

Stressed Out?

Stress can be both positive and negative. It can be the challenge of winning an athletic event, or running to catch the subway. Stress can be a mental challenge such as taking a job advancement exam or finding a solution to a logistical problem. Emotional stressors can include the death of a loved one or the excitement of a child's graduation.

How Does Stress Affect the Body?

When you are under stress, extra energy is called up from the body's reserves. Your body undergoes hormonal and chemical changes which result in increased heart rate, higher blood pressure, faster

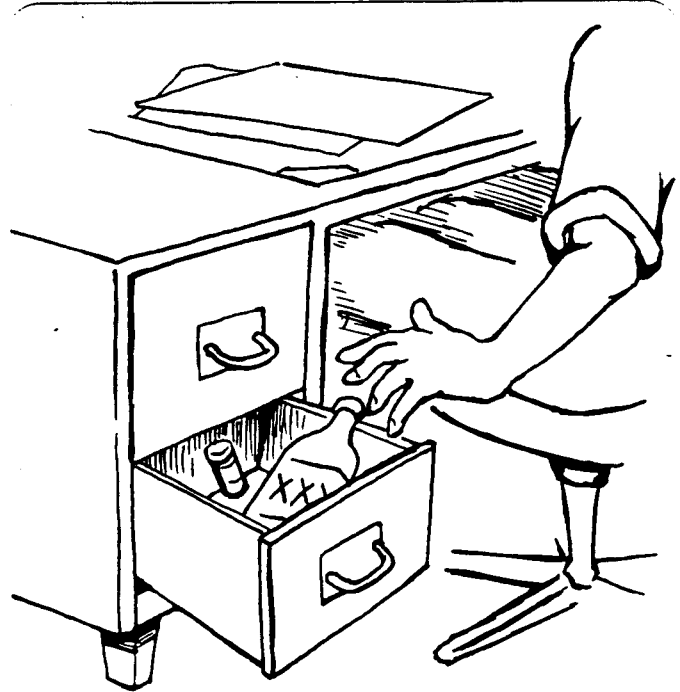


breathing rate and greater output of sugar into the bloodstream. Your body is designed to recover from stressful situations as long as you have plenty of time to relax afterwards. But if the stress is severe or continues day after day, the changes in your body can lead to illness and even death.

Stress makes us feel sick and get sick easier. Headaches, stomach aches, tiredness or insomnia are symptoms of stress. You may feel irritable, depressed, or hopeless. Stress can both cause certain diseases as well as aggravate existing health problems. When the immediate or "acute" symptoms go unchecked, ulcers, heart disease and other illnesses can develop. Increased blood sugar levels may worsen diabetic conditions and weaken the immune system.



When the anxiety and depression gets too much to handle, the stress can lead to alcohol, drugs, overeating and increased smoking. These problems are not a sign of your own personal weakness or lack of will. They could be aggravated by a problem at work.



Occupational Stress: The Causes

Nearly all of us experience some stress on the job. But when this stress begins to affect our health, job performance, family or friends, the trouble begins.

Recognize the symptoms of stress, and identify their possible sources:

Work Environment:

- Noise
- Poor Air Quality
- Inappropriate furniture/equipment
- Inadequate lighting
- Hot or cold temperatures
- No Privacy

Job Design

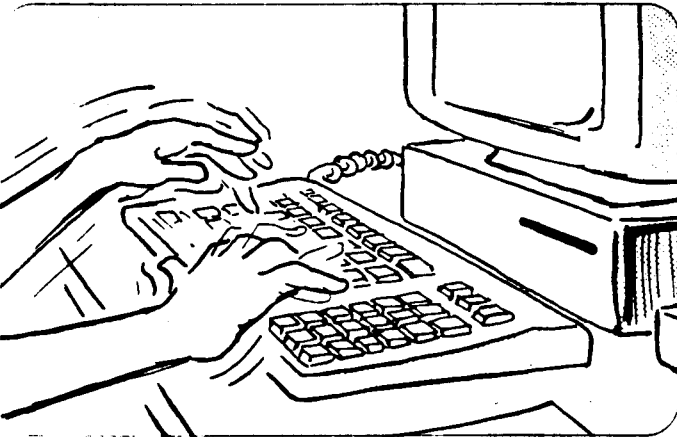
- Little say over decisions that affect your work
- Repetitive tasks; little creativity
- Constant sitting
- Overwork due to inadequate staffing
- Isolation from co-workers

Worker/Manager Relations



- Fear of layoffs/cutbacks
- Unrealistic demands
- Sexual harassment
- Lack of advancement opportunities

VDTs: New Demands



Video Display Terminals (VDTs) introduce unique kinds of stress into the automated office. VDT operators may perform highly repetitive tasks and work with increased isolation from co-workers.

Visual stress from staring continuously at a fixed screen, let alone glare, add to the unique stressors in computer work. In June 1990, an amendment was made to the citywide contract mandating provisions which will

minimize the potential stress of VDT use. Alternative work breaks, eye exams, and state-of-the-art equipment standards are provided.

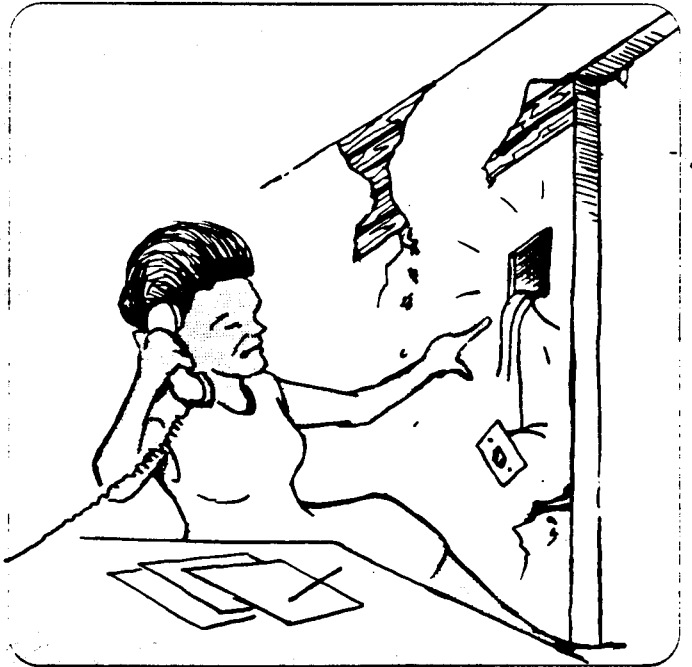
What You Can Do

If a stressful situation is caused by a safety and health hazard, contact your union representative and your supervisor. DC 37's Safety and Health Unit may be asked to investigate if necessary.

If there is a contract violation, talk to your union representative about filing a grievance procedure. VDT operators are covered by an expedited grievance procedure if a provision in the amended contract language is violated.

Remember: if you are experiencing a problem caused by the job itself, most likely others are similarly affected. Talk to co-workers. Discuss what changes would improve the situation.

You have the right to a safe and healthy workplace. Use it!



While trying to improve conditions on your job, you may also want to seek out some personal help. We all know that exercise, diet, and relaxation techniques reduce the effects of stress on the body. The union's Personal Service Unit (PSU) can offer ways to minimize the stress you feel in your life. Call 815-1250 for more information about the PSU. Your agency's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is always available to you as well. Take advantage of these free services.