



STOP! A mind out of control can cause serious illness and 95% of workers find bad management triggers stress.

Let's talk about stress

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Stress affects people in a variety of physiological ways. Defined as the “adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed upon them” by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), stress – if left unchecked – can lead to damaging physical, mental and emotional problems.

With International Stress Awareness Week (1 – 5 November 2021) on our minds, now is the right time to pause and reflect on how to lessen the effects of stress in the workplace.

The stress response

is our natural reaction to external and internal factors which drives our “fight or flight” mindset. A little pressure in our lives helps us perform at our optimum level. If it becomes too much our performance suffers – so it's important we know the difference between healthy pressure and debilitating stress.

Stress management is becoming an issue in the workplace as a surplus of stress leads to reduced productivity, increased accident rates, higher staff turnover and sickness.

According to an International Stress Management (Isma)

survey, 95% of respondents saw supportive managers as the factor most likely to help employees cope with stress. Other remedies included good employee communications (68%), realistic deadlines (53%), empowering staff (32%) and the cultivation of a “no blame” culture (45%) [1].

Common symptoms can be feelings of anxiousness, unhappiness and irritability, with those suffering from stress reporting being overwhelmed, unmotivated and lacking interest. These feelings of worry can manifest themselves physically,

too. Symptoms include hyperventilation, shallow breathing, indigestion, heartburn, and tiredness.

So how can we cope with stress?

Cycling, walking, swimming, rowing, or playing an individual or team sport can help beat stress and improve your sleep. Sleep gives your body time to rest and recover from the day, to recharge the biochemical processes in your brain, to replenish energy and to organise and store memories.

Stress can also be managed with slow breathing and relaxation techniques, including yoga

and meditation. A healthy diet is key in fighting stress, as nutritious food can boost self-esteem. Eating at regular intervals – and avoiding processed foods, excessive sugar, salt and caffeine – helps us regulate blood sugars, while incorporating more water, whole grains, nuts, fruit and fish into your diet can also pay dividends.

The benefits of eating, drinking and living well can be boosted further with human contact. We're innately social beings, and it can be extremely beneficial to talk with friends and family. As we all know, laughter is the best

medicine to help us to lighten our mood.

Stress affects us all in different ways. The tumultuous events of the past year have put more pressure on us all, and International Stress Awareness Week gives us a chance to reassess, reset and recalibrate our wellbeing as we emerge from the pandemic.

■ To learn more about International SOS and its wellbeing solutions, contact **Claire Westbrook-Keir**, Director of Key Account Management: claire.westbrook@internationalsos.com.

[1] *Industrial Society*, 2001



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