



Stress and Psychological Injury

Stress comes from everywhere in our lives – home, work, friends, family. We work longer and play less. Due to technology we find it increasing difficult to find the time to switch off. Work demands can now reach us at all hours.

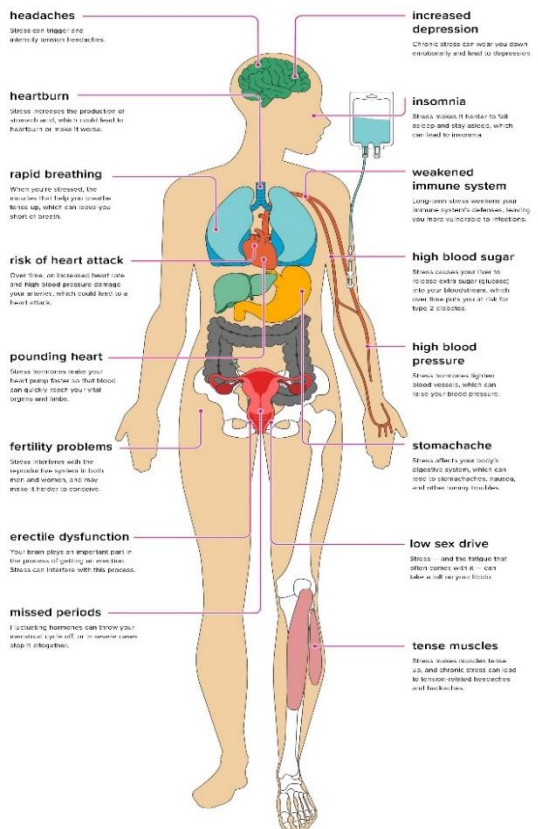
What is Stress and Psychological Injury?

Work-related stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures and which may challenge their ability to cope. It is a hazard that occurs in workplaces and should be treated as such.

Stress is our body's natural response to instinctive 'fight or flight' reactions to danger. However, this stress response is designed to be used in short bursts and then switched off. If it is activated for too long, or the period between stressful situations is too short, then the body has no time to repair itself, and this is when fatigue and damage occurs. This in turn can affect our physical and mental health and quality of life in just the same way as exposure to industrial toxins.

Causes of psychological injury – psychosocial hazards

- Poor organisational change management
- Poor workplace relationships
- Low recognition and reward
- Violent or traumatic events
- High job demands
- Poor support
- Poor environmental conditions
- Low job control
- Remote work
- Isolated work
- Low role clarity
- Poor organisational justice
- Low job demands



How Does Stress and Psychological Injury affect us?

Stress can affect our entire body and effects every one of us differently. This picture depicts just a few symptoms that people may experience.

How can we find out if people are affected by stress and Psychological Injury in our workplace?

- Survey staff** to find out anonymously how they feel.
- Talk to staff**, have conversations, check in regularly.
- Look at sick leave?** How often do staff use it? Are they frequently absent, is there a pattern to absences?
- Look at Workers comp claims** for clues, where are accidents occurring, what time, by whom.
- Use of EAP**, how many people are accessing the service (you can't see whom but you can see the number of people)

What can we do about stress and Psychological Injury?

As individuals we need to **recognise** when we or others are feeling the effects of stress. For example, has behaviour or mood changed, are people isolating themselves. Most importantly, workplaces need to acknowledge that stress is experienced differently by everyone, so not everyone will display signs or symptoms in the same way.

Respond and Refer attempt to put strategies in place or ask for help ie: visit GP, get a referral to a counsellor or psychologist, access Employee Assistance Program, participate in physical activity, talk to a friend, change work practices. There will not be the same fix for everyone and for some it will take many different approaches.

What is the Law?

The WA Occupational Safety and Health Act, 1984(OSH Act) and regulations place certain duties on employers, employees, self-employed people, manufacturers, designers, importers and suppliers and must be complied with.

Duties include:

- Not exposing workers to hazards.
- Providing information, instruction and training.
- Conducting risk assessments.
- Investigating hazards or injuries that have been reported to employers by employees.
- Notifying WorkSafe of reportable injuries.
- Providing and maintaining safe workplaces.

If workers are exposed to a hazard, such as stress then they need to report this to their employer. If stress is created by the workplace the Employer should conduct a risk assessment which should identify how many people are being effected and the consequence that exposure to this hazard may have on the workers. With this information the employer would then need to decide on the most appropriate method to remove or control this hazard in the workplace.

What can workers do?

Join your Union! The more members from your workplace the more power you have to make changes to workplace conditions as a group, with the support of your Union.

The best place to start is **report all hazards to your employer**. Under section 23K of the WA OSH Act the employer must get back to the employee that reports a hazard and tell them how they fixed the hazard or what they intend to do to reduce the level of risk associated with that hazard.

Request the Election of OSH Representatives. OSH Reps should be nominated and elected by workers to represent their interests in regards to health and safety. There is no requirement regarding the number of Reps that are elected so determine how many you should have based on the size of your workplace, the type of work performed, where and when that work is performed. For example if you work in a small office of 20 employees you might only have 1-2 Reps however if you work in a school you might have 4-5 depending on the type of work performed. At the end of the day this should be decided in consultation with workers.

Request the establishment of a workplace OSH Committee. The committee should have at least half of its members directly nominated and elected by staff. The Committee should assist the employer to manage and review any health and safety issues at the workplace. The Committee should consult with workers to identify and resolve health and safety issues.

Get your Reps trained at Unity Training Services. We have been training OSH Reps for 30 years and are professional, passionate and highly qualified Health and Safety Trainers. Visit www.unitytraining.com.au or call 9227 7809.

Contact WorkSafe WA for advice and support 1300 307 877.

Join your Union. Working together to resolve of health and safety issues, will lead to better outcomes. The Union can also assist with elections of Reps and to provide advice and support on safety issues.

We all want safe workplaces. We want to return from work in the same condition we arrived and enjoy the things that matter most.