



International  
Labour  
Office

Geneva



# Stress Prevention

## at Work Checkpoints



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## **Stress prevention at work checkpoints**





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**Practical improvements for  
stress prevention in the workplace**

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## Foreword

Work-related stress is one of the most important issues in many countries and in different kinds of workplaces. Stress has many negative impacts, including circulatory and gastrointestinal diseases, other physical problems, psychosomatic and psychosocial problems, and low productivity. Increasing emphasis is being placed on improving working conditions and work organization with respect to stress at work, and on practical measures to cope with stressful work situations. Recent surveys by the ILO indicate that there are commonly applicable checkpoints for studying and reducing stress at work. It is useful to review recent international experience in this regard and develop easy-to-apply checkpoints applicable in varying situations.

It is especially important to optimize workplace conditions and work organization to prevent stress-related problems in the workplace. There are a number of practical countermeasures to such problems, which include optimizing the outer loads (stressors) at work, at home and in the community; increasing the coping ability of workers; and reinforcing support systems for workers.

This manual therefore aims at reviewing workplace stress issues. It includes easy-to-apply checkpoints for identifying stressors in working life and mitigating their harmful effects. It is hoped that workers and employers will be able to use the checkpoints to detect causes of stress at work and take effective measures to address them.

It is critical to the success of any programme on workplace stress control that the process of preventing stress be linked to risk assessment. The checkpoints in this publication represent good practice for organizations in general, but they must be linked to the specifics of the organization and to particular problems. It is important that stress not be treated differently from other risks; the employer must undertake a risk assessment from which any changes must proceed. A workplace stress prevention policy should not be a separate document, and the issue should be integrated into the overall occupational safety and health policy of the enterprise.

Tailor-made strategies and approaches must be adopted to the specific conditions of the workplace in question. The issues in a large plant in an industrialized country, for instance, may be very different from those in a manufacturing facility in a developing country.

The participation and involvement of workers, their representatives and trade unions is also essential in the prevention of stress at work. Their participation and cooperation should be embedded in the whole process of any programme on stress prevention in the workplace.

A group of experts was organized by the ILO to compile the stress prevention at work checkpoints. The group was composed of six external specialists on stress and work improvement as well as ILO staff members. Based on a one-week working meeting at ILO headquarters and subsequent email discussions, 50 checkpoints were compiled. The experts who participated in the working meeting were Jean-Pierre Brun (Canada), Anna-Lisa Elo (Finland), Tage S. Kristensen (Denmark), Kazutaka Kogi (Japan), Leanart Levi (Sweden) and Anjali Nag (India). Staff members of the ILO who participated in the meeting included Toru Itani, Claude Loiselle and David Gold. Evelyn Kortum from the World Health Organization also participated. The contributions from the meeting participants were compiled by Kazutaka Kogi, who coordinated the drafting of the present manual. The draft was reviewed by the expert members and circulated to external experts associated with international and national organizations of employers and workers. In particular the ILO wishes to thank Hugh Robertson from the Trades Union Congress of the United Kingdom, Janet Asherson from the International Employers' Organization and their colleagues for their critical and useful contributions. Technical review and editing were done by Shengli Niu, Coordinator and Senior Specialist of the Occupational Health Cluster of the ILO Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment (SafeWork).

This publication is much more than a manual on stress; many of its illustrations are a guide to auditing good safety and health practices which, of course, will pay dividends in minimizing stress. The publication of this document is expected to complement ILO activities aimed at improving workplace conditions and preventing stress at work in many countries around the world.

Experience and feedback on the application of the checkpoints listed here in different types of workplaces – manufacturing, information technology, agriculture and so forth – will be

extremely useful for further improvement of this publication. It is our hope that the manual will be improved and revised in the future through its trial application in different countries and industries.

Seiji Machida  
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