



### Take steps to make things better

Once you have an idea of what's at the root of the problem, you can start to deal with it. Your manager should help – the University has given all managers access to guidelines on work-related stress (see [www.bristol.ac.uk/personnel/policies](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/personnel/policies)) so that they can get to grips with their responsibilities and how to carry them out.

There may be things your manager can do to reduce the pressure on you – allocate work differently within the team, deal firmly with any bullying issues, or arrange some training to sharpen up your skills and confidence.

There may also be things you can and should do. Take a look at your lifestyle. Perhaps you need to get organised – to manage your diary better, keep 'to do' lists, prioritise your work. Maybe you should start taking proper lunch breaks and doing something you enjoy, like reading or shopping.

Try to make time for regular exercise – the experts say it works wonders for your mind as well as your body. Or perhaps you need to stop being available to everyone whenever they want – you may be the greatest thing since sliced bread, but the University will manage if you're not permanently at people's beck and call.

Occasionally, a member of staff and his or her manager may find that despite their best efforts to make sensible adjustments of various kinds, the stress problem persists. In such circumstances, it may be in everyone's best interests to explore other options, including redeployment.

### Seek support

If you think you are suffering from stress or that you are at risk of it, don't just ignore it and hope it will go away, and don't feel wary of revealing it to others. The University can offer various kinds of support and is keen to do so.

As well as your manager, who may seek to involve the Occupational Health Service and/or the Health and Safety Office, you may wish to contact one or more of the following:

- The appropriate Personnel Manager from the list at [www.bristol.ac.uk/personnel/teamlist](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/personnel/teamlist). He or she can give you practical advice on your situation and tell you about other forms of support.
- Staff Counselling, which can help in a number of ways:
  - free, confidential support for personal as well as work-related problems, including stress management;
  - performance and development coaching, aspects of which can help you address aspects of your job that may be causing stress;
  - assessment interviews to help identify what sources of support are likely to be of most benefit to you;
  - consultation for managers on staff welfare issues.

Tel. Bristol 930 0261 (office);

Bristol 954 5704 (voicemail).

Email [staff-counselling@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:staff-counselling@bristol.ac.uk).

Web [www.bristol.ac.uk/staffcounselling](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/staffcounselling).

- The Staff Mediation Service, can help with interpersonal conflict problems. Contact the Equality and Diversity Manager. Tel. Bristol 331 7311. Email [tracy.brunnock-cook@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:tracy.brunnock-cook@bristol.ac.uk).
- Dignity at Work Advisers help with problems such as harassment or bullying. Contacts at [www.bristol.ac.uk/staffcounselling](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/staffcounselling)

- Staff Development, which offers a range of courses on the subject of stress as well as other areas of personal development that may help you to deal better with pressure in your life. Tel. Bristol 928 7964. Email [sd-course@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:sd-course@bristol.ac.uk). <http://www.bris.ac.uk/personnel/sdev/>
- Your trade union, which will be concerned about your welfare and ready to help.
- The Careers Service, which can give you advice if you are contemplating leaving your job or have already decided to do so. Research Staff can talk to Sarah Musson (tel. Bristol 331 7071; email [sarah.musson@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.musson@bristol.ac.uk)); other staff can talk to Clare Brophy (tel. Bristol 331 7801; email [clare.brophy@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:clare.brophy@bristol.ac.uk)).

You should of course consult your GP any any time you wish.

### What have we forgotten that's important?

As with the previous leaflets in this series (see below), your comments would be welcome. Please email [pwe-feedback@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:pwe-feedback@bristol.ac.uk).

### Previous leaflets, and storage

The previous leaflets in this series are *Making internal email a blessing rather than a curse*, *How to be an effective leader*, *Managing time more effectively*, *Dealing with bullying*, *Commuting made easier* and *Managing your Career*. They are all available on the web via [www.bristol.ac.uk/pwe/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/pwe/). If you would like a special folder to keep them in, email [pwe-feedback@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:pwe-feedback@bristol.ac.uk) and one will be sent to you.



## Positive Communications

An initiative is under way to create a more positive working environment. A group of academics and support staff is leading the implementation of an improvement plan drawn up after a major staff survey.

One step the group is taking is to produce a series of advice sheets – called *Positive Communications* – on issues raised by staff. The advice will always be brief and practical.

**If you need all or part of this publication in an alternative format, eg in Braille, in larger print or on tape, please call 928 7776.**

## Issue Seven:

# Keeping work-related stress at bay



## Keeping work-related stress at bay

‘If you had to define stress, it would not be far off if you said it was the process of living.’ So said prominent American physiologist, Dr Stanley Sarnoff, late last century. But today we take a much less fatalistic view. The Health and Safety Executive has defined work-related stress as **‘...the adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them’**, and employers and employees are seen as having a duty to keep stress at bay and to tackle it when it nevertheless arises.

This leaflet gives straightforward advice about avoiding work-related stress. It also tells you where to turn for support. You will find more detailed guidelines at [www.bristol.ac.uk/pwe](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/pwe).

### Bear in mind that ‘stress’ isn’t the same as ‘pressure’

There’s an argument that we all experience and even thrive on a certain amount of pressure on a daily basis. The writer William Saroyan may have taken it a little far when he claimed that ‘Without pressure, the work doesn’t get done at all’, but everyone is familiar with the feeling that there’s a lot to do and not enough time to do it in. This can be a broadly positive feeling – most of us welcome a challenge and sometimes need a deadline to motivate us. But stress is never what we need – it’s a response to an excess of pressure, and it’s bad for us. It should be guarded against and the causes dealt with, just as with any other workplace hazard.

### Recognise the signs of stress in yourself and others

So how can you tell when the normal, healthy pressures of working life have tipped over into

unhealthy stress? You probably don’t need to worry if you feel a bit strung out at the end of a particularly long and difficult day – who doesn’t? But if you feel significantly less committed and productive than usual, or if you catch yourself snapping at colleagues and perhaps isolating yourself from them, or if you feel persistently worn out and overwhelmed, you may be experiencing stress. Most commonly, people with stress notice a combination of such signs and feel they just can’t cope. If you’ve been suffering with it for a while and you and your manager haven’t done enough about it, you risk becoming physically or mentally ill – panic attacks and prolonged depression are among the indications that things have got really bad.

You may also spot signs of stress in the people you work with, the people you manage or the people who manage you.



### Identify the causes of stress

First, it’s important to recognise that a person who is showing signs of stress at work may be having problems in their private life as well. ‘Work-related’ stress and ‘personal’ stress may become entangled and exacerbate one another. In some cases, the source of the problem may lie wholly outside work. Managers should, of course, show understanding in such circumstances. They may make special allowances for a while to help someone through a difficult period in their life, although they will have to consider carefully the impact on other colleagues. But a manager is not likely to be able to help tackle the roots of essentially private problems (although Staff Counselling – see ‘Seek support’ – may be able to do so). It is in the area of work-related stress that a manager can make a significant difference. You should try to get to the bottom of what is causing your stress at work. Ideally you should do this in conjunction with someone you trust

– perhaps your manager, a colleague or trade union representative. Managers are expected to understand that there is no stigma attached to stress, which can hit even the toughest operator. You may find it useful to reflect on the six causes of work-related stress identified by the Health and Safety Executive:

- the demands of your job – probably too many, but possibly too few
- lack of control over what you are expected to do
- inadequate support from your manager and/or colleagues
- poor relationships, sometimes including bullying and harassment
- confusion about what your role is
- fears about changes that are taking place.

Obviously you may be affected by a combination of such factors – you know best.