Under pressure?

Advice on stress at work
What is stress?
Some pressure can be a good thing. It is often the challenges we face at work that provide structure to our working days, keep us motivated and give us a sense of achievement and job satisfaction. However if too many pressures or demands are placed on us we may no longer feel able to cope with the situation. Stress is a reaction to excessive pressures or demands. It is not an illness, but it can result in individuals experiencing a range of physical, behavioural or emotional changes. If it isn’t tackled it can sometimes lead to mental or physical ill-health.

It is therefore important that you are aware of the factors that may contribute to stress, what the university has in place to help you and the actions that you can take for your health and wellbeing.

What are the signs of stress?
Physical signs of stress may include headaches, fatigue, aching muscles, stomach upsets; whilst behavioural changes may include indecision, mood changes, increased smoking or consumption/use of alcohol, working longer hours, increased absenteeism or poor work performance. Typical emotional effects include anxiety, poor sleep, low self-esteem or withdrawal from colleagues.

What causes stress?
Stress can be caused by a variety of factors including work pressure, major crisis such as a death or a break up of a close relationship, or a build up of small stresses caused by every day ups and downs. At work, for instance, it may be caused by pressure to meet deadlines, too much or too little work, changes to or lack of control over work, or there may be personality clashes with other work colleagues.

What is the University doing to tackle stress?
The University's Stress Management Policy expresses the University’s commitment to achieving a supportive working environment that maintains and promotes the health and wellbeing of our employees. Here are some examples of what we have in place to help prevent work-related stress and to support employees who experience symptoms:

- Our regular staff survey, which helps us to identify organisational causes of stress. (See www.essex.ac.uk/staff/survey/)
- Human Resource (HR) Officers who provide support with team or individual stress risk assessment
- A range of relevant training and development opportunities, including courses in stress management, time management, assertiveness and dealing with conflict
- HR Policies on flexible working, equality and diversity, stress management etc
- Information and guidance on stress and wellbeing on the University's website
- Regular wellbeing events and access to on-site sports facilities
- A counselling service for staff
- Support and help from the Occupational Health Service, HR Officers, Harassment Advisory Network and the Trade Unions

Further information and contact details are given at the bottom of this leaflet.
What should you do?

- Be aware of the factors that may contribute to your stress and what you can do to improve your health and wellbeing. Find out more by looking on the University's Stress website.

- Speak to your manager promptly, if you have any concerns about work-related pressures, you feel you are suffering from stress, or have concerns about other team members. Your manager will be able to refer you or a colleague to the Occupational Health Service for confidential advice and support. If you don’t feel comfortable speaking to your manager, speak to an HR Officer or your Trade Union representative.

- If you are a manager, make use of the management development opportunities available to equip yourself with the skills you need to identify and respond appropriately to stress issues in your team. Contact Occupational Health Service for further advice regarding the support they can offer individuals or a team.

Some tips on tackling stress

- **Speak to someone**: Don't keep emotions bottled up.

- **Take a break**. Make time for lunch breaks away from the work environment. For instance you could go for a short walk. If pressures are becoming too great, a short break will energize you, making you fitter to face the rest of the task.

- **Learn to relax**. Follow a simple routine to relax your muscles and slow your breathing.

- **Get yourself organised**. Make a list of jobs; prioritise and tackle one task at a time. Learn to say no when demands get too much.

- **Sort out your worries**. Divide them into those that you can do something about and those that you can’t. Tackle those you can do something about. Accept and don’t dwell on the things that you can’t change.

- **Think about your long-term priorities**. Step back and examine what is giving you too much stress. Think about how you can introduce a better balance between work, social life and home life.

- **Improve your lifestyle**. Find time to eat properly, get plenty of exercise and enough sleep. Avoid drinking and smoking too much. Why not join the University’s Sports Centre.

- **Focus on the positive aspects of your life**.
How to contact us:

Health and Safety Advisory Service
T (01206 87) 2944
E safety@essex.ac.uk

For more detailed information on a wide range of health, safety and wellbeing topics, visit the University’s Health and Safety / Occupational Health web pages at www.essex.ac.uk/ohsas.

Or for confidential advice contact the
Occupational Health Service:
T (01206 87) 2399
E ohquery@essex.ac.uk

Alternatively speak to your Human Resources Officer (see www.essex.ac.uk/personnel)
T (01206 87) 3433
E staffing@essex.ac.uk

For information on confidential staff counselling services contact the Occupational Health Service or follow the Counselling link on the OHSAS A to Z at www.essex.ac.uk/ohsas.

The Harassment Advisory Network is a network of trained advisers who can provide advice and support to anyone experiencing harassment or bullying. The service is confidential. To contact:
T (01206 87) 4334
M 07948 187107
E harass@essex.ac.uk

For information on training and development opportunities see www.essex.ac.uk/ldev or contact Learning and Development:
T (01206 87) 4402
E ldev@essex.ac.uk

For information on support for carers available both within and outside the University go to the Caring for Carers website www.essex.ac.uk/eo/carers.

To find out about Trade Union support go to www.essex.ac.uk/unions.