

Long-Term Stress Harms Everyone in the Workplace



Stress is not always bad. In fact, in the workplace, stress can prompt workers to stay focused on a task or meet a deadline. Extensive and prolonged stress in the workplace, however, can harm workers' physical and mental health, negatively affecting an organization's success. Employers can help alleviate workplace stress by supporting their workers. Unions and worker organizations can also support workplace mental health and well-being through their member services, outreach, and community engagement work.

How Does Long-Term Stress Harm Workers?

Physical harm:

- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Muscle tension and pain (e.g., back pain)
- Headaches
- Poor sleep
- Stomach discomfort
- Excessive weight gain or loss



Mental health challenges or behavioral changes:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Burnout
- Emotional outbursts
- Social withdrawal
- Drug or alcohol use
- Restlessness
- Fatigue
- Anger and irritability
- Lack of motivation or focus



How Does Long-Term Stress Harm Employers?

- **Increases potential for workplace incidents.** Stressed and fatigued workers are less attentive in recognizing and avoiding hazards.
- **Reduces productivity.** Stressful working conditions can cause workers to lose motivation, become easily distracted, lose focus, make mistakes, experience a decline in performance, and develop mental health challenges. The [World Health Organization](#) estimates that for every dollar U.S. employers spend treating common mental health issues, they receive a return of \$4 in improved health and productivity.
- **Increases absenteeism.** Exposure to long-term stress undercuts workers' physical and mental health, causing them to miss more days of work.
- **Undermines morale and leads to high turnover.** Stressed workers are less likely to be energized to perform well or to stay at a company that does not show interest in improving work conditions.



Resources

- OSHA: [Worker Fatigue](#)
- Healthy Work Campaign: [Healthy Work Tools](#)
- Mayo Clinic: [Stress Management](#)
- National Institute of Mental Health: [5 Things You Should Know About Stress](#)
- National Institute of Mental Health: ["I'm So Stressed Out!" Fact Sheet](#)
- National Safety Council's [SAFER: Mental Health and the Workplace](#)
- NIOSH's [Stress at Work](#) booklet