature of law in this difficult area. It is our view that employers do not want to be in a position where a case for damages for work related stress is to be faced. It absorbs immense management time and energy and substantial financial costs even just in defence without considering any award. Far better to comply with law and good practice, conduct a risk assessment and take reasonable practical steps as a result: not only will this minimise the risk of a claim or the damages resulting from it, it will also create a more effective and efficient working environment that delivers results.

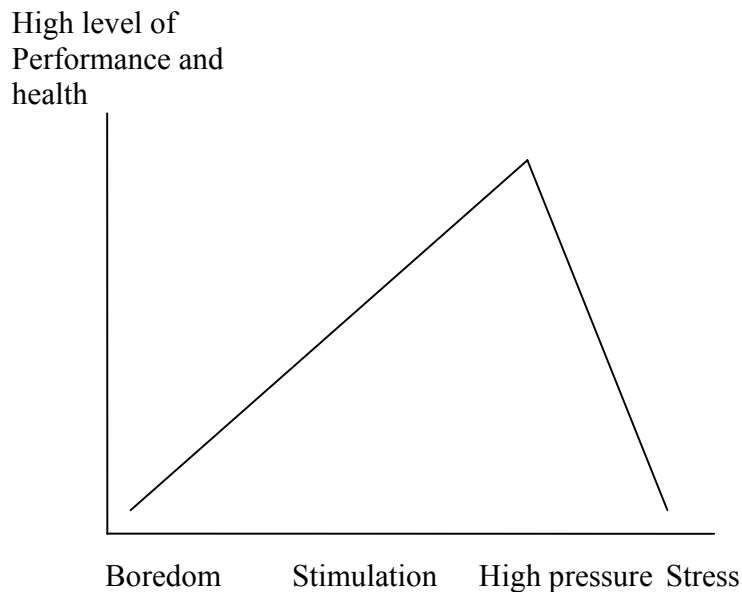
4. What is stress and what are the effects of stress?

Stress

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as “the adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them” it is in fact what we could call ‘distress’.

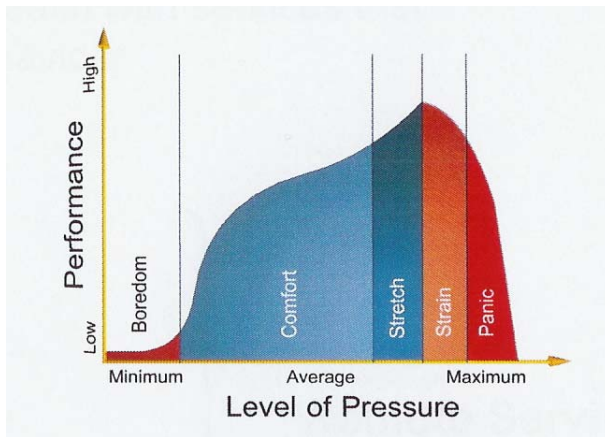
Some commentators discuss “good” and “bad” stress. We make a clear distinction between stress and pressure; stress is felt when the pressure becomes too great. Pressure is helpful and motivating for most people – think of an elastic band which, when under no tension, is floppy and of no use: when it is under some tension it is doing its job well and if under too much tension it will break. People are like that – if there is too little pressure and stimulation they get bored; when under their range of pressure that is stimulating and motivating they work well up to their peak and if the pressure is too much their performance falls off and they fail.

The graph below represents this -



The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

This is often represented as –



Stress can be caused by cumulative pressures – rather like the straw that breaks the camel’s back; sometimes we can withstand the pressure from one or more sources if they are not themselves overwhelming but when additional pressures come along they add to the weight felt until a further (perhaps tiny) one makes us stressed. It is like a glass of water being gradually filled until one tiny drop makes it spill over.

People are whole, they do not separate into work and non work components; therefore the person at work brings with them the pressure level accumulated from their non work life in the same way that the person at home brings their work life pressure level with them. It is for these reasons that sometimes people move from pressured to stressed quickly and to a casual observer, for apparently insufficient reason.

Stress is absolutely personal; we each have a different basic threshold level and those particular things that will create a stress response in us. That which one person will regard as perfectly ordinary and unstressful another might find stressful. We think of this as stress being ‘in the eye of the beholder’ and it is what makes it difficult at times for people (especially managers) to understand why someone else is stressed because either the stressors are not visible to them or they are visible but those stressors would not create stress for them.

This paper focuses on work related stress although its association with non work factors is undeniable. People vary considerably in their response to different pressures i.e. an individual’s ability to deal with a given stressor or accumulation of stressors may be lower than the pressure as perceived by others. The ICM (27) survey studied current attitudes to life events and compared them with the Holmes and Rahe study in the 1960s (28) and found a high correlation -

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

Ranking	2006	1967
1	Death (of a loved one)	Death (of a loved one)
2	Divorce	Divorce
3	Change in financial state	Personal injury
4	Personal injury	Marriage
5	Job security	Fired at work
6	Marriage	Retirement
7	Trouble with boss	Change in financial state
8	New technology*	Trouble with boss
9	Retirement	Vacation
10	Commuting*	
11	Vacation	

* New categories. These are both work related and retirement is not ranked as highly now as previously.

There has been much research into personality characteristics and the nature of our upbringing and experiences that influence our emotional responses, attitudes and behaviours and we would be happy to discuss this individually. We can also arrange stress assessments and advise on stress management techniques for individuals.

5 What are the effects of stress

On the individual

There are many ways in which stress affects the human being and much depends on the nature of the stressor(s). In an acute situation there is the classic fight or flight response (there is a fright response when someone is temporarily immobilised after which they move to fight or flight) when we make a choice between running away and fighting off the aggressor. In either fight or flight response what we are in fact doing is reducing or negating the stressor i.e. we overcome it or make it into a non stressful stimulus by putting it out of the range of doing us harm. In these acute incidents the body reacts in the following pattern-

First phase (alarm response)

- Producing adrenaline (Epinephrine [Ep]) and Norepineprine [NEp] to help activate our body and provide an immediate response
- Pumps blood to muscles for action
- Releases stored energy to fuel action in the form of glucose/fatty acids and cortisol (glucocorticoids)
- Changes in blood pressure and cardiovascular function
- Activates the autonomic and sympathetic nervous system
- Rapid breathing
- Muscle tenseness
- Increased mental alertness

If the stressful situation is short lived the body returns to normal state. However if the stressful situation continues or there is a succession of such situations the body moves to a second phase.

Second phase (adaptation and resistance)

- Suppresses immune reaction
- Release of endorphins and growth hormone
- Increased blood sugar levels

If this is prolonged the body will move to the third phase.

Third phase (exhaustion)

- Exhaustion which contributes towards stress related illnesses such a heart disease and exacerbation of other medical conditions. Stress has been relate to a wide range of illnesses including irritable bowel syndrome, stroke, diabetes, greater susceptibility to bacterial and viral attack because of reduced immune function (immunosuppression)

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

Selye (1936) defined three stages as (33)-

1. Alarm reaction stage – when a stressor is present the brain sends out messages to alert the body's systems for fight or flight
2. Resistance stage – either successful resistance of the stressor or adaptation to it
3. Exhaustion stage – if the stressor continues and adaptation does not occur or is lost a state of overload is created.

In summary, in the event of a singular stressful incident the first phase changes occur but the body can soon return to a normal state (it has reached stage 2). The problem with modern life can be that it comprises a wide range of incidents in succession (e.g. driving in crowded commuter traffic conditions) and the arousal experienced by the body is such that it does not have sufficient time to return to a normal state. In this situation the body can be in an almost continuous stressed state.

People react differently to the same pressure and this makes it difficult to predict stress levels from given situations, behaviours or circumstances. Kenneth M Nowack Ph.D. has for example characterised people as “Hot reactors”, “Sustainers” and “The Hardy”. The first get sick in the battle of experiencing stress; the second get sick after experiencing the stress and the last experience stress without getting sick.

Personality types also play a part. Many people have heard of “Type A” behaviour type often in the context of being a predictor of coronary heart disease. An individual's personality, attitudes and values drive their behaviours and may lead that person to become stressed by factors that another person would not find stressful. For example imagine two people, one a Type A person who is – active and energetic, impatient, never has enough time, intolerant of others –working with someone who is Type B – placid where very little worries them, laid back, leaves others to worry about most things.

We are all stressed at times and this is normal; short, infrequent periods of stress pose little risk and are probably not harmful provided the stress is neither excessive nor prolonged. If the circumstances are such that stressful situations continue unresolved the body is kept in a state of mental and physical activation and there is a chronic effect which can lead to the problems listed in the third phase.

Generally speaking stress induces changes in the body or in behaviour, for example-

Body (physiological)

- Breathlessness
- Constant tiredness
- Cramps or muscle spasms
- Recurring backache, sciatica and lumbago
- Aches and pains in muscles especially back, neck and shoulders

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

- Fainting spells
- Dizziness
- Frequent crying
- Headaches
- Blurred vision
- Impotence or frigidity
- Nail biting
- Teeth grinding
- Nervous twitches
- Body spasms
- Sleeping problems*
- Excessive tiredness
- Insomnia
- Chest pains
- Pins and needles
- Constipation or diarrhoea and piles
- Asthma
- Allergies and hay fever
- Palpitations
- Indigestion
- Feeling sick or dizzy
- Indigestion or heartburn
- High blood pressure
- Cardiovascular disorders
- High blood sugar level
- Lack of appetite
- Restlessness
- Tendency to sweat
- Weight gain or loss
- Frequent coughs, colds and other minor ailments

*Loss of sleep or poor sleep patterns (getting 2 hours less than normal sleep results in degrading critical judgement and decision making by 50%, diminishing memory by 20%, interfering with communication skills by 30% and affecting mood by 100%: Rosekind 2005))

A person experiencing stress may feel (psychological and cognitive effects)-

- Aggression
- Depression
- Scared of disease
- Bad or ugly
- There's no one to confide in

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

- Lack of interest in other people
- Irritable
- Dread of the future
- Fear of failure
- Neglected
- Lack of interest in life
- Loss of sense of humour
- Loss of motivation
- Loss of self esteem
- Loss of confidence
- Loss of sex drive
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Panic attacks
- More aggressive
- More passive
- Faulty thinking
- Feeling 'got at' (paranoid)
- Unduly self critical

A person experiencing stress may behave in one or more of the following ways

- Poor decision making
- Have difficulty in making decisions
- Impaired ability to assimilate information
- Reduced ability to analyse and be rational
- Have difficulty concentrating
- Have difficulty relaxing
- Deny there's a problem
- Be unable to show true feelings
- Be irritable
- Indecisive
- Display irrational, inappropriate or exaggerated behaviour
- Avoid difficult situations
- Demonstrate mood swings
- Change their normal behaviour (e.g. start drinking more, smoke more, change timekeeping habits)
- Craving for food (or drink)
- Alcohol or drug usage
- Withdraw
- Apathetical
- Confused
- Lack of purpose
- Lack of direction

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

- Poor memory
- Over active
- Obsessive
- Lateness
- Lack work focus and engage in gossip or criticism
- Work increased or reduced hours: take excessive holidays or refuse to take holidays
- Disorganised
- Over exercising
- Work more but with no improved output or performance

Although lengthy, these are not exhaustive lists and clearly any individual will not display all of the above signs. The signs of stress can be difficult to spot because unless the individual is well known to you (i.e. his normal behaviours are well known to you and therefore calibrated) the usual signals i.e. changes in behaviour may not be easily noticed. The changes may also be different at different stages in the response and behaviour might change from normal to something different in the short term to something different again in the medium term and something different yet again as the final stage is reached.

On the organisation

The effects of stress on the organisation are likely to be-

- Higher absenteeism
- Poor timekeeping and punctuality
- Higher staff turnover
- More difficult recruitment of staff
- Lower morale and motivation
- Aggressive behaviour
- A blaming culture
- Poorer decision making
- Poorer quality
- Poor performance
- Low productivity
- Industrial relations issues
- Resistance to change
- Poorer creativity and innovation
- Poorer customer service
- Inability to meet deadlines
- More internal friction
- Higher management costs
- Subversion and sabotage

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

All of these reduce effectiveness and efficiency

Additionally in the event of a claim being made the organisation has to spend significant management time in its defence and risk facing the high costs of legal fees and claims for damages.

5. What are the causes of stress (stressors)?

Considerable research has been undertaken to understand what it is about work that creates stress (e.g. the Bristol Stress and health at work study – a 328 page report) (5). This and much other research (22) led the HSE to identify a range of risk factors which have resulted in their Management Standards (6). The Management Standards divide into six main categories-

Demands

Include issues like workload, work patterns and the work environment

The Standard is that-

- *Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs*
- *Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns*

Control

How much say a person has in the way they do their work

The Standard is that-

- *Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work*
- *Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns*

Support

Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues

The Standard is that-

- *Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors*
- *Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns*

Relationship

Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour

The Standard is that-

- *Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours e.g. bullying*
- *Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns*

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

Role

Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles

The Standard is that-

- *Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities*
- *Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns*

Change

How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

The Standard is that-

- *Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change*
- *Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns*

Some of the most common stressors at work are (in no particular order) -

- Poor communication
- Poorly managed change
- Introduction of new technology
- Little or no consultation
- Little control over how work is done (autonomy)
- No empowerment to make decisions
- No control over the pace of work
- No control over work breaks
- Perceived unfairness (e.g. distribution of workload, bonus schemes, favouritism)
- Monotony of work/lack of variation
- Boredom or lack of challenge
- Highly autocratic/directive management style
- Rigidity of structure and decision making
- Bullying and harassment
- Change (e.g. timing, pace, complexity)
- Taking on anything new (e.g. job role, introduction of IT)
- Insecurity (e.g. reorganisation and downsizing, threat of redundancy)
- Ill health that may affect performance or ability to do the job
- Workload (too high or too low)
- Lack of stimulation (e.g. boring, repetitive tasks)
- Working hours or work patterns (disruption of Diurnal [circadian] rhythm)
- Interpersonal conflicts

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

- Interaction with customers or public in difficult situations
- Working alone
- Working environment (e.g. noise, interruptions)
- Nature of the job (e.g. driving in traffic)
- Meeting deadlines
- Lack of information or training
- Lack of clear instructions
- Lack of clarity in role, responsibilities or authority
- Lack of support (e.g. from managers or colleagues, HR, trades unions)
- Conflicting demands from different people (e.g. managers, customers)
- Lack of resources (e.g. time, staff, equipment, tools, materials)
- Insufficient or biased feedback (e.g. only commenting on things that have gone wrong, blame culture)
- Lack of policies, procedures and systems to deal with issues at an early stage or to deal effectively with any grievance
- Poor work/life balance

Some have found it convenient to put these into categories – for example -

- Environmental
- Occupational
- Social

Or –

- Physical environment and equipment
- The organisation's structure and characteristics
- Management of the organisation
- Roles and responsibilities
- Relationships within the organisation
- Career development, motivation and fulfilment
- Personal and social relationships
- Individual characteristics such as personality, values, beliefs and attitudes

A list and discussion can be found in “Stress at Work Management and Prevention” Stranks (34) together with further discussion based on the work of Cooper and Marshall (1978).

In our view it is appropriate and practical to adopt the HSE's categories as a sound basis for categorising risk of stress in the workplace.

The real question for managers is - are these risk factors inevitable stressors in modern life in the workplace that cannot be changed? If they can be changed, how much does it cost to change them?

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

In our view most of the causes listed above are not inevitable and if they exist they are able to be changed and that there does not have to be a high cost and that any investment can be repaid handsomely in a very short period of time.

According to Chris Rowe, head of the HSE's psychosocial policy "The HSE recognises that much stress is created by managers not managing people properly. The HSE Standards aim to prevent this situation happening by describing the sorts of things that should be in place in good high performing workplaces".

6. What should we do about it?

There are three main thrusts to tackling stress in the work place-

1. Undertaking a stress audit as part of a risk assessment process
2. Undertaking individual risk assessments that are job and person specific at the time of appointment, job change, etc.
3. Creating a management environment (culture) that is aware of causes of stress and takes actions to avoid them

The CIPD (35) outlines four parts to a corporate strategy -

Policy, procedures and systems audit to ensure that policies, systems, procedures provide a working environment that protects the workforce and can identify employees at risk and provide an appropriate level of support

Problem centred approach using a problem solving model that takes identified issues and finds ways to solve them

Well being approach that focuses on ways to create a healthy workforce

Employee centred approach working at the individual employee level e.g. stress training or counselling

In order to assess risk and consider what action might be taken in the first instance we need information on how things stand currently – what risks are present, their causes and possible solutions.

The collection of useful information might include (in no particular order) -

- Sickness and absenteeism statistics
- Accident statistics
- Staff turnover statistics
- Conventional health and safety risk assessments for the physical environment
- 1:1 discussions
- Group discussions
- Information from customers
- Information on staff grievance and harassment complaints
- Feedback from exit interviews
- Feedback from TUs
- Feedback from occupational health and EAP providers
- Stress risk assessment (questionnaire)

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

The findings and analysis might lead to action such as -

- Ensure there is understanding of the organisation's vision
- Identify and enforce corporate values and culture (Talk the talk and walk the walk)
- Align people and the organisation (see the Morpheus model in the www.morpheuspd.co.uk website)
- Match people well to their job roles
- Change job or work design
- Improve induction process and information
- Recruit, train and develop only the best managers
- Focus on leadership at senior levels, both as individuals and as a team
- Invest in training e.g. in stress awareness and management, time management
- Allow flexible working
- Revise and improve recruitment and selection processes and procedures
- Increase staff control over work
- Ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear and that appropriate levels of authority are granted
- Involve staff in decision making - consultation
- Involve staff in change consult and communicate
- Increase flexibility and empowerment (independence and initiative)
- Conduct exit interviews and respond to comments
- Provide support to staff and managers
- Match people to jobs using psychological tools
- Assess management style and culture
- Manage change in consultation with staff and be aware of the pressures brought about by the pace of change
- Have good 'work/life balance' and family friendly policies
- Be aware of working hours, shift patterns and other high risk factors such as exposure to violence
- Encourage 'healthy' behaviours and act quickly on unacceptable behaviours
- Give frequent feedback and consider future development
- Improve communications, share information freely and in a timely way
- Encourage a climate of openness and honesty
- Do not tolerate a blame culture; encourage a culture of learning and development
- Ensure a stress policy and procedure is in place and acceptable attitudes and behaviours are communicated to managers
- Ensure staff understand their responsibilities regarding stress for themselves and each other
- Introduce health promotion campaigns
- Provide high quality occupational health support, and an EAP including external counselling
- Encourage partnership working with staff representatives and TUs

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

- Review and change physical workplace stressors (e.g. noise, physical harm from attack)
- Make changes to physical environment
- Communicate, communicate and communicate
- Consult widely and often; set up partnership working

This is not an exhaustive list, nor is it the case that an organisation has to make changes in all of these ways: this is why an audit, its analysis and actions arising from it are entirely unique to each organisation and the time at which the assessment is made.

Stress, as with health and safety generally, is everyone's responsibility. Everyone must play their part – managers, occupational health, HR professionals, health and safety professionals and each member of staff individually. It is also important to consider vulnerable groups such as those with a disability, the young (through inexperience and lack of training) expectant women and remote or solitary workers.

Undertaking risk assessment

The Morpheus process is-

1. Identify hazards ("hazards" are the identified stressors – not the effects they have)
2. Decide who might be harmed and how
3. Evaluate the risk (likelihood and impact)
4. Determine actions that will be taken to reduce or eliminate the risk
5. Implement chosen actions
6. Review the assessment at regular intervals and take further action

The HSE's published process is -

1. Look for the hazards
2. Decide who might be harmed and how
3. Evaluate the risks and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or more should be done
4. Record your findings
5. Review your assessment and revise it if necessary

In most cases employers have so far not undertaken a systematic risk assessment using the above process for assessing the mental health and well being of their staff despite the fact that they have often been using such techniques for many years to assess physical health and safety. Most organisations have only taken action when forced at a tertiary level as shown below.

It is generally agreed that there are three levels of intervention (Murphy 1988) that should be considered (14)-

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

Primary

To eliminate or reduce the sources of stress by assessing risks and changing the environment (physical and mental). This is primarily concerned with identifying the possible causes of stress and the risk levels to individuals and the organisation; relatively few organisations have undertaken a comprehensive assessment.

Secondary

To help managers and individuals understand stress and its causes and effects and to take actions to avoid and manage stress. Some of this may be present but it is likely that the recommendations following the risk assessment will put most of the necessary interventions in place.

Tertiary

To assist individuals suffering from stress usually with an emphasis on altering the individual's situation or perception rather than addressing the cause. This stage deals with the treatment and rehabilitation of individuals who have been affected by stress e.g. through counselling, occupational health and employee assistance programmes (EAPs). This level is the one currently most commonly relied upon and used as a reaction to individual problems. It places emphasis on the individual (rightly) but usually fails to address the root cause of problems.

The Morpheus stress audit places an organisation firmly at primary level and maps easily onto the HSE's Management Standards.

The stress risk assessment analysis and report is followed by a number of focus groups which validate the findings and consider questions of emphasis, risk level and options for improvement actions. These are conducted in accordance with good practice and the HSE's guidance (15).

Considerable further information is available in HSE's publications "Making the Management standards Work how to apply the Standards in your workplace" aimed at managers and "Working together to reduce stress at work" which is a guide for employees, both available from their website www.hse.gov.uk and we strongly recommend that these are downloaded and studied.

It is not only the management of organisations that should be taking action. Staff also have responsibilities (well identified in the above document) including a duty of care to themselves and others in the organisation. This is often not known and understood by staff and is worthy of clear communication alongside the responsibility and actions that the organisation may take.

The ISMA study (30) highlighted that ignorance was the major barrier to doing something about work related stress. 61% also said that it was due to lack of time 48%

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

lack of line management commitment and 34% because of lack of senior management commitment. We have one thing to say to such line and senior managers – be aware of the risk you are taking in failing to take action. Furthermore 46% of the respondents believed that they had been unsuccessful in introducing stress management initiatives because of the stigma of stress in their organisation. Such a culture is not a healthy place to work in.

7. What are the benefits of tackling stress?

The benefits of tackling stress arise both for the individuals in the organisation and for the organisation itself –

For the individual

- Improved quality of working life
- Improved health and well being
- Higher feelings of self worth
- Greater job satisfaction

For the organisation -

- Reduced staff costs
- Lower risk of claims
- More motivated staff
- More productive staff
- Higher morale and commitment
- Improved return on investment in training and development
- Change is more easily introduced
- Improved employee relations
- Improved customer care
- Higher productivity
- Lower staff turnover
- Better absence management
- Fewer days lost to sickness and absenteeism
- Retention of knowledge and skills base
- Reduced number of accidents
- Improved quality
- Reduced costs of sick pay
- Reduced costs of sickness cover/overtime
- Reduced costs of recruitment
- The organisation's responsibilities under legislation are met thus reducing the likelihood and cost of claims being made, improves defence against such claims
- Strengthens the organisation's position with regard to employer's liability insurance

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

According to ACAS (17) the problems experienced when a key member of staff was off sick for an extended period of time were-

Problems	%
Teams over-stretched and lacking resources to get job done	68
Teams/staff lacking leadership and direction	64
Loss of morale/resentment from other employees	45
Problems managing key accounts/business	31
Financial problems with regard to paying for temporary cover	25

In broader terms the impact of indirect costs of absence were identified as –

- Unnecessary high staffing levels and overtime payments
- Delayed production
- Lower quality or levels of service
- Disruption to the flow of work
- Low morale and general dissatisfaction, resulting in low productivity
- Poor customer satisfaction or relationships

In a survey of employers (18) asked to identify the top three HR issues facing them as a priority in the business the following results were obtained-

Top three priorities	%
Attracting and retaining staff	68
Keeping staff motivated	50
Complying with legislation	47
Employee health and well being	38
Absence management	35
Controlling salary costs	35
Managing pension plans	21

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

When asked if they had a system to manage employee health and well being 60% responded NO and 40% YES.

Addressing stress in the workplace would contribute to improving the top six concerns in this table.

In the same survey when asked what health problems affect employees the results were-

Health problems	%
Stress	76
Back problems	63
Depression	57
Long term/chronic illness	46
Heart problems	29
RSI	24
Alcohol and drug problems	20
None of these	8

Addressing stress in the workplace could improve all of the above.

HAS have calculated that each 0.1% saved on absence gave a return of £1000 direct and £1000 indirect in an organisation with 500 employees. It has also been calculated that stress related sickness absence is costing organisations between £350 and £500 per employee per annum (various sources).

The cost of replacing a member of staff has been estimated at between 50% and 90% of annual salary (Personnel Management Factsheet 7 July 1988).

Through the introduction of risk assessment and stress management initiatives Somerset County Council have shown a saving of £1.9 million in reduced absence in two years (29). This was a result of reducing sickness absence from 10.75 days per year to 8.29 excluding school based staff. The investment required to achieve this was £360000 made up of the audit £30000 followed by interventions (actions decided upon as a result of the audit) of £360000 – a net saving of £1.57 million – a cost benefit ratio of 4.76 to 1 and payback period of 5.5 months.

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

City of York Council (schools) enjoyed a return on investment of £5 for every £1 spent, winning the Personnel Today award for Managing Health at Work including £15600 benefit in reduced health risks and £43200 in absence reduction.

Direct Line insurance reduced employee turnover by 5% representing a saving of £150000 in direct payroll costs alone; every £1 spent recovered £9 from retention of staff alone

The Food Standards Agency Meat Hygiene Service reduced self reported absenteeism from 17.7 days to 8.4 days per annum.

In its Beacons of Excellence report (14) the HSE identifies a number of organisations that have derived benefit and highlights the outstanding things that they did to enable this to take place, for example-

Organisation	Good practice example
Rolls Royce	Senior management commitment
Kingston hospitals NHS Trust	Management commitment
Glaxo, Smith, Kline	Financial commitment and comprehensive risk assessment strategy
Astra Zeneca	Key performance indicators (KPIs)
Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council	Job risk assessment
Somerset County Council	Most comprehensive approach
Denbighshire County Council	Simple job checklist
London Borough of Hounslow	Strategy and primary intervention
London Electricity	Strategy and primary intervention
Stockton Borough Council	Innovative use of external help
The Royal Sun Alliance Group	Employee survey
Abbey National	Focus groups and primary intervention

8. References and resources

1	Absence minded: absence and labour turnover CBI 2006
2	Routes onto incapacity benefits: Findings from qualitative research, Roy Sainsbury and Jacqueline Davidson, Dept for Work and Pensions 2006
3	HSE web site www.hse.gov.uk/stress and the report "Psychosocial Working conditions in Great Britain in 2004" HSE 2004
4	HSE Work related stress – a short guide INDG281rev1 reprinted 5/04
5	The scale of occupational stress – The Bristol stress and health at work study HSE 2000 www.hse.gov.uk/researcher/crr_pdf/2000/crr00265.pdf ISBN 0-7176-1783-1
6	HSE web site www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards
7	Aon Consulting Employee Risk @ Work study 2005 www.aon.com
8	Roffey Park The Management Agenda www.roffeyparkresearch.com
9	TUC Biennial Study 2004
10	The Teacher, April 2001
11	Working in America John Renesch www.refresh.com The 2000 Integra Survey
12	HSE 2004/5 Survey of Self Reported Work Related Illness (SWI04/05) www.hse.gov
13	www.bullyonline.org and further reading in Earnshaw and Cooper "Stress and Employer Liability"
14	HSE report "Beacons of excellence in stress prevention" www.hse.gov.uk/research/rpdf/rrr133.pdf
15	"How to organise and run focus groups" HSE
16	"Working together to reduce stress at work – a guide for employees" published jointly by ACAS, the International Stress Management Association and the HSE
17	"Characteristics and costs of absence and labour turnover ACAS 2005
18	Norwich Union Healthcare survey of 214 British Employers
19	HAS, trading division of Simplyhealth Access Relax survey 2006 www.hsa.co.uk/corporate
20	The management of health, safety and welfare issues NHS Employers Organisation 2005
21	A practical guide to managing and supporting mental health in the workplace Mind out 0870 443 0930
22	Mackay, Cousins, Kelly, Lees and McCraig A 'Management Standards' approach to tackling work-related stress. Part 1: Rationale and scientific underpinning. Work and stress 2004 downloadable from www.hse.gov.uk
23	HSE Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and HSE Guidance Notes November 2001 Tackling Work Related Stress – "A manager's guide to improving and maintaining employee health and well being" HSG218 www.hse.gov.uk
24	European Foundation Survey on Working Conditions in the European Union 1996

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

25	Developing Patient Partnerships Health education charity
26	HSC press release: C021 – 25 May 2004
27	ICM Research www.icmresearch.co.uk report Stress and well being commissioned by Developing Patient Partnership 2006
28	Homes TH and Rahe RH The social readjustment rating scale Journal of Psychosomatic Research 11 pp 213-18, 1967
29	Case study Tasho, Jordon and Robertson “Case study: Establishing the business case for investing in stress prevention activities and evaluating their impact on sickness absence levels” research report 295 HSE Books 2005 ISBN 0 7176 2938 4
30	Pearce J Attitudes, opinions and experiences of attendees at the ISMAUK stress workshops 2004-RR38 2005 www.hse.gov.uk/stress/research/rrpd/rr169.pdf
31	HSE Five steps to risk assessment INDG163 (rev1) www.hse.gov.uk
32	Justice at Work and Reduced Risk of Coronary Disease Among employees: The Whitehall study. Archives of Internal medicine, 165, 2245-2251
33	See also Selye H The Stress of Life 1976 McGraw-Hill: New York
34	Stress at Work, Jeremy Stranks, Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann ISBN 0-7506-6542-4 and www.books.elsevier.com/companions/0750665424
35	CIPD www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/health/stress/stress.htm?IsSrchRes=1

Further resources

TUC www.tuc.org.uk

ACAS www.acas.org.uk

The International Stress Management Organisation <http://www.isma.org.uk>

CBI www.cbi.org.uk

The Field Foundation www.bullyonline.org

HSE Report on stress in call centres www.hse.gov.uk/stress/research

9. The Morpheus way (the Morpheus stress audit)

The Morpheus stress audit has been designed to follow the HSE's recommended practice and guidelines and maps precisely onto their Management Standards, thus acting as a benchmark of an organisation's progress and potentially a benchmark against other organisations or within their industry/business sector. In addition to the work related section based on the HSE's Management Standards we include an optional non-work lifestyle section which comprehensively assesses employees' lifestyles. Although participants respond anonymously we collect data so that the demographics of the response can be compared with the demographics of the workforce.

Studies and experience emphasise the importance of using a tailored approach rather than 'one size fits all'. Therefore each questionnaire is finalised after extensive industry and client specific research to ensure that all of the risk factors are covered in sufficient detail and that they can be risk assessed to enable a practical set of targeted actions to be determined.

A project timetable is agreed in order that there is clarity and that everyone knows what is happening and when. The pace is in the hands of the client but should be such that momentum is not lost through periods of apparent inactivity when staff cannot see progress.

The first stage is to meet with senior management (it is vital that senior management support the initiative and are prepared to be open minded about the findings and willing to take appropriate action as a result) or a steering group appointed by senior management after consultation. A bespoke questionnaire tailored to the organisation's particular needs and likely risk factors is agreed. This questionnaire is made available to all staff or a representative proportion as agreed and is made available in paper form or electronic form by accessing it through work or home PCs as appropriate. Responses are anonymous and collated by Morpheus Personal Development Ltd who prepare and present a report on the findings which includes analysis of the results by department and by hierarchical level.

Good communication is vital and Morpheus work closely with management and staff representatives and TU representatives at all stages to ensure that there is full understanding of the process and the reasons for conducting the audit.

Following analysis and review of the findings an appropriate number of focus groups are conducted by Morpheus Personal Development Ltd to validate the findings, check any questions raised and obtain a view on the risk levels present together with suggestions for action.

Morpheus Personal Development Ltd makes recommendations for action which senior management can consider and adopt. We can advise on policy and procedures and provide training, coaching and counselling as required – a fully comprehensive service.

The Morpheus free guide to stress at work

In brief summary the process is-

1. Agree tailored questionnaire to meet organisation's specific needs
2. Make questionnaire available in printed or electronic formats to all or representative number of staff
3. Analyse results and report to senior management both in writing and orally
4. Conduct focus groups to validate and calibrate results and obtain suggestions for action
5. Make recommendations to management
6. Management decisions are taken
7. Create action plan
8. Implement action plan
9. Review progress at an appropriate interval

Our expert consultants guide you through the process, assist you in identifying and assessing the risks and the actions that can be taken to reduce or eliminate them. We also provide awareness and management skills training to ensure that everyone has the knowledge and abilities to identify likely stressors and the actions that should be taken.

Morpheus Personal Development Ltd also provides personal stress assessments and feedback together with lifestyle feedback and guidance, thinking styles assessment, coaching and counselling for individuals.

For an informal discussion in the first instance please contact us by telephone 01905 778599 or by email info@morpheuspd.co.uk

11. The way forward

We expect that you have by now decided that you should undertake a stress audit. The question is how.

The first decision is whether to attempt it 'in house' or to engage a professional, experienced organisation. Both guidance and experience suggest strongly that stress audits are best conducted by external independent organisations. The sensitivity of staff should not be underestimated and they draw comfort from absolute guarantees of anonymity and objectivity. The reality is that staff often do not trust the results of 'in house' audits and the more this is the case the more the need for change. In other words they will not give honest, open responses if they fear the consequences of doing so.

HSE guidelines highlight the need for questionnaires to be designed specifically for each organisation saying "HSE sponsored research is showing that many of the commercially available questionnaires are not particularly reliable or valid tests for work-related stress. In any case, off-the-shelf questionnaires may not address key issues for your unit. It will often be better to obtain competent advice to help you design a questionnaire that is specific to your unit".

If you decide to engage an external organisation you have a wide range of choice and no two offerings are the same. It is good practice to do some research and identify a short list of, probably three, organisations to meet with for in depth discussions. For this to be meaningful you need to draw up a list of criteria that you will use to compare the offerings.

Here are some of the criteria you might use-

- ✓ Demonstrable expertise in the field
- ✓ Openness to discussion
- ✓ Flexibility to meet your specific needs
- ✓ Ability to guide you through the process and effectively project manage all of the activities
- ✓ Comprehensiveness of service from start to completion - including facilitation, training, coaching, counselling etc.

And, of course, the costs: but remember that you are looking for value for money not lowest initial cost. In other words it is the effectiveness of the outcomes that far outweigh minor differences in investment.

The rights of Roger Edwards of Morpheus Personal Development Ltd to be identified as the author of this work are asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form other than with permission of the copyright holder which can be requested by applying to Morpheus Personal Development Ltd 01905 778599 or info@morpheuspd.co.uk