

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is a physical and psychological reaction to pressure that occurs when there is an imbalance between demands and resources. Stress is not always unhealthy. It's helpful to think about stress in terms of three zones: the well-being zone, the risk zone and the danger zone.

THE WELL-BEING ZONE

Even when we are thriving and feel well, it is natural to experience brief periods of stress. As long as the stress is temporary, it is an appropriate reaction that helps us to deal with pressure.

THE RISK ZONE

Being stressed over longer periods of time can lead to a variety of physical and psychological symptoms that can affect your health and work performance negatively.

THE DANGER ZONE

If you do not regain your balance and your stress becomes chronic, stress can have more serious consequences and constitute a genuine threat to both your health and work performance.

Stress affects the individual, but it should be understood as a result of the interplay between us and our surroundings. There are factors in both our working lives and personal lives that can increase or help prevent stress.

WE SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY

- At AU, we view stress as a shared challenge, and we share the responsibility of helping to **prevent**, **detect** and **tackle** unhealthy stress.
- AU is committed to being a good and healthy workplace for all employees.
- AU will work to ensure that everyone takes an active responsibility in promoting well-being and preventing stress.

INFORMATION

Find more information here:



AU's website about stress



AU's psychological counselling services



Arbejdstilsynet
Website in Danish



Arbejds miljøweb
Website in Danish



Test your stress

HOW WE PREVENT AND TACKLE

STRESS

AT AARHUS UNIVERSITY

PREVENT

DETECT AND TACKLE

DEAL WITH

MANAGER
What is your responsibility?

- Know what stress is, what typically causes it and how it typically develops, and what you as a manager can do to prevent it
- Provide clarity and alignment on priorities and performance, check in with staff about their workload, motivation, well-being and collaboration, both individually ([CLICK HERE](#)) and as a group ([CLICK HERE](#))
- Contribute to creating a culture in which team members have access to mutual support, assistance and guidance from colleagues and their manager
- Focus on ensuring a culture of constructive communication and working to prevent and manage conflicts
- Contribute to creating a culture in which openness about both successes and challenges is encouraged – create a space in which staff feel free to talk about mistakes by setting an example and speaking openly about your own doubts, mistakes or challenges
- Make sure that the department/unit's procedures for working with well-being and stress prevention are clear and brought into focus on an ongoing basis

- Be attentive to any signs that your staff are not thriving, both as individuals and in the unit as a whole, through one-on-one dialogues and daily observation
- If you are concerned about a staff member, discuss it with them
See guide to discussing well-being and stress with staff in the risk zone ([CLICK HERE](#))
- If a staff member is experiencing stress, explore what factors are contributing so that you can make a plan to lighten the load or reallocate tasks. Inform them of the option of getting psychological counselling and encourage them to consult their general practitioner
- Monitor how well the plan is working and adjust it as needed
- Find out if other staff in the unit are also experiencing stress and need your help
- Remember that stress is not purely an individual problem; it is a shared problem that may stem from unclear roles, responsibilities, expectations, conflicting demands, the workplace culture and other issues
- If the staff is experiencing stress due to general structural problems in the workplace, you as a manager should work on improving working conditions as much as possible (perhaps in collaboration with the occupational health and safety and union representatives)

- Start the process of getting relevant support by encouraging them to contact:
 - their general practitioner
 - AU's psychological counselling service
- See guide to discussing well-being and stress with staff in the danger zone ([CLICK HERE](#))
- In the event the staff member takes sick leave, agree on what to tell colleagues, and agree on the frequency and kind of contact with them during their sick leave
- Agree to follow up during the sick leave and follow AU's procedures for dealing with absence due to illness
- Together with the staff member on sick leave, plan a phased return to work and a gradual increase in tasks, with an eye for their scope and complexity ([CLICK HERE](#))
- Help the team prioritise their tasks while their colleague is on sick leave – find out if anyone else is under pressure, and explore what you as a manager can do to tackle this/prevent stress in the unit
- Where relevant, involve the occupational health and safety and union representatives in identifying any workplace conditions that might lead to stress, and work to improve these conditions

COLLEAGUE(S)
What can we do together?

- Contribute to creating a culture of openness about stress and well-being, for example by speaking openly about challenges or asking others for help
- Show an interest in how our colleagues are doing and support/help colleagues who seem overburdened
- Take co-responsibility for the contributing to your unit's performance and well-being by being available to discuss and advise on work-related issues and help with specific tasks if a colleague needs it
- Contribute to creating a strong, inclusive community, for example by participating in social activities
- Contribute to constructive communication, feedback and resolving disagreements quickly

- Contact your colleague if you see signs of unhealthy stress and express your concern to them directly – express an interest in whether they need help/support
- Encourage your colleague to contact their manager if they haven't already done so – you might offer to accompany them, or suggest contacting the occupational health and safety representative or the union representative if your colleague doesn't want to contact their manager for any reason
- Follow up and show extra concern and support subsequently

- Talk to each other and with your manager about:
 - 1) how we can support our colleague (coordinate contact/send flowers etc.)
 - 2) how we can contribute to a healthy workplace culture with support for well-being and coverage for work tasks during your colleague's absence
 - 3) whether tasks should be distributed differently, or whether anything else can be done to prevent stress in the team

STAFF
What can you do yourself?

- Be aware of your own stress reactions and react promptly to changes in your own behaviour that can be signs of stress
- Take co-responsibility for your own well-being by focusing on motivation, a healthy balance between your work and the time available to do it in, and a culture that encourages breaks
- Contribute to creating a workplace culture in which people discuss stress openly and take shared responsibility in relation to their tasks and well-being

- Respond to persistent symptoms by discussing workload and prioritisation of tasks with your manager
- Work with your manager to figure out sources of pressure and make a plan to lighten the load
- Consult with your own general practitioner and contact AU's psychological counselling service
- Ask for help from your network, colleagues, occupational health and safety rep, union representative

- Seek out relevant help and support by contacting:
 - your general practitioner
 - your manager
 - AU's psychological counselling services, if relevant
- Be open about your situation, and work together with your manager to ensure the best possible conditions for being in the workplace and, if relevant, for being on sick leave and returning to work
- See a guide in Danish to setting up a phased return to work ([CLICK HERE](#))