

# Dealing with Stress

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) define stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them”. Stress is not an illness – it is a state. However, if stress becomes too excessive and prolonged, mental and physical illness may develop.

## What is it?

Stress is our body’s natural defence mechanism that helps us survive by alerting us to danger and preparing our bodies for action. When we feel trapped or threatened our brain senses fear and triggers our fight or flight response. When this happens we experience certain physical sensations such as increased heart rate, stomach churn, muscle tension, tingling head, nausea, tightness or pressure in the chest, muscle tension, or sweats.

Research shows that by triggering our fight or flight response we activate the right front part of the brain which alters the way we think. In humans this can make us defensive, aggressive, destructive and resistant to help. This is because we resort to the same kind of thinking as all animals when trapped or threatened which is to **DART**: Defend, Attack, Run or Tolerate (accept your fate).

There are many ways of dealing with stress and below are a few helpful tips that may be able to help whether you are suffering from stress yourself or concerned about a colleague.

## Dealing with Stress – Employees

Learn to manage your stress better by:

**Managing external pressures** so stressful situations don’t seem to happen to you quite so often; and

**Developing your emotional resilience** so you’re better at coping with tough situations when they do happen.

Tips for managing stress include:

- Make some lifestyle changes such as using relaxation techniques, making time for your interests and hobbies, making time for your friends and finding a balance in your work/home life.
- Look after your physical health by eating healthily, trying to be more physically active and get a good night's sleep.
- Give yourself a break not only by getting a change of scenery but learn to be kinder to yourself and reward yourself for your achievements.
- Change how you see the situation, set realistic goals, avoid extremes, avoid stressful situations, set priorities, manage your time effectively and change how you react to stress/manage how stress affects you.

## Dealing with Stress – Employers

There are 6 main stress factors:

- 1. Demands:** This includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment. Pay attention to the way jobs are designed, training needs and whether it is possible for employees to work more flexible hours. Employees often become overloaded if they cannot cope with the amount of work or type of work they are asked to do.
- 2. Control:** How much say the person has in the way they do their work. Think about how employees are actively involved in decision-making, the contribution made by teams and how reviewing performance can help identify strengths and weaknesses. Employees can feel disaffected and perform poorly if they have no say over how and when they do their work.
- 3. Support:** This includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues. Give employees the opportunity to talk about the issues causing stress, provide a sympathetic ear and keep them informed. Levels of sick absence often rise if employees feel they cannot talk to managers about issues that are troubling them.
- 4. Relationships:** This includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour. Check your policies for handling grievances, unsatisfactory performance and poor

attendance and misconduct, and for tackling bullying and harassment. Ensure staff are aware of policies and that line managers are trained to recognise potential problems at an early stage. A failure to build relationships based on good behaviour and trust can lead to problems related to discipline, grievances and bullying.

**5. Role:** Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures they do not have conflicting roles. Review your induction process, ensure accurate job descriptions and maintain a close link between individual targets and organisational goals. Employees will feel anxious about their work and the organisation if they don't know what is expected of them.

**6. Change:** How organisational change (large and small) is managed and communicated in the organisation. Plan ahead so that change doesn't come out of the blue. Consult with employees so they have a real input, and work together to solve problems. Change needs to be managed effectively or it can lead to uncertainty and insecurity.

### Why is it important to me?

Being able to manage stress effectively is key to maintaining your overall health. Healthy, happy employees are more productive which helps to create a positive and highly effective workplace. Therefore it is important to be able to recognise the signs of stress both in yourself and others in the team to be able to develop solutions to help manage the situation.

IQ believes that dealing with stress for individuals both personally and in managing teams is an important skill for professionals working in the quarrying and minerals products industry. It features on our **Skills Wheel** which captures all the key skill and knowledge areas we believe are vital to successful career development in the industry.

### Where Next?

There are many websites and organisations that can offer advice about managing stress, mental health and work based policies. A few worth looking at are:

Health and Safety Executive (HSE):

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/what-to-do.htm>

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service:  
[www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1993](http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1993)

MIND, the mental health charity:  
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/workplace-mental-health/work-and-stress/>

Institution of Occupation Safety and Health (IOSH):  
[www.iosh.co.uk/Books-and-resources/Our-OH-toolkit/Stress.aspx](http://www.iosh.co.uk/Books-and-resources/Our-OH-toolkit/Stress.aspx)

International Stress Management Association (ISMA):  
[www.isma.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Top-ten-stress-busting-tips1.pdf](http://www.isma.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Top-ten-stress-busting-tips1.pdf)

IQ: Refer to the IQ Factsheet '**Achieving a Work-Life Balance**' within the Personal Effectiveness segment of the Skills Wheel.

## **Institute of Quarrying**

IQ supports professionals working within the quarrying and minerals product industry through membership and training. These factsheets are produced across a range of topics to share ideas and best practice. Further information can be found via the resources section on the IQ website [www.quarrying.org](http://www.quarrying.org).