**Stress**

27% of Canadian workers (1 in 4) claim to have high to extreme levels of stress daily.

28.3% of Canadians between 35 to 49 years old perceive their stress levels as quite a bit or extreme.

62% say work is their main stress; tied for second at 12% are financial and time stresses.

Prolonged stress increases risk of depression, heart disease and substance abuse.

Some stress in our lives is helpful and helps us focus to solve problems. If we did not feel any stress, we simply would not be alive! We all talk about stress, but what is stress?

Stress is the body’s response to a real or perceived threat.  Most of the threats people face today are not simply something that they can fight or run away from. Today’s threats are usually problems that people **have to** work through. But too much stress may feel overwhelming at times, so there are many strategies to help you take control. Some options to reduce stress are time management skills, rest, and exercise. For more information on stress, management options, and resources, please see the attached document for details.

**Employee Health Hurdles**

**Stress January 2021**

**Overview:**

Stress can provide stimulation, intellectual challenges and motivate us to focus. When people's coping abilities are able to meet the expectations or demands placed on them, stress is minimized. When the expectations or demands are too heavy, individuals may become “stressed out.” The key is to either reduce those expectations or to improve one's coping abilities. Prolonged stress: however, challenges the body’s ability to maintain homeostasis and is associated with negative bodily responses.

Stress is a normal response or reaction to situational pressures or demands, it is not about the actual situation. The goal of this response is to adapt to or eliminate the cause of stress. Many people experience physical sensations like sweating, a racing heart, or tense muscles. Everyone is unique and reacts differently to different stressors, in different situations, even when facing the same stressor. Over time, stress can also have a big impact on physical health. Sleep difficulties and headaches are common problems related to stress and people are also more likely to get sick when they are experiencing a lot of stress. In these cases, some people avoid dealing with the original problem altogether, which may make the problem and the stress worse. It can be very hard to concentrate, make decisions, and feel confident when a person is overwhelmed.

When stressors continue for a long period of time and you have a constant feeling of stress, it is considered chronic. Ignoring the effects of stress can lead not only to physical health issues, but mental health issues as well.

**Acute Stress** (examples; traffic, argument with a spouse, noise, aggressive behaviour, speeding cars, anticipation, worry) can cause:

* Tension headaches,
* Upset stomach, and
* A moderate amount of distress

**Chronic Stress** (examples; long term illness, unhappy marriage, financial barriers) make it difficult for your body to return to normal levels of stress hormone activity and cause disruptions in the following:

* Cardiovascular system (irregular heart rate, palpitations, high blood pressure, heart attack, heart disease, stroke)
* Respiratory system (asthma, hyperventilation-rapid and deep breathing)
* Immune system (frequent infections, autoimmune diseases)
* Reproductive system
* GI disorders (anorexia/ obesity, constipation/diarrhea, ulcer, inflammatory bowel disease)
* Nervous system disorders (sleep disruptions, fatigue, anxiety, depression, other mental health conditions)
* Musculoskeletal Disorders (headache, backache, decreased growth rate/failure to thrive)

Chronic stress increases your risk of developing type 2 diabetes and exhibiting violent actions/

outbreaks.

**How do I know if someone is (or if I am) having trouble coping with stress?**

Below is a quiz from the Canadian Mental Health Association to help identify the extent of a person’s stress, or follow the link below this quiz for the online version:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **What's Your Stress Index** | | |
| DO YOU FREQUENTLY: | YES | NO |
| Neglect your diet? |  |  |
| Try to do everything yourself? |  |  |
| Blow up easily? |  |  |
| Seek unrealistic goals? |  |  |
| Fail to see the humour in situations others find funny? |  |  |
| Act rude? |  |  |
| Make a 'big deal' of everything? |  |  |
| Look to other people to make things happen? |  |  |
| Have difficulty making decisions |  |  |
| Complain you are disorganized? |  |  |
| Avoid people whose ideas are different from your own? |  |  |
| Keep everything inside? |  |  |
| Neglect exercise? |  |  |
| Have few supportive relationships? |  |  |
| Use sleeping pills and tranquilizers without a doctor's approval? |  |  |
| Get too little rest? |  |  |
| Get angry when you are kept waiting? |  |  |
| Ignore stress symptoms? |  |  |
| Put things off until later? |  |  |
| Think there is only one right way to do something? |  |  |
| Fail to build relaxation time into your day? |  |  |
| Gossip? |  |  |
| Race through the day? |  |  |
| Spend a lot of time complaining about the past? |  |  |
| Fail to get a break from noise and crowds? |  |  |

Adapted from: [What's Your Stress Index?](http://www.cmha.ca/mental_health/whats-your-stress-index/) Canadian Mental Health Association.

Interpretation of the score (based on the number of “Yes” selections):

* 0-5:  There are few hassles in your life. Make sure though, that you are not trying to deliberately avoid problems.
* 6-10: You've got your life in fairly good control. Work on the choices and habits that could still be causing you some unnecessary stress in your life.
* 11-15: You are approaching the danger zone. You may be suffering stress-related symptoms and your relationships could be strained. Think carefully about choices you've made and take relaxation breaks every day.
* 16-25: Emergency! It is critical that you stop and re-think how you are living; change your attitudes and pay careful attention to diet, exercise, and relaxation.

**What can you do to cope with stress?**

* Ideally, if it is possible, identify the stress and eliminate it. Otherwise, you need to reduce the various symptoms associated with each disease. If the symptoms are psychological, talk to someone and get support. This can be done by discussing the various options with your doctor or the Employee Family and Assistance Program. If your symptoms are physical, there are numerous interventions you can do individually, to reduce your pain and prevent infections.
* There are a variety of treatments and coping interventions to be used, including staying healthy with physical activity, maintaining a healthy diet, taking a break, learning time management skills, and simply doing something for yourself each day. There are numerous options and suggestions listed in the resources below.

Create a life

that feels

good on the

**inside**

**Resources**

Canada’s Food Guide at <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines at <https://csep.ca/CMFiles/Guidelines/CSEP_PAGuidelines_0-65plus_en.pdf>

CCOHS Workplace Stress at <https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/stress.html>

Details on stress and how to cope see <https://www.heartandstroke.ca/-/media/pdf-files/canada/other/coping-with-stress-en.ashx>

Ways of coping with stress at <https://www.stressstrategies.ca/coping-with-stress>

Ways of coping with workplace stress see <https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/stress_workplace.html>

**For further employee and local support services:**

Acadia Health & Wellness page at <https://hr.acadiau.ca/benefits/health-wellness.html>

Employee Family Assistance Program at <https://hr.acadiau.ca/10261.html>

Nova Scotia Mental Health Supports at <https://www.mentalhealthns.ca/find-support> and

[Nova Scotia Health Authority: Mental Health and Addictions (NSHA MHA)](https://www.ementalhealth.ca/index.php?m=record&ID=54757)

**Nova Scotia Mental Health Resources**

**PROVINCIAL SUPPORT**

Nova Scotia Health Mental Health & Addictions at [**mha.nshealth.ca**](https://mha.nshealth.ca/)

Nova Scotia Health Mental Health & Addictions **Intake Service**

**Phone: 902-424-8866**

**Toll Free: 1-866-340-6700**

**Real people** Monday – Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm. Voicemail evenings, weekends, and holidays.

Nova Scotia Government Resources [**novascotia.ca/help**](http://www.novascotia.ca/help)

**REGIONAL SUPPORT**

Annapolis Valley Health Authority, Mental Health & Addiction Services 1.855.273.7110

Mental Health Services Kentville: 902.679.2567 ext. 2870  
Mental Health Services Middleton: .902.825.4825  
Mental Health Services Berwick: 902.583.3111 Ext. 143  
CMHA Annapolis County Branch: 902.665.4801  
CMHA Kings County Branch: 902.679.7464

**References**

<https://cmha.bc.ca/documents/stress/>

<https://novascotia.cmha.ca/documents/stress/>

<https://wellspring.ca/nova-scotia/programs/all-programs/back-at-work-managing-stress-in-the-workplace/>

<https://workercounsellor.ca/chronic-stress-and-wcb/>

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/contest/finalists-finalistes_2-eng.htm>

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310009604>

<https://www.apa.org/topics/stress>

<https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/stress.html>

<https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/stress_workplace.html>

<https://www.curablehealth.com/blog/brain-infographic?gclid=Cj0KCQiA5bz-BRD-ARIsABjT4ng5P-beVxxrDTFvhoFxX7nqw6ilHwMcZpHYXqJoPmXNI68B6B68W38aAqnfEALw_wcB>

<https://www.heartandstroke.ca/-/media/pdf-files/canada/other/coping-with-stress-en.ashx>

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/145855#symptoms>

<https://www.stressstrategies.ca/coping-with-stress>