CareWorks' Employee Wellness Programme

Managing Stress: A Guide for Healthier, Happier Workdays

In today's fast-paced South African work environment, stress has become a common part of life. Whether it's tight deadlines, load-shedding disruptions, rising living costs, or balancing work with family responsibilities—**stress is unavoidable, but it is manageable**.

Unchecked stress can affect your health, relationships, and job performance. But with the right tools and support, you can manage stress effectively and build resilience.

What Is Stress?

Stress is your body's natural response to a challenge or demand. A little stress can help you stay alert and focused. But **chronic or high levels of stress**—especially at work—can be harmful to your mental and physical health.

Common Causes of Workplace Stress in South Africa

- Long hours and high workloads
- Financial pressure and rising cost of living
- Fear of job loss or poor working conditions
- Poor communication or unresolved conflict at work
- Lack of support or recognition
- Uncertainty, especially during times of social or economic instability

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Signs You May Be Stressed

Stress affects everyone differently, but warning signs can include:

- Feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or irritable
- Headaches, stomach problems, or body aches
- Difficulty sleeping or constant fatigue
- Struggling to concentrate or make decisions
- Changes in appetite

- Withdrawing from others

If these signs continue for a long time, it can lead to burnout, anxiety, or depression.

How to Manage Stress Effectively

Here are practical strategies you can use to manage stress at work and at home:

🧘 1. Breathe and Take Breaks

Take regular breaks during the day—even five minutes can help. Try deep breathing, stretching, or stepping outside for fresh air.

📋 2. Prioritise and Plan

Break your tasks into manageable steps. Use to-do lists, set realistic goals, and avoid overcommitting.

🗣️ 3. Talk About It

Speak to someone you trust—a colleague, friend, or counsellor. Sharing your feelings helps lighten the load and may lead to solutions.

🤸 4. Move Your Body

Exercise is a proven stress reliever. You don't need a gym—take a walk, dance, or stretch. Even 15–30 minutes a day can make a difference.

🥗 5. Eat Well and Stay Hydrated

Avoid too much sugar, caffeine, and junk food. Eat balanced meals and drink water throughout the day to keep your body and brain fuelled.

💤 6. Get Enough Sleep

Sleep is vital for managing stress. Aim for 7–9 hours per night. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.

🙏 7. Practice Gratitude or Mindfulness

Keep a gratitude journal or take a few minutes each day to reflect on what's going well. This helps shift focus from problems to positives.

Cultural and Workplace Support in South Africa

- **Ubuntu** teaches us the importance of community. Lean on your support network—colleagues, family, and friends.
- **Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)** offer free, confidential counselling services. Use them!
- Organisations like **SADAG** (South African Depression and Anxiety Group) provide resources, hotlines, and tools to help you manage stress and mental health.

What Employers Can Do to Support Staff

- Promote mental health awareness and wellness days
- Offer access to EAPs or onsite counselling
- Encourage open communication and regular check-ins
- Provide flexible working hours or hybrid options where possible
- Recognise staff achievements and show appreciation

In Closing

Stress is part of life—but it doesn't have to control your life. By taking simple, consistent steps to manage stress, you can improve your mood, boost your energy, and protect your overall health.

Take care of your mind the way you take care of your body. It's one of the best investments you can make—at work and beyond.

Need Help?

If you're feeling overwhelmed or need to talk, contact:

- **SADAG (24/7 Helpline):** 0800 567 567
- **SMS Line:** 31393
- **Your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)**