

Stress Reduction FactSheet

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Cost and Effect

Job stress in the U.S. costs \$200 billion annually. Stress is the number one problem for working people, many of whom are juggling work, home, and the care of children and aging parents. It is no surprise that stress has increased. Stress creates the “fight or flight” response in the brain. The stress hormone then circulates in the blood stream causing the heart to speed up, the arteries to narrow, and blood sugar to rise. One of the indicators that we are under stress is our desire to consume more sweets, which then contributes to abdominal fat, obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Under stress, our digestion is inhibited and we find ourselves using more antacid products to cope with acid indigestion.

Chronic stress signals the body to store more fat. It impairs the immune system and increases our susceptibility to colds and infections. Increased accumulations of fat can damage the brain and other organs. Recent studies in America’s rundown urban neighborhoods suggest that stress is killing young people at a faster rate than drugs or guns. They are suffering from heart attacks long before the age of 50, along with strokes, diabetes, kidney disease and high blood pressure.

More information became available to the world in the thirty years between 1965 and 1995 than was produced in the entire 5,000 year period between 3,000 BC and 1965.

What has resulted from this onslaught of information?

- More information increases the likelihood of change, and the more change we experience, the more stressed out we become.
- We sit more than we move, managing increased information on our computers. Studies show that sitting is very bad for our health. Sitting is the exercise-equivalent of smoking, only it is worse for our health.
- Sitting for long stretches of time is linked to a variety of debilitating diseases that include diabetes, osteoporosis, depression, heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, sexual dysfunction, breast, colon, and pancreatic cancer, physical frailty and digestive problems.

The results of chronic stress show up in our behaviors at work and at home. Stress makes us irritable and jittery, causes us to lose focus, which can be dangerous to our safety on the road and in work situations. Stress causes physical problems and illness creating headaches, stomach pains, neck and shoulder pains, weight gain, fatigue and depression. Any one of these problems may result in an increase in injuries on the job. It affects our relationships at home and at work, making us irritable, impatient, and on edge, resulting in increases in verbal and possible physical violence at work. Stress gives rise to increased fatigue and depression as well as an increase in negative thoughts and feelings. It becomes increasingly difficult to do our best work under these conditions.

Managing Stress

Since stress impacts people in different ways, it is important that we identify those situations that cause stress for us personally. Once we identify our personal stressors, we need to recheck to see which of those stressors we really have any control over. If we are being honest with ourselves, it is apparent that we only have control over our own attitudes and behaviors. We then become responsible for our own choices, and the need to change our outlook and attitudes.

There are actions we can take to help us achieve this change. The most simple and direct action we can take is to become aware of our breathing. Most of us breathe in a very shallow way, never moving the stale air out of our lungs, using only the upper lobes of the lungs. Since most of us are not inclined to go long distance running, a good start is the practice of deep breathing. Initially practice this exercise sitting down. Take a deep breath in, hold it for a slow count of three, then breathe out and hold the lungs empty for a count of three.



Repeat this exercise five to ten times. Do this exercise sitting in a chair and as you become accustomed to the increase in oxygen in the lungs, you may then coordinate it with your steps when you go walking.

- There are some skills we can practice to reduce stress. Clear communications can reduce misunderstanding and potentially hazardous behavior.
- Time management skills can help work proceed in a smooth manner and reduce stress by prioritizing our workload and creating a manageable schedule.
- As stress can impair our sense of humor, keeping humorous calendars, or funny sayings, or cartoons available can assist by giving us a “funny-bone” break.
- Using our assertiveness skills and practicing relaxation and stress reduction exercises can also be beneficial in reducing stress.

We also help ourselves when we increase our healthy habits. Changing only two habits, can have the most positive impact on our health. STOP SMOKING AND LOSE WEIGHT. Simply quitting smoking and losing weight are immensely beneficial to our health.

When we add the habits of increased sleep, moderate exercise, and a diet that includes more fresh fruit and vegetables, we increase the likelihood of a longer life expectancy and a healthier old age. So practice stress reduction and improve your health and safety.

This information is published by the Texas Department of Insurance (TDI), Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC) and is considered factual at the time of development.