



Ergonomics Advisor

Managing Stress in the Workplace

More and more, both employers and employees are realizing the negative impact of stress in the workplace.

“The financial toll of occupational stress on North American industry adds up to about \$300 billion annually,” writes medical journalist M. Sara Rosenthal in her 2001 book, **50 Ways to Prevent and Manage Stress**. “This figure includes costs of absenteeism, lower productivity, employee turnover, and direct medical, legal, and insurance fees.”



Sitting hunched and leaning forward, reducing breaks and increasing overtime can add to existing stress and increase risk of musculoskeletal injuries.

A certain amount of stress in our lives is inevitable and may be

good for us. For example, “good stress” can give us that extra push to meet the challenge of a tough deadline and leave us with a sense of pride in our accomplishment.

Chronic stress, however, can be physically and emotionally overwhelming.

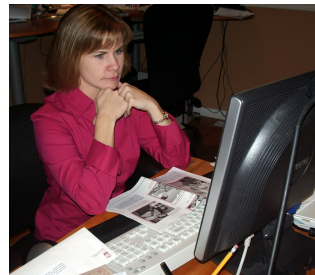
What is stress?

Stress can be defined as a person’s physiological, physical and emotional response to a perceived intense situation.

Since we are unique in terms of anatomy, physiology, personality and background, you and those around you will understandably react differently to potentially stressful situations.

Common causes of stress

Today’s world is moving at such a fast pace — we have internet, wireless



Changing things that you can (such as improving the setup of your workstation, diet and exercise) along with support from family and friends can restore some sense of control.

internet, cell phones, Blackberries, pagers and ever-changing technology. We can be found anywhere, anytime and we don’t turn off. Multi-tasking is a way of life.

Some common workplace stressors are:

1. Heavy workload
2. Long hours
3. Uncomfortable work setting
4. Infrequent or non-existent breaks
5. Interpersonal difficulties

6. Uncertain job future
7. Lack of involvement in decisions

Responses to stress

When faced with stress, the body increases blood pressure, heart rate and production of several stress hormones.

Shona Anderson, President of Anderson Ergonomics Consulting, has observed that many of her clients who are experiencing stress will:

1. Fail to adjust their workstation properly
2. Sit hunched and leaning forward toward their monitor
3. Take shallow breaths
4. Tense their muscles
5. Work through lunch
6. Increase overtime

Shona understands that the above behaviour contributes to neck, shoul-



Take regular stretch breaks and practice good breathing techniques.

The best office equipment in the world, with the best ergonomic setup, will never make you comfortable if you are stressed and do not use it properly.



At lunchtime, stand up, leave your work area and get some exercise. This will increase circulation and reduce discomfort caused by prolonged sitting.

der, back and other musculoskeletal injuries and must be addressed, along with physical risk factors, as part of a comprehensive ergonomics assessment.

Shona finds that her clients who are experiencing the most discomfort are often the ones who have the most stress in their lives. We all have stress in our lives at some point and ensuring the workstation is “ergonomically set up” will reduce the physical stressors you feel.

Addressing the physical risk factors in the workstation can help to make people more comfortable but may not be the entire solution.

Benefits of yoga

Susi Hatley Aldous, manager of Functional Synergy, a therapeutic yoga studio in Calgary, divides her time between running the business and teaching corporate workshops downtown.

Susi compared the lives of her hard-working, exhausted and “really stressed-out” clients who first come to the studio to driving a car when the fuel gauge needle points to empty.



The meditation, exercises and breathing of yoga practice can improve a person’s ability to handle adversity and general stresses.

“By utilizing yoga (poses), breathing, and meditation techniques, they’re able to get up above the ‘E’ and into a quarter-tank, a half-tank, three-quarters of a tank, and then get back up to a healthier state of being.”

Susie feels it is important for people to understand what ergonomics is and to know the essential nature that ergonomics plays in their working life. “But,” she added, “the secondary component of knowing how to stretch, breathe and move their body will help augment the setup that they have.”

Anderson Ergonomics Consulting advises: **PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT YOUR BODY IS TELLING YOU.** If you are in pain, take a break! Do one or some of the following: Stand up and stretch, focus on your breathing, take a walk around your workplace, sit back in your chair, relax and close your eyes.

Tips to Help Cope with Stress

1. Recognize stress
2. Ensure proper workstation setup
3. Stretch and change positions often
4. Practice breathing techniques
5. Take regular breaks
6. Set priorities daily
7. Half smile rather than frown
8. Communicate with coworkers/boss
9. Learn new skills
10. Foster friendships
11. Get enough sleep
12. Eat well
13. Reduce coffee
14. Stop smoking
15. Exercise regularly
16. Join yoga class
17. Meditate each day
18. Have massages
19. Treat yourself

Anderson Ergonomics Consulting offers assessments where a Certified Professional Ergonomist will work with you to assess your workstation and your posture, and then make suggestions for improvements. AEC also offers a Stretching Guide for Office and Industrial Workers.

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