

Communication to plan members

Stress and your workplace¹

Stress is a physical, emotional, and behavioural response to life events. However, stress can mean different things to different people. Understanding some of the sources and symptoms of stress can help you identify how it might be affecting you. Learn more about stress in the sections that follow.

Healthy vs. unhealthy stress

We often assume that stress is unhealthy, but there is a positive side to it as well. A small amount of stress can help you complete daily tasks, achieve goals, and meet deadlines; it enables you to learn new things and adapt to change. This type of healthy stress often produces happiness, satisfaction, and accomplishment.

Stress becomes unhealthy when it prevents you from functioning to the best of your abilities. This can result in negative physical, emotional, and behavioural reactions, leading to feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration.

Common symptoms of stress

Your body may have a strong response to stress. This is exhibited in a variety of ways, depending on the person. Here are some common examples:

- Emotional exhaustion (irritation, annoyance, intense anger, and a lack of compassion)
- Physical tiredness
- Sleep disturbances
- Higher incidence of illness
- Difficulty managing daily tasks
- Increased anxiety and tension

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, you should speak with a health care provider to help you determine the cause.

Sources of stress

One of the main sources of stress is the workplace. While work provides you with financial stability, self-esteem, and structure, it can also be a significant source of stress. If you have stressful working conditions, you may feel the effects outside of the office, leading to anger and frustration at home, marital problems, disagreements within the family, and lack of time for leisure activities. The [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#) highlights some common work-related stressors.

But stress does not come only from work. External factors, such as family-life issues, can often spill over into the workplace. These issues can include finances, death or illness in the family, divorce, a new marriage, or moving homes. Moreover, life events are often more stressful than we realize. It is important to examine our lives regularly to acknowledge our emotions and our [stress levels](#).

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Stress vs. burnout

When you have excessive and prolonged stress, high demands at work and home, and feelings of being overwhelmed, you may suffer from burnout, which is not quite the same as stress. Stress is characterized by too many pressures that demand too much of you, while burnout is a constant state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion, characterized by a lack of motivation to meet these demands.

Prevention and management

Reducing stress involves finding both short-term and long-term solutions. Short-term solutions may be helpful to reduce your immediate stress levels, but they are only temporary. As soon as another stressor presents itself, your stress levels will increase again. It is important that you develop personal coping strategies and apply them to your daily routine. Finding a long-term strategy can help you reduce your stress, even when new factors and challenges arise.

Perhaps even more important than prevention and management is maintaining a good work-life balance. According to the [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#), if you have balance in your life, you are more likely to be satisfied at work and at home, and you tend to be physically, emotionally, and socially healthier. Health Canada outlines a series of [steps to help you cope with stress](#).

Resources

When you are experiencing excessive stress, it is often difficult to know who to turn to. Listed below are a few resources to help you cope with stress.

[EAP programs](#) are confidential counselling services for employees with problems that affect their work performance and are usually paid for by your employer. Check with your Human Resources department (or equivalent) to see if these services are available to you.

The [Canadian Psychological Association](#) has a list of provincial and territorial associations to help you locate a psychologist in your area.

The [Canadian Mental Health Association](#) provides information and resource centres related to stress and work/life balance.

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Mental health programs by province and territory

- [Alberta](#)
- [British Columbia](#)
- [Manitoba](#)
- [New Brunswick](#)
- [Newfoundland and Labrador](#)
- [Northwest Territories](#)
- [Nova Scotia](#)
- [Nunavut](#)
- [Ontario](#)
- [Prince Edward Island](#)
- [Quebec](#)
- [Saskatchewan](#)
- [Yukon](#)

Key Websites

- [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety: Workplace Stress](#)
- [Health Canada: Coping with Stress](#)

¹ This article is a courtesy of Novus Health®, one of our *Well-balanced* offer providers.