



# MANAGING STRESS AT WORK

A course book for the NEBOSH HSE  
Certificate in Managing Stress at Work



MSWBK0922



Edition 1

Version 1

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PUBLISHED BY NEBOSH/HSE 2022 ©

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# Contents

Element 1	<b>Key principles</b>	<b>3</b>
	1.1 Understand common terms and the relationships between work-related stress, pressure and mental health/mental illness	4
	1.2 Understand the prevalence and costs of stress and mental ill-health in the workplace	8
	1.3 Recognise the signs and effects of work-related stress	13
	1.4 Understand the responsibilities of employers to workers relating to work-related stress	16
Element 2	<b>Identification of risk</b>	<b>27</b>
	2.1 Understand the causes of workplace stress	28
	2.2 Understand and apply the HSE's Management Standards approach	34
Element 3	<b>Implementing interventions</b>	<b>39</b>
	3.1 Develop practical options to address and reduce workplace stressors	40
	3.2 Develop practical options to manage the effects of stress and its impact in the workplace	47
	3.3 Develop ways to continually improve the workplace	52
	<b>Glossary of key terms</b>	<b>55</b>
	<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>57</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>58</b>

# A guide to the symbols used in this course book

ELEMENT 1

## THOUGHT PROVOKER

These ask you to think about what you have been learning, to relate it to your own experience.



## ACTIVITY

Carry out an activity to help reinforce your learning.



ELEMENT 2

## EXAMPLE

Real or imagined scenarios that give context to points made in the text.



## KEY TERMS

Definitions of key terminology and concepts.



ELEMENT 3



# Key principles



ELEMENT 1

ELEMENT 2

In this element, we will explore common terminology around stress and mental health, and the moral, legal and business reasons for managing work-related stress. We will then focus on the signs, symptoms and ill-health effects of stress. Finally, we will look at the impact of leadership influence on workplace stress, the typical job roles involved in managing workplace stress, and their responsibilities in identifying and reducing causes of stress.

## Learning outcomes

On completion of this element, you should be able to:

- 1.1 Understand common terms and the relationships between work-related stress, pressure and mental health/mental illness
- 1.2 Understand the prevalence and costs of stress and mental ill-health in the workplace
- 1.3 Recognise the signs and effects of work-related stress
- 1.4 Understand the responsibilities of employers to workers relating to work-related stress

ELEMENT 3

# Understand common terms and the relationships between work-related stress, pressure and mental health/mental illness

## Stress

### KEY TERMS

#### Stress

The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them.



Stress is an adverse reaction. In small amounts it can be manageable, but it often builds up over time and can come from various sources, such as financial worries, health concerns, caring responsibilities, work-related issues or relationship problems. Where stress is experienced over a period of time (without the opportunity for recovery) it can lead to physical and mental health problems and harm.

The impacts of stress can be wide-reaching, as the ripple effects impact on an individual's thoughts, feelings and actions; and affects relationships, colleagues, family and home life.

## Pressure

### KEY TERMS

#### Pressure

Pressure is a force that makes us do something. It often brings a sense of urgency and is usually based on persuasion or intimidation, rather than encouragement and interest.

Pressure can be actively put on someone, or it can be felt as a result of the amount of demands on our time or resources.



Unlike stress, some pressure can be positive and can be a motivator. There is an optimum amount though – no pressure at all can be just as bad as too much. Like stress, pressure can come from many sources, including ourselves.

## THOUGHT PROVOKER

Time pressure can be a big motivator. How often have you waited until the last minute to complete a task before a deadline?

However, if you were suddenly assigned multiple tasks with an impossible deadline this would put too much pressure on you and would not be motivating at all.



## Intervention

### KEY TERMS

#### Intervention

In the context of workplace stress, an intervention is something done to address an issue. It can be a direct action, or a set of changes.

Multiple interventions are usually recommended together, to address the root cause, immediate causes and existing impacts of a problem, and to prevent them from reoccurring.

In the context of a workplace, pressure and stress are things that should be actively managed, in order to protect workers from harm. Controls which are put in place to address the causes and effects of stress are called 'interventions'. They can be implemented at different levels – there is much more detail about these in Element 3.



# Understand common terms and the relationships between work-related stress, pressure and mental health/mental illness

## Mental health

### KEY TERMS

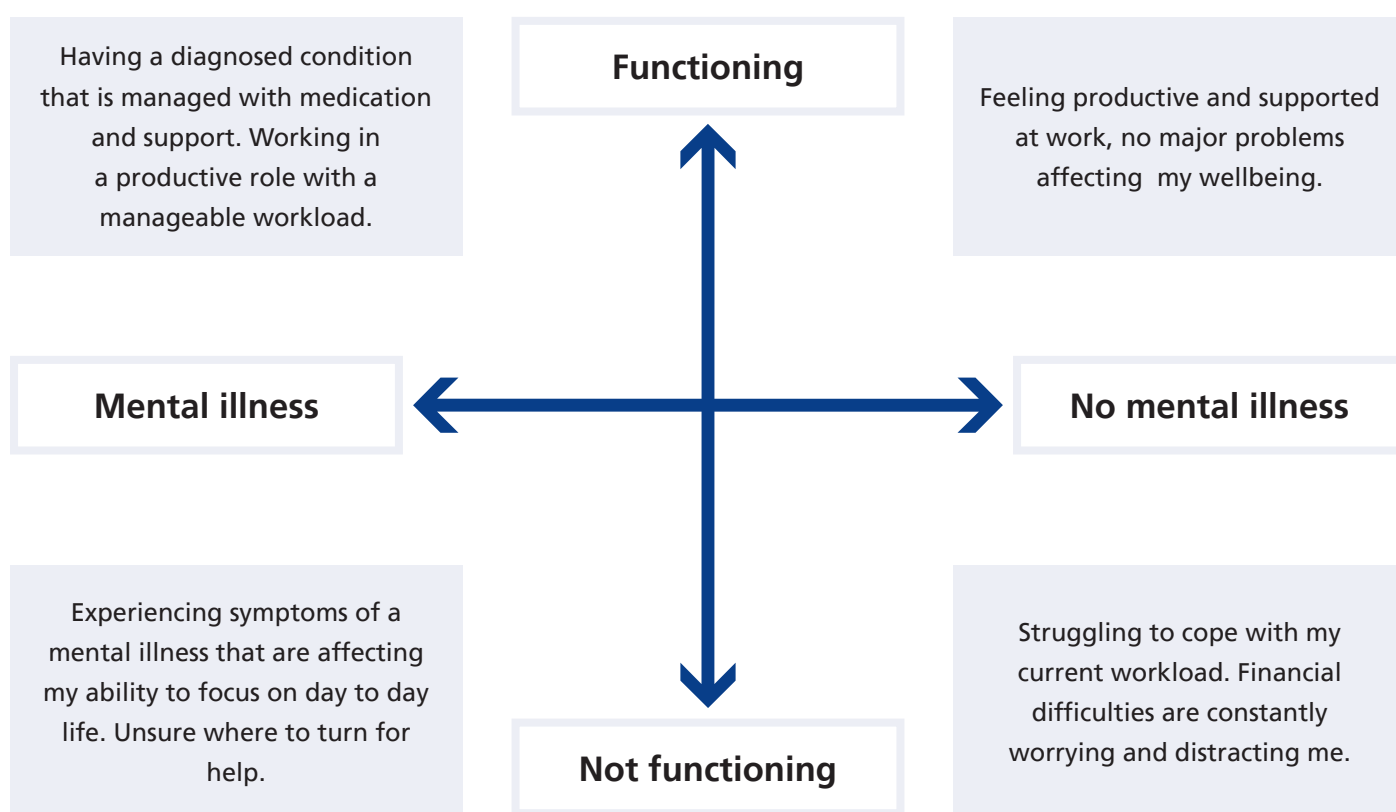
#### Mental health

Refers to a person's psychological, behavioural and emotional state. A state of mental health means that we can be productive, and cope with the normal stresses of life.



Health (physical or mental) is a state of being, and our state of being can change all the time. It is too simplistic to just consider that at any one point, someone is either 'healthy' or 'ill'. The way we manage our health and can cope or 'function' also changes throughout our lives – this is something that is affected by external stresses, including workplace stress.

The mental health continuum helps us to think about where we might be sitting:



The examples in each corner of the continuum show some possible situations that might place a person at different points in the continuum.

## Understand common terms and the relationships between work-related stress, pressure and mental health/mental illness



ELEMENT 1

ELEMENT 2

There are many common types of mental health issues that may be present or develop in the workplace, including:

- anxiety disorders (like general anxiety disorder, social anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder);
- depression;
- post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD);
- addictions;
- self-harm;
- psychosis.

Common mental health problems can have causes outside work; for example bereavement, divorce, postnatal depression, a medical condition or a family history of the problem. In circumstances like this an employer's ability to help is limited, but it is still important that workers feel able to discuss any problems they are facing, without fear of judgement or other negative consequences. The workplace can sometimes be a great place to start reaching out and getting support.

There can be a stigma associated with mental health disorders and work-related stress – often people are much more willing to talk about a physical health issue than about a mental health one, and they may hold back from seeking help. It is important to remove this stigma and make talking about stress and mental health a part of normal working life.

**Remember, as a colleague or line manager it is not your responsibility to diagnose or treat a health condition, but being aware of these common issues can help anyone experiencing problems get the help and advice that they need.**

ELEMENT 3



# Understand common terms and the relationships between work-related stress, pressure and mental health/mental illness

## The relationships between stress, pressure, work and health

### When does pressure become stress?

There is no measure or limit for how much pressure is 'too much'; people have different capacities to cope and this changes in different contexts and at different points in time. Remember that there are always other things going on in a person's life that might not affect their ability at work, but can affect how well they are able to cope.

#### ACTIVITY



An organisation announces a new project with an important client. The timelines are tight but the organisation has delivered similar projects in the past.

How well do you think each of the following people would cope with the pressure of leading this project?

- The new associate who has been with the organisation for two months
- The senior director who is going through a difficult divorce
- The executive who just finished working on a similar project

### The difference between stress and mental ill-health

Stress is not a mental illness, but it can affect mental health. Some of the signs of stress are the same or similar to the symptoms of someone struggling with their mental health.

People are generally more resilient and able to cope with stress if they are in better health. A person dealing with an existing mental ill-health issue may find it more difficult to function in a stressful environment.

### Links between stress and health

The direct effect of stress on the body can cause changes in nerves, hormones and blood pressure, meaning stress can lead to chronic physical health conditions including musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), cardiovascular ill-health and gastro-intestinal (GI) ill-health.

Indirectly, people may attempt to cope with workplace stress with increased alcohol consumption or drug use (prescription or other). This can then lead to additional physical and mental health issues.

### The beneficial effects of work

Although workplace issues are a leading cause of stress, they are not always the problem. Personal or family circumstances can also lead to stress and mental health issues. In these situations, going to work can offer a respite. Some people benefit from the structure of being at work; they feel valued for their contribution, and gain a sense of purpose, motivation, achievement and productivity.



## Understand the prevalence and costs of stress and mental ill-health in the workplace

### The scale of the issue: within the UK

**1.7 million**

workers suffering from work-related ill-health in 2020/21

**50%**

of workers suffering from work-related ill-health in 2020/21 were absent due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety

**451,000**

workers suffering from a new case of work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2020/21

**£5.3 billion**

estimated annual cost to employers from work-related stress, depression, or anxiety

**38.8 million**

working days lost due to work-related ill-health in 2019/20\*

**17.9 million**

working days lost due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2019/20\*

**21.6 days**

sickness absence days per person taken for work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2019/20\*

\* Figures not reported for 2020/21

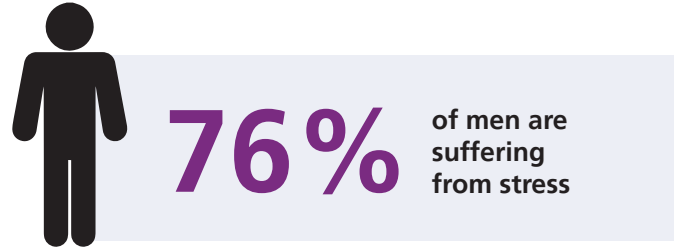
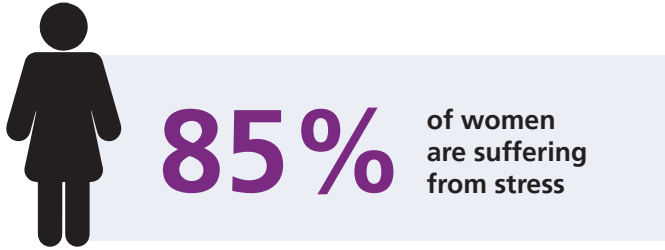
Source: HSE statistics

Industries reporting the highest rates of work-related stress, depression or anxiety are public administration, defence, human health, social work and education, and the size of the problem has been steadily increasing over time. Over the past

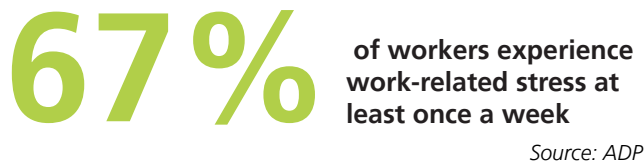
decade, the main causes of work-related stress, depression or anxiety were workload, deadlines, lack of managerial support, violence, threats, bullying and changes at work.

# Understand the prevalence and costs of stress and mental ill-health in the workplace

## The scale of the issue: globally



Source: CIGNA



Source: ADP



Source: APA

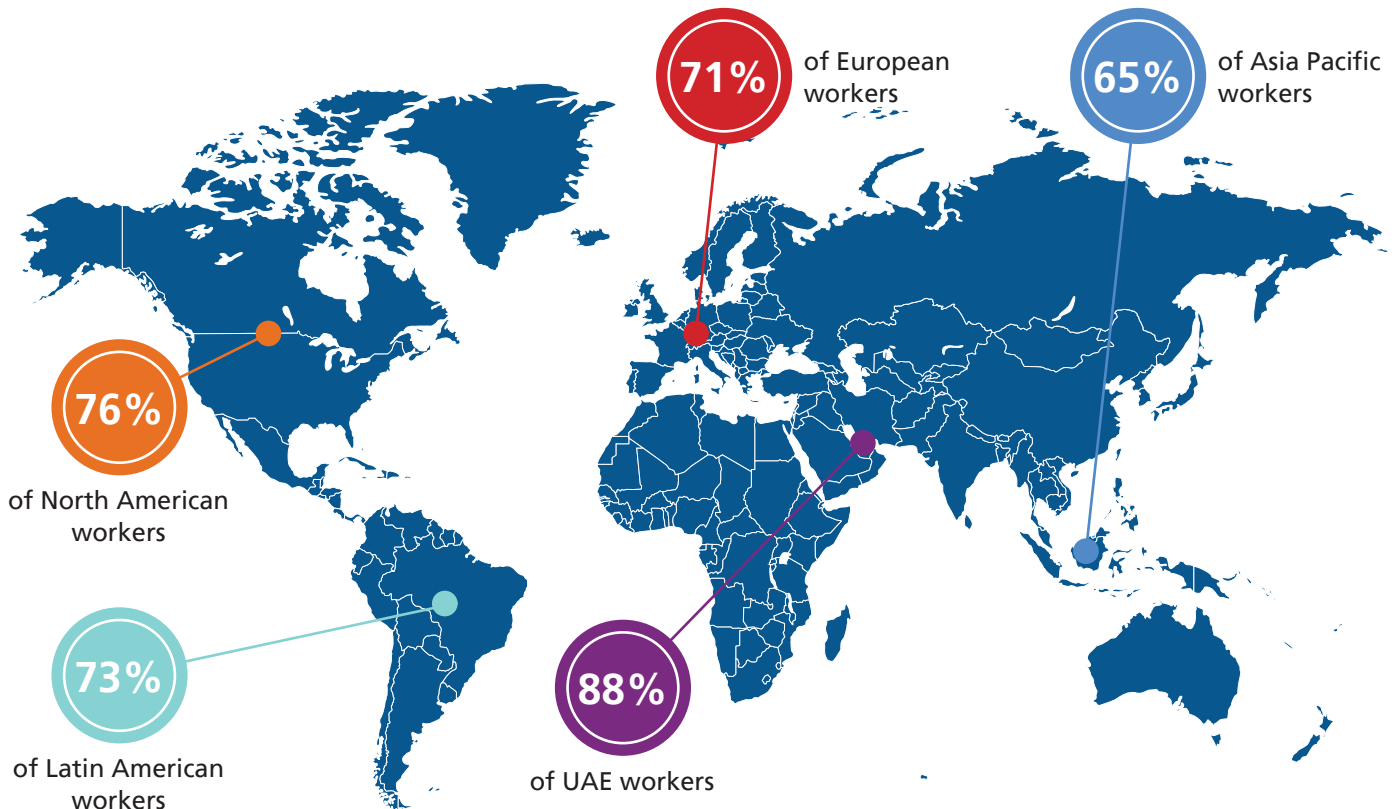
**\$1 trillion**

global economic cost each year in lost productivity due to mental ill-health, such as anxiety and depression

Source: WHO

## Percentage of workers who report suffering from work-related stress at least once a week:

\* No work-related stress data available for Africa at time of writing.



ELEMENT 1

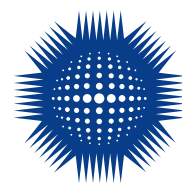
ELEMENT 2

ELEMENT 3

# *Managing Stress at Work* follows the syllabus for the NEBOSH HSE Certificate in Managing Stress at Work qualification. It provides the knowledge you need to help you gain the qualification.

The book contains practical activities and examples and gives definitions for key terminology. It can be used as part of your studies during a taught course or as a study aid for eLearning and distance learning.

*Managing Stress at Work* is designed to provide straightforward, practical skills in identifying the causes of workplace stress, and successfully implementing interventions to control, prevent and reduce stress. HSE and NEBOSH hope that the book will also become a valuable reference source once you are back in the workplace.



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