

GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT

EFFECTIVE STRESS REDUCTION STRATEGIES IN THE WORKPLACE

THE EXPERIENCE OF SCPHRP

At the Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research and Policy (SCPHRP) our role is to use the research evidence to improve the health of the Scottish population. Our jobs are all about improving health! However, we have found that as a workforce we also feel under pressure and stressed at times of the day and year. We have put in place several strategies to try and manage our stressful working lives and below are some that you might like to try out. None of them take much time out of our working day, but makes us happier; most are evidence based, or based on our ethos and approach to team working and wellbeing in the workplace.

Regular meetings which focus on pressure points, goal setting, team working. Working together as a team, and making stress reduction the responsibility of the team, and not that individual, can be very positive. At SCPHRP we have regular team

meetings which encourage individuals to state when they under pressure, or are likely to be under pressure in the future. This enables the team collectively to work out solutions, and redistribute tasks/work together as necessary.



Family friendly environment

We take into account the family commitments of members of the team, whether that is young children or ageing parents. We have several team members that work extended hours on some days so that they can work reduced hours on others, in order to meet child care commitments. We also recognise that many of us have ageing parents, and provide team members with support and time off when necessary.

Peer support: socialising and getting to know each other

Evidence suggests talking to colleagues can help you to deal with stress.¹ Spending time together outside work as a team can help you

to get to know each other and recognise when stressful events or practices are happening both inside and outside work. A strong resilient close team can really help when one person, or the whole team are under pressure.

Senior role models

Stress in the workplace can be accentuated if the senior team members work very long hours and at weekends or make unreasonable demands. Other team members may feel obliged to work in the same way and a negative cycle builds up where work and home life become unbalanced. At SCPHRP we send out a clear message that evening and weekend working should not be the norm (although we recognise that some people like the flexibility of working at these times). Deadlines are planned well in advance, and people are encouraged to say no to tasks if they feel that they do not have the capacity to carry them out. Senior managers also take part in several of the activities described below.

Mindfulness²

Paying more attention to the present moment – to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you – can improve your mental wellbeing. Some people call this awareness 'mindfulness', and you can take steps to develop it in your own life. Good mental wellbeing means feeling good about life and yourself, and being able to get on with life in the way you want.

Evidence shows that what we do and the way we think have the biggest impact on wellbeing. [see fact sheet on mindfulness or visit <http://au.reachout.com/what-is-mindfulness> for more tips and apps]. Tai Chi, Yoga and Knitting are all ways of being more mindful.

¹ <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/09670731111140748>

² <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/mindfulness.aspx>

Tai Chi: do it for 5 mins a day and feel the benefits

Tai Chi appears to be associated with improvements in psychological well-being including reduced stress, anxiety, depression and mood disturbance, and increased self-esteem.³ In the SCPHRP office we try to do 5 mins of Tai Chi in the pm using this YouTube video [Office Workout: 5 minute Tai Chi <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGzLAVWvEFQ>] – we do it together, and you can do it at your desk – no equipment or fancy clothes required, but you will feel better after it!

Yoga

Studies have found a positive effect of yoga in reducing stress.⁴ Yoga does need some equipment and special clothing, but can be done in the workplace. We have a regular slot on a Friday lunchtime when we do around 20 mins of yoga using a YouTube video. We do it in our office, making a space by moving the furniture around.



Knitting: Take up knitting in your tea-break or lunch hour (or even in meetings!)

Besides the obvious advantage of creating useful articles and garments, knitters enjoy a host of health benefits both physical and psychological.^{5 6} Knitting allows you to steep yourself in creativity and forget the stress and anxiety of your day. Being actively engaged in a project about which you are passionate and interested, allows the brain to immerse itself fully in the task. The process of learning to knit helps you feel good about yourself and enhances your sense of self-esteem. Crafts like knitting engage both your mind and body, causing optimistic feelings about your life and future. We knit in meetings as well as at other times, and have even been known to engage in other crafts such as crochet or badge making!

Laughter!

It makes sense that a good laugh would make one happier. There have been a number of studies to prove it scientifically as well as intuitively.⁷ “It appears that a brief period of mirthful laughter may be a quick and effective method to reduce stress levels.” So don’t feel bad about having a happy workplace where you share jokes or pictures of cats doing yoga (we do!). We also make sure that we celebrate success – work related or personal.



Exercise and physical activity.

Research has shown that exercise not only provides a reduction in stress levels but also an increased ability to resist its effects in the future. Exercise is your shortest route to a feeling of well-being and a physical glow. Everyone knows that exercise is good for you and that it is one of the best stress combatants available. Any form of physical activity leads to the release of these feel good neurotransmitters called endorphins which are often classified as the happy hormones. Try walking or cycling part of your way to work some days, talking a walk at lunchtime, or fitting in a few minutes of Tai Chi. Or you can even use an exercise ball to help you! See our fact sheet on physical activity and mental health⁸



³ <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6882/10/23/>

⁴ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21614942>

⁵ <http://www.stitchlinks.com/pdfsNewSite/research/Poster%20British%20Pain%20Society%20March%202009%20copy.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/cot/bjot/2013/00000076/00000002/art00002>

⁷ <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/09670731111140748>

⁸ <http://www.scphrp.ac.uk/poster-physical-activity-and-mental-health/>