

Minimising and managing stress in the workplace: The implications of COVID-19

Why is this important?

COVID-19 has contributed to higher stress levels for many employees.

Employees may start to lose their sense of belonging when they are not able to communicate with their colleagues face-to-face. This can increase feelings of stress and anxiety.¹

'Workload' remains the biggest cause of work-related stress reported by all businesses, as does 'relationships outside of work' (as the key determinant of non-work-related stress).²

Stress related to financial concerns saw an increase from 41% in 2018 to 54% in 2020 for all enterprises, with smaller businesses reporting even higher levels at 60%.

While some stress helps us to be productive, too much long-term stress can lead to burnout and ill health. When our stress response is turned on repeatedly, it puts unnecessary strain on our bodies and impacts our ability to think.

What can you do to minimise and manage stress levels?

Know the warning signs

**Worries, overthinking issues,
being stuck on issues**

**Losing your zest for life; losing
interest in family, friends or work**

Changes in your sleeping patterns

Nervous 'twitches' or muscle spasms

Indigestion, stomach upsets

**Pains in lower back, chest, shoulders,
joints or other parts of the body**

**Skin itches or rashes for
no apparent reason**



Frequent colds or flu

**Shortness of breath or
shallow breathing**

Memory or concentration problems

**Feeling anxious and tense
for no obvious reason**

Finding it hard to make decisions

Tearfulness for no apparent reason

Feeling impatient or irritable

Losing confidence

1 McGregor, A. (2021). *Businesses urged to promote healthy hybrid work model*. Auckland, New Zealand: Southern Cross. Retrieved from <https://www.southerncross.co.nz/group/news/2021/workplace-wellness-report-2021>

2 Southern Cross Health Insurance & Business NZ (2021). *Workplace Wellness Report 2021*. Auckland, New Zealand: BusinessNZ. Retrieved from <https://www.businessnz.org.nz/resources/surveys-and-statistics/wellness-in-the-workplace-survey/Southern-Cross-Health-Insurance-BusinessNZ-Workplace-Wellness-Report-2021.pdf>

Do something about it

- If you notice changes in someone's behaviour, thinking, feelings or reactions, ask them 'how are you, really?' and listen.
- Review your team's allocated work tasks, individual needs, social environment, workplace relationships and organisational culture. Are any of these factors impacting on the mental health and wellbeing of the team?
- Identify what changes can be made both now and in the future.
- Consider how to get the team engaged to achieve change.



Helpful resources

Mental Health Foundation

Minimising and managing workplace stress

What is stress, how does work impact stress and how can organisations and their people use the Three Rs, Refuel/Whakatipu, Resolve/Whakatika and Relax/Whakatā, to get on top of it? These resources help workplaces prioritise mental health to ensure employees have improved wellbeing, greater morale and higher job satisfaction.

Workplace wellbeing during COVID-19

Resources to help workplace leaders create work environments where people feel safe, calm, connected and hopeful throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Open Minds e-learning

This free online training course helps managers support people experiencing mental distress or illness at work, with guidance about starting a conversation with someone who might be affected.

Health and Safety Association of New Zealand (HASANZ)

Find a HASANZ registered advisor to help you.

HASANZ also has a range of COVID-19 related webinars and resources, including:

- Managing COVID-19 in the workplace
- Returning to work safely
- Personal leadership and working differently
- Healthy working from home.

WorkSafe

Staying mentally healthy when working from home

Guidance for workers who do office-type work in their home, or an equivalent location, rather than at their business premises.

Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum

A range of resources for CEOs, including:

- COVID-19 vaccination policy support
- Protecting mental wellbeing at work
- CEO's guide to mental health and wellbeing
- Research: Lessons from the pandemic.

Business.govt.nz

Managing the impact of COVID-19 cases in your business

Advice for organisations on how to plan for COVID-19 affecting their employees, and how to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infections in their workplace.