

# Minimising and managing stress in the workplace: The implications of COVID-19

## Why is this important?

COVID-19 has contributed to higher stress levels for many employees.

Employees may start to lose their sense of belonging when they are not able to communicate with their colleagues face-to-face. This can increase feelings of stress and anxiety.<sup>1</sup>

'Workload' remains the biggest cause of work-related stress reported by all businesses, as does 'relationships outside of work' (as the key determinant of non-work-related stress).<sup>2</sup>

Stress related to financial concerns saw an increase from 41% in 2018 to 54% in 2020 for all enterprises, with smaller businesses reporting even higher levels at 60%.

While some stress helps us to be productive, too much long-term stress can lead to burnout and ill health. When our stress response is turned on repeatedly, it puts unnecessary strain on our bodies and impacts our ability to think.

## What can you do to minimise and manage stress levels?

### Know the warning signs

**Worries, overthinking issues,  
being stuck on issues**

**Losing your zest for life; losing  
interest in family, friends or work**

**Changes in your sleeping patterns**

**Nervous 'twitches' or muscle spasms**

**Indigestion, stomach upsets**

**Pains in lower back, chest, shoulders,  
joints or other parts of the body**

**Skin itches or rashes for  
no apparent reason**



**Frequent colds or flu**

**Shortness of breath or  
shallow breathing**

**Memory or concentration problems**

**Feeling anxious and tense  
for no obvious reason**

**Finding it hard to make decisions**

**Tearfulness for no apparent reason**

**Feeling impatient or irritable**

**Losing confidence**

1 McGregor, A. (2021). *Businesses urged to promote healthy hybrid work model*. Auckland, New Zealand: Southern Cross. Retrieved from <https://www.southerncross.co.nz/group/news/2021/workplace-wellness-report-2021>

2 Southern Cross Health Insurance & Business NZ (2021). *Workplace Wellness Report 2021*. Auckland, New Zealand: BusinessNZ. Retrieved from <https://www.businessnz.org.nz/resources/surveys-and-statistics/wellness-in-the-workplace-survey/Southern-Cross-Health-Insurance-BusinessNZ-Workplace-Wellness-Report-2021.pdf>

## Do something about it

- If you notice changes in someone's behaviour, thinking, feelings or reactions, ask them 'how are you, really?' and listen.
- Review your team's allocated work tasks, individual needs, social environment, workplace relationships and organisational culture. Are any of these factors impacting on the mental health and wellbeing of the team?
- Identify what changes can be made both now and in the future.
- Consider how to get the team engaged to achieve change.



## Helpful resources

### Mental Health Foundation

#### Minimising and managing workplace stress

What is stress, how does work impact stress and how can organisations and their people use the Three Rs, Refuel/Whakatipu, Resolve/Whakatika and Relax/Whakatā, to get on top of it? These resources help workplaces prioritise mental health to ensure employees have improved wellbeing, greater morale and higher job satisfaction.

#### Workplace wellbeing during COVID-19

Resources to help workplace leaders create work environments where people feel safe, calm, connected and hopeful throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

#### Open Minds e-learning

This free online training course helps managers support people experiencing mental distress or illness at work, with guidance about starting a conversation with someone who might be affected.

### Health and Safety Association of New Zealand (HASANZ)

Find a HASANZ registered advisor to help you.

HASANZ also has a range of COVID-19 related webinars and resources, including:

- Managing COVID-19 in the workplace
- Returning to work safely
- Personal leadership and working differently
- Healthy working from home.

## **WorkSafe**

Staying mentally healthy when working from home

Guidance for workers who do office-type work in their home, or an equivalent location, rather than at their business premises.

## **Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum**

A range of resources for CEOs, including:

- COVID-19 vaccination policy support
- Protecting mental wellbeing at work
- CEO's guide to mental health and wellbeing
- Research: Lessons from the pandemic.

## **Business.govt.nz**

Managing the impact of COVID-19 cases in your business

Advice for organisations on how to plan for COVID-19 affecting their employees, and how to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infections in their workplace.