

Under pressure...

move for
HEALTH



Stay healthy and happy at work with advice
from the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

Under pressure

Work is good for us. Being in employment provides a sense of responsibility, opportunities to learn and financial reward. But it can also place demands on our bodies and minds, which can leave us feeling tense and over stretched.

Some pressure at work is normal. Pressure isn't always negative; it can help motivate us and make changes in our daily lives. But too much pressure can create stress and sustained exposure to stress is linked to mental health conditions, like anxiety and depression, and to physical problems. Physios know that back and neck muscles are particularly sensitive to the effects of stress. This can cause pain and sometimes headache too. All this can prevent us enjoying work and doing our jobs effectively. It also costs employers millions of pounds each year in sickness absence.*

Physical activity – good for mind & body!

Physiotherapists know that exercise can do more than just help manage body weight and prevent disease. Evidence shows that being physically active promotes mental wellbeing and reduces or wards off stress by:

- causing your body to release chemicals which help lift your mood and make you feel more relaxed

- focusing your attention away from issues that make you feel stressed and onto what your body needs to do to run, kick a ball, or swing a racquet
- helping you release pent-up stress and tension and making you more resilient to pressure.

Getting started

Almost any form of physical activity can provide relief from tension or stress. The smallest steps can go a long way to improving your mental wellbeing, while also helping you look and feel better physically.

Active travel

Travel actively by walking or cycling as part of your journey:

- Get off the bus or train one stop earlier and walk the final part of your journey. If you drive, park further away than usual
- At train stations and car parks, take the stairs instead of lifts or escalators
- Cycling is great for fitness and a good stress reliever – it can also save you money on fares or fuel.

Easy exercise at work

Too much time spent sitting at a desk or doing repetitive tasks can contribute to the development of back, neck and arm pain and other health problems. Breaking up your day so that you rotate your time spent doing other tasks, and moving and stretching regularly can help you think more clearly and be more efficient.

✓ ***Stress is the number one cause of long-term sickness absence for both manual and non manual workers (CIPD Absence management survey 2011)**

~BE ACTIVE DAILY

Physios recommend being active every day, undertaking at least 150 minutes (2.5 hours in total) of moderate to vigorous exercise each week. This means increasing your heart rate, but not being so short of breath that you can't talk. It's OK to be active in 10 minute bouts if you don't have time for structured exercise sessions!

LEARN HOW PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
CAN HELP YOU PREVENT OR
MANAGE STRESS!

- Take the stairs instead of the lift at work and, where possible, walk further to use water coolers and other office equipment
- Rotate your tasks. Alternate sending emails with going to speak to people. Wear a light weight headset and stand up to make some of your phone calls. Don't wedge the phone between your head and shoulder
- Take all your breaks and get away from your workstation. Go for walks at lunchtime, or sign up for a class like aerobics, or Tai Chi
- Don't skip meals and do drink water regularly.

Simple stretches 'Chairobics'

- Sit to the front of your chair, rotate your upper body to the right, holding on to the backrest of your seat with your left hand. Hold for five seconds, then swap sides.
- Hold your hands together loosely behind your neck and stretch your elbows back so you can feel the pull on your shoulder blades – don't press your hands into your neck. Hold for five seconds.
- Lace your fingers together and push your palms away from your body for five seconds.

✓ **Raise concerns with your employers early about any pressures you think are affecting your health. With their support, you might be able to address problems before they have a chance to build up.**

Out of hours

Ensure you help yourself by making the most of your holiday allowance and the scheduled break times you are offered. Avoid taking your work home with you and make the most of your free time to do other activities you enjoy. Combine this with eating well and getting a good night's sleep and you're much more likely to feel mentally refreshed and ready to face the working day.

~EMPLOYERS

Good employers are keen to help their workforce stay healthy – it's in everyone's best interest to keep staff happy, motivated and productive. Do what you can to promote good physical and mental health in your workplace by providing a supportive environment and ideas for activities in and around your location. Much of this can be achieved for little or no cost and can bring real benefits in terms of reduced absence.

~GOOD POSTURE

Whatever your occupation, it's important to practise good posture for the tasks you're expected to do. Bad habits, such as slouching, along with stress and anxiety can affect posture - causing you to hunch your shoulders, for example.

✓ Good posture helps keep your joints healthy and strong. You'll also breathe more freely which will keep you feeling calm and relaxed. So sit or stand 'tall' with your shoulders back and your core (tummy) muscles slightly pulled in. In good posture, your spine, shoulder and hip joints will all be well aligned.

You can be referred to a physiotherapist by your GP. Or, in some places, you can contact your local NHS physio department yourself. To find your local private physiotherapy practitioner visit www.physio2u.co.uk
This leaflet was compiled with the help of the Chartered Physiotherapists in Mental Healthcare <http://cpmh.csp.org.uk> and the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Occupational Health and Ergonomics www.acpohe.org.uk

This document can be
made available in a format
for people with sight problems
Tel: 020 7306 6666



in association with



Web www.csp.org.uk Email enquiries@csp.org.uk
14 Bedford Row London WC1R 4ED Tel +44 (0)20 7306 6666

THE CHARTERED SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY is the professional, educational and trade union body for the United Kingdom's 50,000 chartered physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and support workers.