



A NIOSH Center for Excellence to Promote a Healthier Workforce

Beyond Breathing: Organizational Approaches to Reduce Job Stress

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The Path of Stress-Related Illness

Stressor → Stress → Strain → Symptoms → Illness



Types of Job Stressors:

Physical

- Poor indoor air quality
- Ergonomic stressors
- Hazardous waste exposure
- Inadequate equipment



Types of Job Stressors:

High Demand

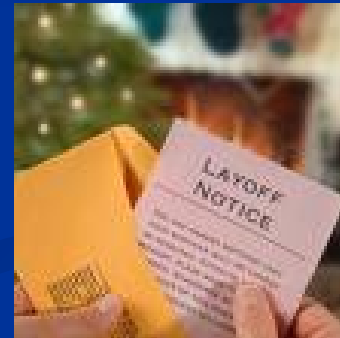
- Heavy workload
- Unrealistic deadlines
- Conflicting demands
- Inadequate amount of time to complete tasks
- Repetitive Tasks
- Excessive/mandatory overtime



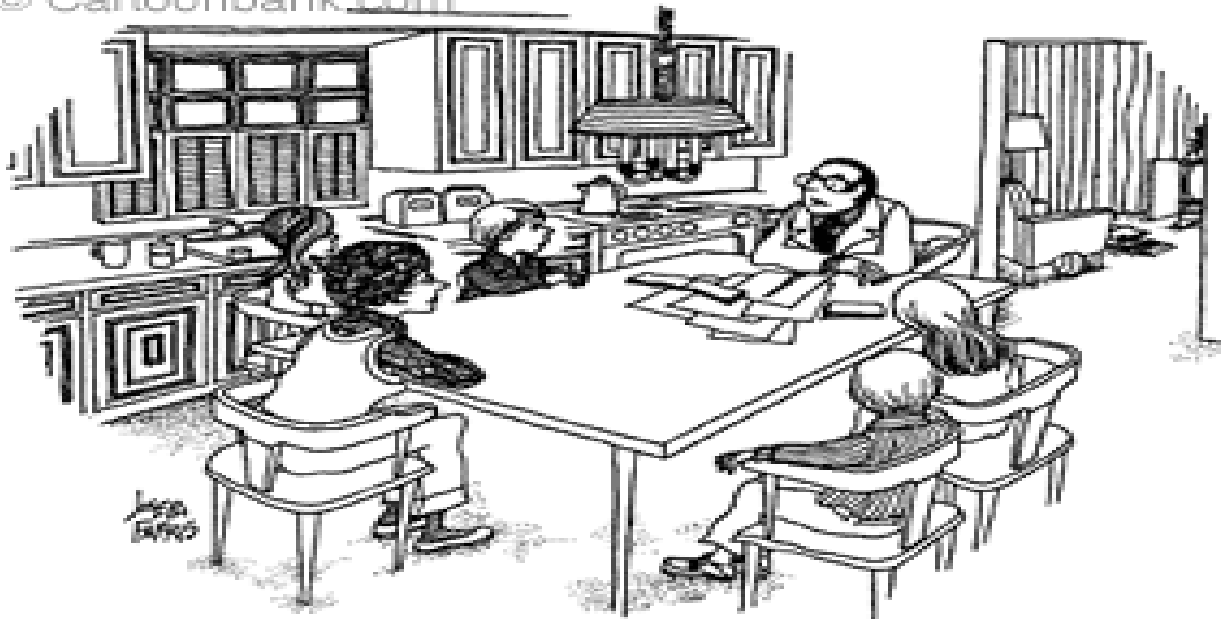
Types of Job Stressors:

Low Control

- Responsibility without authority
- Job skills not used
- Dead-end jobs
- Job insecurity
- Lack of input in decisions



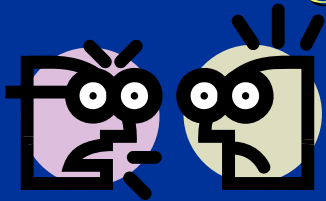
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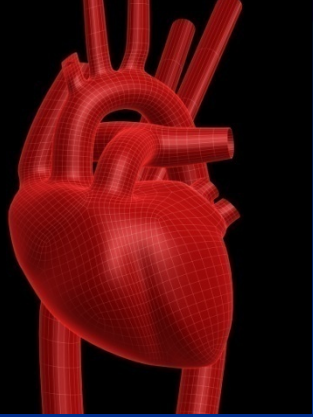


"I've called the family together to announce that, because of inflation, I'm going to have to let two of you go."

Types of Job Stressors: Low Social Support

- Poor relations with co-workers
- Poor relations with management
- Lack of family support
- Racial/sexual discrimination
- Lack of recognition

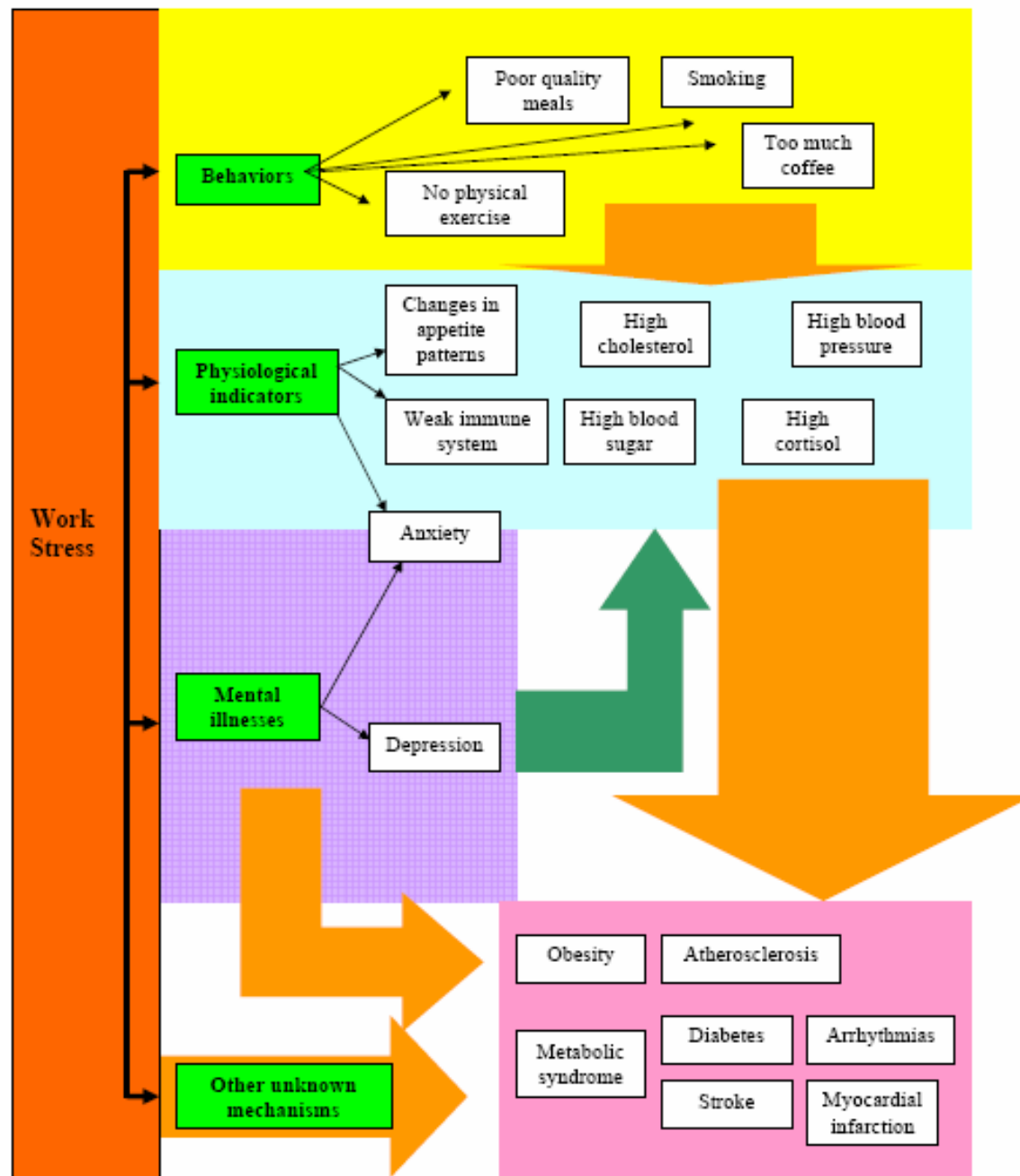




How Does Job Stress Affect Our Health?

- Early warning signs of job stress include:
 - Headache, sleep disturbances, upset stomach, difficulty concentrating, short temper, job dissatisfaction, and low morale
- Long-Term risks for sustained job stress include:
 - Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, weakened immune function, musculoskeletal disorders, and depression.

Figure 1: Evidence-based work stress association with cardiovascular disease



**What is Your Experience
with Job Stress?**

6.2 A Survey: Do You Have Job Strain?

This test can give you an indication of how much "job strain" you may have at work.

Demand

I have to work very hard.

I am asked to do an excessive amount of work.

I have enough time to get my work done.

Yes

☐
☐
☐

No

☐
☐
☐

Control

I have to do a lot of repetitive work.

I have a job which allows me to be creative.

I have job which allows me to learn new things.

I have a lot of say about what happens.

I have a lot of freedom to decide how I do my work.

☐
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Social Support

I work with helpful people.

I work with people who take a personal interest in me.

My supervisor is helpful.

My supervisor is concerned about my welfare.

☐
☐
☐
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☐
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☐

Scoring

Calculate a separate score for each of the three parts (demand, control, social support). In each part, give yourself one point for every "yes" answer. On the blank lines below, write the word that describes each score:

My job demand is:

If you scored 0 - 1, write "Low"; 2 - 3, write "High"

My control at work is:

If you scored 0 - 2, write "Low"; 3 - 5, write "High"

My support at work is:

If you scored 0 - 1, write "Low"; 2, write "Moderate"; 3 - 4, write "High"

* This test is adapted from a questionnaire developed by Dr. Robert Karasek, of the University of Massachusetts at Lowell.

Job Stress Experience

- Is “stress-free” the goal?
- What is the most desirable profile of a job?

Addressing Job Stress

Tertiary Prevention:

- Tertiary Interventions are reactive, and aim to minimize the effects of stress-related problems once they have occurred.
- Q: What are some examples of Tertiary Prevention?
(You can use your own job stress experiences)

Examples of Tertiary Prevention

- Organizational Strategies
 - Employee Assistance Programs
- Individual Strategies
 - Utilize Employee Assistance Programs
 - Psychological Counseling/therapy
 - Traumatic Event Debriefing
 - Medical care and Treatment



Addressing Job Stress

- Secondary Prevention:
- Secondary interventions aim to modify an individual's response to stressors.
- Q: What are some examples of Secondary Prevention?
(You can use your own job stress experiences)

Examples of Secondary Prevention

■ Organizational Strategies

- Team Building
- Diversity Programs
- Worker education and training
- Access to fitness facilities/walking paths



■ Individual Strategies

- Good Nutrition
- Physical Activity
- Meditation
- Social/Emotional Outlets
- Assertiveness Training



Addressing Job Stress

- Primary Prevention:

Proactive actions taken by an organization that aim to prevent illness among individuals.

- Q: What are some examples of Primary Prevention?

(You can use your own job stress experiences)

Examples of Primary Prevention

■ Organizational Strategies

- Clearly defining workers' roles and responsibilities
- Workload matches workers' capabilities and resources
- Job Redesign
- Opportunities for workers to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs
- Work schedules are compatible with demands/ responsibilities outside the job
- Improving ergonomics and work/environmental design
- Improving communications between workers and managers
- Career Ladders

■ Individual Strategies

- Lifestyle Management
- Manage perceptions of stress

Organizational vs. Personal

- Organizational changes should be top priority
- Even the most conscientious efforts to improve working conditions are unlikely to eliminate stressors *completely* for all workers.

- GOLD STANDARD

- a combination of organizational change and individual stress management is often the most useful approach for preventing and addressing stress at work.



Stress Scenario #1

- You have been employed at a local community health center for 10 years. A year ago a new management team came on board and has revamped many of the operations associated with your division, without the input from the long standing members of the team. Communication between the management team and everyone else is non-existent and morale is as low as ever. Over the last six months you've grown to loath going to work, have had a short fuse with your spouse and children, and have trouble sleeping. What can be done?

Stress Scenario #2

- You are a supervisor of a group of 10 working within a healthcare facility. Recently, a valuable employee came to you and reported that they would be leaving the facility. Surprised, you ask the person what motivated them to move on. Even more surprising to you, the employee went on to share some feedback you wished you'd received sooner. Specifically, the person reported people feeling like they were consistently put into situations where they were "in over their heads", any feedback they offered was often dismissed, the dynamics of the work group was dysfunctional (specifically some bias toward a non-Christian employee), and that people didn't receive you to be very approachable. You vow to not let this happen to another member of your group. What can you do?

Analysis of the Stress Scenarios

1. What is the main source of stress in the situation?
2. What can be done from an organizational point of view to address the situation that is causing the stress?
3. How can you involve others in the problem solving?
4. What individual strategies can you implement to cope with the stressor presented?

Barriers of Organizational Change

- Q: What barriers do you see when trying to make organizational changes in the workplace?



Overcoming Barriers

- Q: What can be done to overcome each of those barriers?



Conclusion

- Job stress is a tangible risk factor for the development of many chronic diseases.
- Personal experience with job stress is significant.
- Approaches have tended to be in the area of individual stress management.
- Organizational approaches coupled with individual strategies is the most effective way to address job stress.