REDUCE STRESS AT WORK

WHY?

- Employees are stressed at work. 40% of employees say their job is very stressful and 25% view their job as the number one stressor in their life.
- Prolonged stress can increase an employee’s risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, depression, and all-cause mortality.
- Persistent stress at work can also reduce job satisfaction, decrease productivity and performance, increase absenteeism, and harm employee morale.
- Evidence suggests that stress from home life and work often overlaps. Stress and conflict at home can undermine job satisfaction and job performance. Similarly, positive work experiences, such as having a supportive supervisor, result in better job satisfaction and better mental well-being at home.
- Taking action to help employees manage stress at work will have benefits for the workplace and for the health of the employee.

HOW?

A comprehensive approach that addresses both organization-level change and employee-level support is necessary. We divide actions to reduce work-related stress into two categories: organizational strategies and employee stress management. Research on work-related stress is evolving and there is not yet conclusive evidence on the most effective stress reduction methods in the workplace, therefore, the strategies below are based on existing studies on work-related stress.

Organizational Strategies

**STEP 1:** Review and revise workplace policies and practices to help reduce stress

- Carefully assess employee workload and timing of workflow. Ensure that job demands are in line with the employee’s capabilities and resources. When workload demands are not achievable in relation to agreed hours of work, employees experience stress and burnout.
- Make policy and schedule adjustments to allow employees flexibility to care for their families and themselves (through doctors’ appointments, physical activity breaks, etc.). When possible, give employees control over their pace of work.
- Engage leadership at multiple levels. Middle managers are drivers of change in workplaces and should be included in wellness program design.
- Encourage employees to use vacation time and to disconnect from work while away. Employees given adequate vacation time report lower levels of work-related stress and burnout, which alleviates absenteeism.
- Provide opportunities for career development, job training, and education.
- Establish a zero-tolerance policy for workplace harassment. Employees who are bullied at work experience more stress and feel less supported by supervisors and coworkers.
- Provide training on diversity and conflict resolution for employees and supervisors.
STEP 2: Create a supportive work climate.

- Provide **opportunities for social interaction** and allow employees **time to participate in workplace wellness** programs. Walking groups or physical activity challenges have concurrent benefits of increasing physical activity, social interaction, and team-building.
- Provide **constructive, sincere feedback** to help employee work through problems. This helps show employees that you care about them and their well-being. When employees feel supported, they are more productive.
- Provide **recognition for good work** through verbal comments, monetary rewards, or written acknowledgement. Recognition for competent work, outstanding performance, and achievements outside of work, like certificates or degrees, can reduce stress.

STEP 3: Improve Communication

- **Involve employees in decision-making** and in creating solutions. Consult your employees to identify sources of work-related stress. You can do this through a survey, conversations, or team meetings.
- Clearly define **job expectations and responsibilities**. Stress at work is linked to the quality of communication between supervisors and employees.
- **Share information** with employees when going through changes to reduce uncertainty about career development and future employment prospects. Uncertainty about job security negatively impacts employee job satisfaction and well-being.

**Employee Stress Management**

STEP 1: Connect aspects of your existing workplace wellness program to stress reduction

- Increase opportunities for employees to be **physically active**. Regular physical activity is associated with stress reduction and improved mood. **Gym discounts, on-site exercise facilities or classes, and promotion of nearby walking/biking trails** are examples of ways to increase physical activity.
- Provide healthy eating options for employees. Stress can disrupt normal eating patterns and increase consumption of foods that are high in calories, sugars, and fats. **Offering healthy food choices at meetings and events** helps support employees to choose healthier foods and beverages.
- Support **tobacco cessation**. Research shows that high-stress work days can increase cigarette use and contribute to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as smoking.

STEP 2: Identify the mental health benefits your company may already offer through health insurance or an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

- Contact your **insurance provider** and/or EAP to learn what resources they offer employees for stress management.
- EAPs provide **individual counseling for employees** on both work and personal issues that may be causing stress. Promoting healthy relationships between work and family life can help employees focus on work.

STEP 3: Communicate mental health benefits to employees.

- Offer **stress management trainings** and information to managers, middle managers, and employees. Nearly one-half of large companies in the United States provide some type of stress management training for their workforces. Trainings teach employees how to identify and cope with work stressors and instruct personal skills like time management and mindfulness meditation to reduce stress.
RESOURCES
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)- website with stress resources and in-depth workplace stress report.
http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/99-101