

Welcome to the Health@Work newsletter for Spring

Job stress the biggest cause of work absence

Mental health has overtaken physical injury as the cause of the longest absences from work.

About 55 per cent of people who suffer stress or other mental conditions on the job are taking five or more sick days off in a row, figures from the Bureau of Statistics' publication Australian Social Trends, June 2011 show.

Safe Work Australia paints a more drastic picture, with figures showing that workers with a job-related mental disorder take an average of 10.8 weeks off a year.

Health experts say workplace bullying and harassment, as well as heavy workloads, are behind the rise in stress claims and the drain on productivity.

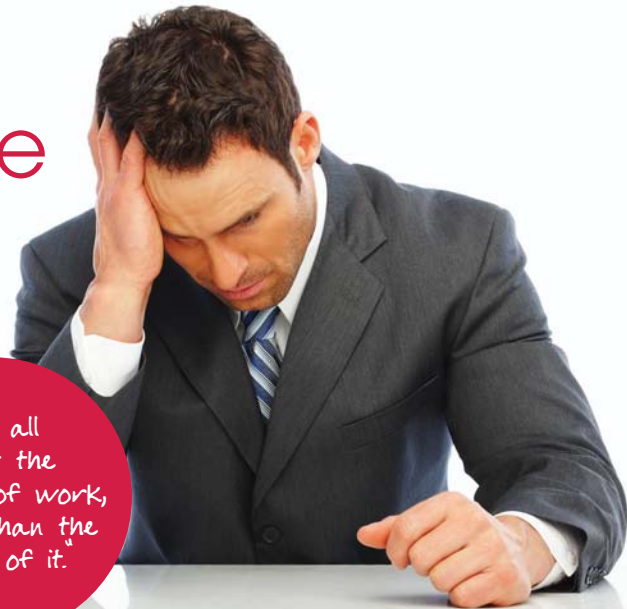
The surge in the number of employees taking time off for mental health disorders and filing stress claims is one of the greatest workplace crises facing the nation, stress expert Professor Maureen Dollard said.

Professor Dollard, director of the Centre for Applied Psychological Research at the University of South Australia, said a study by the centre - to be released this year - shows that workers with mild levels of depression take twice as many sick days off as their colleagues. The study of 3000 workers found about 20 per cent suffered mild levels of depression.

Employees were under pressure from the "relentless drive" towards productivity increases, Professor Dollard said.

"It's all about the quantity of work, rather than the quality of it.

"It's taking its toll. It's dehumanising. Managers are after short-term productivity gains and don't really value the worker any more."



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The ABS report also shows:

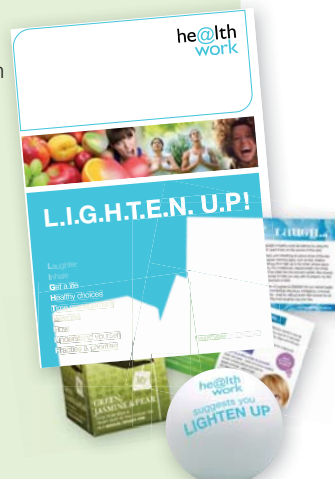
- Fractures are the next largest category of workplace injury, with 54 per cent of those with broken bones away for a week or more.
- Fifty-three out of every 1000 workers suffer a work-related injury or illness - about 640,000 workers a year.
- Work-related injuries and illnesses cost about \$60 billion a year.
- The accommodation and food services industry has the highest injury rate - 84 per 1000 employees.
- About 4.8 per cent of compensation claims compiled by Safe Work Australia - about 61,600 workers - were for mental health matters.
- The median payout for psychological injury was \$16,300.

LIGHTEN UP BOX

October 9th - 15th is Mental Health Week

This box is a great way to educate your employees on stress resilience. By getting them to take a break, have a cup of tea and read the information booklet.

- **12 page Information Booklet.** This booklet covers the LIGHTEN UP acronym and gives great educational tips, quizzes and projects for stress resilience.
- **Stress Ball.** To keep at their desk and squeeze for a reminder to LIGHTEN UP!
- **Eat, Breathe, Laugh Card.** This wallet sizes card is a great reminder to have at your desk or in your wallet to refer to. It has a brief overview of the acronym and also a 5 min relaxation, mind clearing technique.
- **Herbal Tea.** This individually boxed herbal tea helps relax and clear the mind and is a great alternative to traditional coffee and tea.



Separate data for federal public servants shows there has been a 54 per cent increase in mental stress claims in the past five years.

Comcare, the federal work health and safety regulator, said while injury compensation claims by government workers fell in the same period, it was concerned at the growing proportion of claims for workplace stress.


Neil Quarmby, general manager for Work Health and Safety at Comcare, said mental stress claims in the past 12 months accounted for close to 22 per cent of all serious claims involving a week or more off work.

Professor Dollard said managers need to be aware of the "psycho-social safety climate" in workplaces and the priority they give to psychological health versus productivity.

"We are on this mad cycle of work intensification, globalisation, competition. Unless people start to pull back and think more about the welfare of the workers, it will become a serious public health issue."

She said early indications of the work stress research conducted by the centre were that people who experienced even mild levels of depression had twice as many sick days as those who did not. About 20 per cent of the working population experienced mild levels of depression at some stage during their working lives.

Source: Jim O'Rourke The Sunday Age, July 31, 2011



is your body trying to TELL YOU SOMETHING?

Our bodies are incredibly complex. There are eleven systems which all need to be working effectively and in harmony with each other in order for you to be feeling healthy and vital.

These systems are your digestive, respiratory, immune, cardiovascular, endocrine (produces hormones), nervous, skeletal, muscular, reproductive, urinary and integumentary (skin, hair, nails, sweat glands). Your body likes to keep these systems in dynamic equilibrium (a state called homeostasis). As you can imagine, this requires a constant interplay between these systems to maintain harmony and adjust for the effects of diet, lifestyle, daily demands and changes to the external environment in which we live.

Our bodies are remarkably good at keeping in balance however, should one or more of these systems lose their ability to contribute to homeostasis some form of illness can manifest.

So, what are some of the signals that your body might be struggling to maintain this dynamic equilibrium. There are literally hundreds but I thought I would mention some of the more subtle ones which we often ignore, overlook or don't even recognise.

DO YOU RECOGNISE ANY OF THESE SIGNALS?

- **SLEEP:** Difficulty getting to sleep, frequent waking, waking early or waking unrefreshed are all signs that something is not quite right. Ideally, you should fall asleep readily, sleep soundly and wake refreshed.
- **ENERGY:** Frequently feeling tired, falling asleep in front of the TV, fatigue after minimal activity, slow recovery after exercise, lethargy and not having the energy to do all the things you want to do. Why isn't your body producing the energy you need to get you through your day?
- **POOR IMMUNITY:** Frequently succumbing to infections, especially when they linger on suggests that your immune system is not getting what it needs to fight off the bugs. Why?
- **DIGESTIVE PROBLEMS:** Heartburn, bloating, wind, pain, reactions to foods, nausea, food cravings, diarrhoea, constipation are all signs that your digestion is not what it should be. Poor diet and/or an inability to digest and assimilate nutrients can impact on all the other systems in the body.
- **MOOD:** "Not your usual self", mood swings, irritability, sadness, anxiety, not your normal ability to cope with stress, short fuse, loss of pleasure in things that used to give you pleasure and difficulty concentrating could all be signs of nutrient deficiency, hormonal or nervous system imbalances.
- **ACHES AND PAINS:** Anywhere in your body
- **SKIN PROBLEMS:** Dryness, rashes, acne, itchiness, brittle or flaking nails, dry/dull hair, running hot or cold. What is your body trying to tell you?
- **SINUS PROBLEMS** or a persistent cough
- **MENSTRUAL PROBLEMS** such as pain, PMS, heavy flow, irregular cycles
- **UNEXPLAINED CHANGES IN YOUR WEIGHT**

Many of us don't even realise our body is trying to tell us it's not happy. We tune out to these signals or just "put up with them". By doing this, not only do we put ourselves at risk of developing more significant illnesses later on but we also just miss out on the opportunity to make the most of our days now. We lack vitality and life becomes a little bit more of a chore.

So, my challenge to you is to "tune in" to your body.

Pay attention and listen to the **signals** and if you realise that something is **not right** don't put up with it. Make an appointment with your healthcare professional and **get it sorted out**. Your body will thank you and you will reap the dividends **now and in the future**.

Source: Naturopath Kaye Wright

Would you like to hear more about this?

Talk to Health at Work about the above seminar 'Is your body trying to tell you something?' or about some of our other interactive, fun and informative seminars.

- Fit 4 Work / Healthy 4 Life
- Optimum Health
- The Effortless Healthy Working Week
- Fit & Fabulous Woman ... being one or becoming one
- Secret Men's Business ... the stuff you need to know
- ...just to name a few!



Health at Work Pty Ltd

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taking a road trip or work on the road?

here's how to eat well on the road!

1

Map out your meals

Be careful not to plan your meals around the size of your esky or cooler bag. It's better to pre-portion food, based on how many people are in the car. If there are just two of you, don't bring enough sandwich ingredients to feed a family. To avoid non-stop munching, set designed eating times as close to your normal routine as possible, keep fresh food appetising by packing it in separate containers or zip-lock bags.

2

Fuel up with the right foods

For sustained energy and alertness, especially if you're the driver, go for foods that pair protein with complex carbohydrates. Salad and tuna rolls, mini quiches or frittatas, hard boiled eggs on wholegrain crackers or vegetable sticks with hommus or cottage cheese are good choices, or, if you stop, fruit and nuts. Avoid high GI snacks like chips, sugary drinks and lollies that not only make you sleepy but can also make you hungry, so that you eat more, increasing your sleepiness.

3

Be smart at the servo

If you haven't had a chance to pre pack food and service stations are the only dining destinations in miles try and find some sandwiches which are generally a better pick than processed snack foods. Otherwise, grab some yoghurt from the cold section, a packet of trail mix or wholegrain crackers, and a can of tuna. If there are only snack bars in sight, a fruit and nut bar is your best bet.



4

Prevent takeaway tailspin

Most takeaway chains have lighter options like salads and wraps available, as well as listing nutritional information online so you can do your research in advance. Choosing the seared Chicken Tandoori Wrap instead of the Big Mac at McDonalds, for example will save you a whopping 19.5g of fat and 720kj. As a general rule, go for something that isn't fried and ideally contains vegetables, salad or fibre rich carbohydrates.

Yoga = Happiness

We know exercise can help ease depression but it seems some forms of exercise spread more happiness than others.

THE RESEARCH

Scientists from Boston University School of Medicine spent 12 weeks monitoring two groups, one of which walked for three hours each week, the other spent three hours doing yoga. Both groups undertook brain scans and questionnaires throughout the study.

THE RESULTS

Those who did yoga reported lower levels of anxiety and better moods than the walkers. They were also found to have much higher levels of amino acid GABA in their brains – a chemical that helps to promote a state of calm.



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One in three injuries to Australian workers are caused by manual handling, with inexperienced workers at greatest risk.

10 TIPS

for back care



While many may believe that back injuries at work most often occur due to the heavy lifting of objects, the truth is that individuals who sit while doing their work often suffer from more back injuries than those who are on their feet all day. However, precautions must be taken no matter what industry you are employed in. At work, in order to eliminate the chance of back injury or to deal with an existing injury, there are several things that a person can do.

1

Try to alternate between standing and sitting – avoid sitting for too longer periods, take frequent breaks, go for a walk at lunchtime, get up to go talk to a work colleague etc.

2

Place a support in the small of your back when driving or sitting at a desk – This will support the spine in its natural “s” shape. Inadequate support can result in a slouched posture with the shoulders hunched forward and the chin poking outward. This can have serious implications for the muscles, ligaments and joints in the spine. Driving and sitting with poor posture can not only lead to low back and neck ache and overall stiffness but also poor concentration and fatigue.

3

Try to lose weight to reduce the load on your spine and back muscles - If overweight, get down to your ideal body weight. Excess weight and poor core strength lead to increase load and strain on the spine, and this ends up causing injury and pain.

4

Exercise by walking or swimming regularly - Moving helps your body to stay healthy. If you stop moving and stay in bed, your joints will slowly stiffen up and your muscles will become weak. Regular Exercise will strengthen muscles and ligaments.

6

Watch your posture; try not to slouch or slump – A “Sitting Tall” mantra applies to screen based office desk work environments. This is based on the principle that if your upper body weight is aligned above your pelvis (skeletal system), then muscles get a rest. Also set your desk/car/truck/workstation up correctly. Good workstation set up minimizes physical stress whilst at work, improves posture and will enhance work comfort.

5

Stretch regularly to reduce stiffness and increase mobility - Take regular stretch breaks throughout the day to avoid prolonged working periods in a fixed position. Warm up cold muscles with gentle stretches before engaging in any manual work.

7

Be careful when lifting; make sure the load is not too heavy or too large - Lift and carry heavy loads correctly by keeping the load close to the body and lifting with the thigh muscles. Use mechanical aids or get help to lift or carry a heavy load whenever possible. Organise your work area to reduce the amount of bending, twisting and stretching required.

8

Keep moving, even if you have an episode of back pain – Not being active can make your pain worse. One of the most important things you can do to help your back improve is to exercise and by doing the specific back exercises your health practitioner recommends.

9

Consider whether your bed is providing the support you need at night - The right mattress can really help one have a good night's sleep and wake up feeling rested and refreshed. Sleeping on the wrong mattress can cause sleeplessness, back pain, and overall aches and pains. For people with a back problem, a mattress that isn't a good fit can make the pain worse.

10

For back pain, better to see your practitioner sooner rather than later.



WORKSAFE WEEK

17th – 21st October

With the focus on ‘being safe at work’, Health at Work offers a number of options for you to be able to implement in the workplace during Worksafe Week.

Ergonomic/Manual Handling options:

Our qualified Ergonomists can educate through our:

- Better Backs & Bodies Seminar,
- Roving Workstation Assessments
- Manual Handling Assessment & Demonstrations
- ‘Train the Trainer’ Ergonomic & Manual Handling Course
- Core Strength Classes – learn to tighten and build those abs!

Contact Health at Work for more information.