

FACT SHEET

STRESS MANAGEMENT



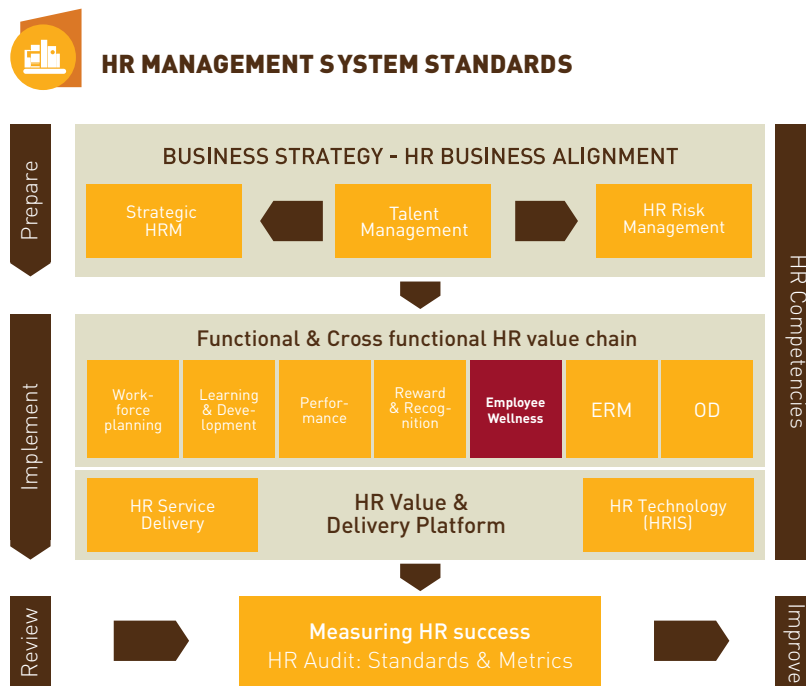
INTRODUCTION

The area of employee wellness within the HR value chain, usually includes stress management programmes and awareness. Are you or your employees “stressed out”? Does your employee wellness strategy and programmes assist with the “stressed out” mode? This fact sheet aims to create the awareness of employee wellness and stress management, which are very realistic issues organisations are facing. Workload stress as well as personal stress all seem to have an impact on employee performance, and it is the responsibility of HR to enable this stress to be managed. By understanding the connection between wellness and stress, HR should find the solution (s) to assist employees cope effectively and healthily.

The SABPP identifies stress concerns under the SABPP HR Standard 8: Employee Wellness, which is defined as:

“Employee wellness is a strategy to ensure that a safe and healthy work and social environment is created and maintained, together with individual wellness commitment that enables employees to perform optimally while meeting all health and safety legislative requirements and other relevant wellness good practices in support of the achievement of organisational objectives.”

SABPP HR Systems Standar Model



In addition, inadequate employee wellness may also pose HR Risk to an organisation and the SABPP defines HR Risk (Standard 3) as the following:

HR Risk Management is a systematic approach of identifying and addressing people factors (uncertainties and opportunities) that can either have a positive or negative effect on the realisation of the objectives of an organisation.

Stress is a risk in terms of performance, productivity and health. The management of this risk will require insight into the understanding of wellness and stress, and the type that is prevalent within the organisation. An attitude that reigned in the past was that employees come to work to do a job and they should leave their personal problems at home. However, the nature of the modern work environment with all its technological changes, restructuring, downsizing, mergers, outsourcing, global competition and socio-political changes has created a workplace full of uncertainty with a high level of employee stress.

If these pressures and demands are made without any provision of proper support systems, employees will suffer immensely. Stress within the workplace is a growing concern, and employees run a risk of burnout, minimum coping mechanisms and even entrapment in their thinking. The modern-day workplace has to deal with the increasing demands and changes, and this adds to the stress factor for employers and employees alike.

Globalisation and technological advancement have changed the nature of work. 21st century jobs have become more knowledge demanding in terms of work overload, work pressure and job insecurity (Dhobale, 2009: 39)¹. In attempting to hold on to their jobs, employees are spending more hours at work, and at home on work-related activities via their laptops, iPhone or Smartphones which further blur the boundaries between work-life and home-life (Fittogether, 2004)².

Long work days, including overtime, increases employees' risks of developing poor sleeping habits, poor lifestyle choices (substance abuse, poor diet and exercise), fatigue, heart problems, high blood pressure and chronic headaches (Sparks et al., 2001: 489-509)³. In a South African study conducted at the World-at-Work Total Rewards Conference, the following employers' comments were noted:

- **82%** of employers indicated that their healthcare costs were affected by workforce stress,
- **79%** indicated that absenteeism was significantly impacted by employee stress, and
- **77%** reported that their workplace safety was affected by employee stress (Moodley, 2010: 5).

HR Fact:

A total of 3.2 days per worker are lost each year through workplace stress.
- Sue-Ellen Watts (Twitter 19 June 2017)

¹ Dhobale, R. S. 2009. Stress management training: a boon to employee wellness! The Icfai University Journal of Soft Skills, III(1): 39-44.

² Fittogether. 2004. Workplace Wellness Toolkit. <http://www.fittogethernc.org/WorkplaceWellnessAbout.aspx#62> [25 June 2010].

³ Sparks, K., Faragher, B. & Cooper, C. L. 2001. Well-being and occupation health in the 21st century workplace. Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 74(4): 489-509.

| Modern Day Workplace Disease |

Employees who work harder and longer hours are prone to the following common symptoms⁴ of stress:

- Physiological symptoms: refers to the body's physical ailments.
- Muscle tension, tension headaches, backaches, jaw pain.
- Digestive problems: heartburn, peptic ulcers, irritable bowel.
- Migraines, chest pain, insomnia, lack of sexual drive, fatigue.
- Cardiovascular: high blood pressure, strokes, heart attack.
- Common colds, diabetes, arthritis, psoriasis, cancer.

They can also experience psychological symptoms as well which refers to mental ailments like:

- Hostility, irritability, anxiety, nervousness, depression, suicide.

Behavioural symptoms are common as well and this refers to how behaviour changes like:

- Poor concentration, memory, creativity and decision making.
- Anti-social, aggression, withdrawal, lack of sleep.
- Increased alcohol consumption, drugs, smoking, spending, eating disorders.

It is evident that modern day workplace demands and blurred boundaries between work- and home-life are resulting in more employees experiencing disease in their health and wellness status. The latter is commonly known as chronic diseases of lifestyle (CDL) (Van der Merwe, n.d)⁵.



Diagram: Workplace consequences of CDL

⁴ Andrews, 2005: 11-12; Jaye, 2010: 43; Van der Merwe, n.d.; Wolters Kluwer Health, 2009: 1-2; Sparks et al., 2001: 489-509; Michie, 2002: 67-68; Dubrin, 1994: 174-175

⁵ Van der Merwe, A. n.d. Health Stress Management. <http://www.healthstresswellness.com/index.asp?pgid=117> [25 June 2010].

However, stress is a reality of life and work. We stress about our family, health, finances, crime, societal expectations, work and many other aspects of a complicated fast-paced modern life. Effective stress management and self-management skills are needed to cope and thrive in the modern work environment.

HR Fact:

80% of workers feel stress on the job and nearly half say they need help in learning how to manage stress. And 42% say their co-workers need such help.
- American Institute of Stress.

The engagement of employees by HR, can create the opportunity to understand and develop well-ness programmes to “cope” with the stress. The burden of stress becomes less overwhelming and more manageable.

| BUT stress is good for you? Right? |

The popular view is that a certain amount of stress is good for you, however can stress in any form be good for you? Most individual experience stress in different areas of their lives, and at different levels. In most cases stress is not viewed as positive, yet it is inevitable. How do you respond to the following statements?

- You need a certain amount of stress to keep you on your toes.
- Stress makes you feel alive.
- If you cannot handle stress, you are weak.
- Stress comes with the job.
- Take a chill pill.
- Chill-lax!

How do you answer the above?

HR Fact:

A recent study, conducted by international research company Bloomberg, ranked South Africa as the second “most stressed out” nation in the world, following Nigeria. El Salvador was ranked third. Another study, conducted last year by Ipsos Global and Reuters, showed that up to 53% of South Africa’s workforce does not take their allotted annual leave.

- Source: <http://bhekisisa.org/article/2015-07-01-sa-is-stressed-out-and-suicidal>

Traditionally, stress looked like this

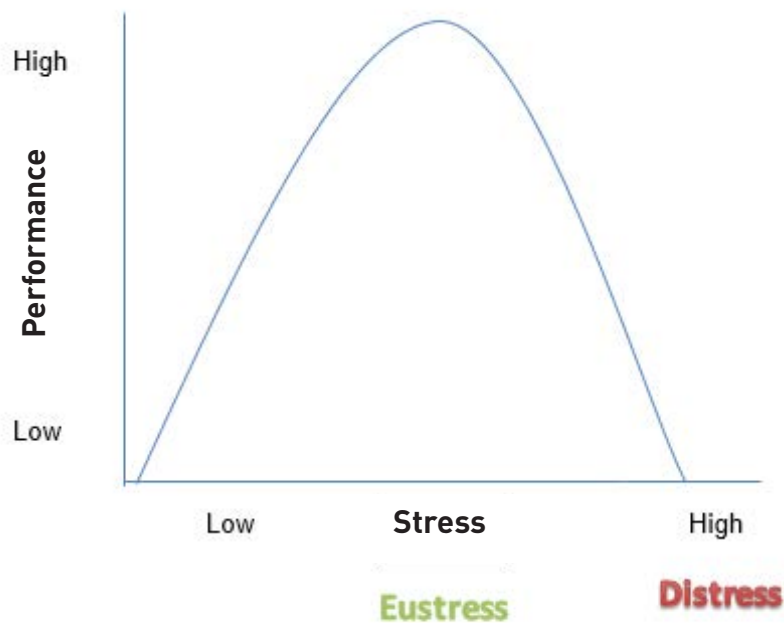


The “founding father of stress research”, Selye⁶ (1950, 1956) produced the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) theory with the two most frequently used stress terms, namely “eustress” and “distress”. Eustress was considered to be the good, helpful stress; whereas, distress was considered to be bad and harmful to the body (Andrews, 2005: 7, 10-11)⁷. The idea of good and bad stress originated from the Yerkes-Dodson Law (1908: 459-482)⁸ illustrated on the next page:

⁶ Selye, H. 1956. *Stress of life*. New York: McGraw – Hill.

⁷ Andrews, L. 2005. *Stress control for peace of mind*. London: Greenwich Editions

⁸ Yerkes, R. M. & Dodson, J. D. 1908. The relation of strength of stimulus to rapidity of habit-formation. *Journal of Comparative Neurology and Psychology*, 18: 459-482.



Yerkes-Dodson Law (1908)
Source: Andrews (2005: 7)

- An optimal level of stress or arousal = peak performance = eustress (good stress)
- After optimal level, continued stress / arousal, lowers performance = distress (bad stress)

| Misinterpretation of stress |

Unfortunately, stress and if left untreated develops into burnout will rob you of your health and wellness. Stress is a condition you experience when you perceive excessive demands and pressures for which you don't have enough personal resources for (knowledge, skills, ability, time, etc.) (Michie, 2002: 67; Park, 2007: 5⁹; Kazmi, Amjad & Khan, 2008: 135)¹⁰, meaning you are not in control of the situation. Your body reacts instinctively for survival in order to overcome the stressful event. The stress response is part instinct and part your perception about the situation or event.

⁹ Michie, S. 2002. Causes and management of stress at work. *Occup Environ Med*, 59: 67–72.

¹⁰ Kazmi, R., Amjad, S. & Khan, D. 2008. Occupational stress and its effect on job performance: a case study of medical house officers of district Abbotabad. *J Ayub Med Coll Abbotabad*, 20(3): 135–139.

Your body's stress response immediately activates hormones. Firstly, noradrenaline and adrenaline to kick start the response, increasing your heart rate, blood pressure and glucose levels. Secondly, cortisol to fuel your muscles with glucose and to help the body recover from stress (Andrews, 2005: 8)¹¹. This improves your ability to survive the perceived threat; however, it may cause you to feel anxious, jumpy and irritable. These side effects may reduce your ability to work effectively with other people, and decreases your ability to execute precise, controlled skills and to make complex decisions.

The above reaction to stress is referred to as the alarm phase or fight / flight response. Thereafter, the body needs a resistance phase to recover and repair itself. If there is no recovery and stress continues, the body goes into the exhaustion phase and shuts down, implying burnout, which may in severe circumstances cause death (Andrews, 2005: 8)¹².

| Who is responsible for stress? |

Leaders and management teams find it difficult to manage stress and its related problems, because they too are experiencing similar job problems and stress related symptoms owing to unwell organisational climate and culture (Hillier, Fewell, Cann & Shepard, 2005: 419, 422)¹³.

HR must take responsibility for employees' health and wellness status and realise that employees' and organisational wellness requires a proactive approach. The problem arises when there are different interpretations of and approaches to managing employee wellness. Also, budget becomes a challenge, and with the cost cutting initiatives that are in practice currently, HR may find it difficult to advocate for the wellness programmes.

HR Fact:

Stress levels in the workplace are rising with 6 in 10 workers in major global economies experiencing increased workplace stress. With China (86%) having the highest rise in workplace stress. - **The Regus Group**: <http://www.gostress.com/stress-facts/>

¹¹ Andrews, L. 2005. *Stress control for peace of mind*. London: Greenwich Editions.

¹² Andrews, L. 2005. *Stress control for peace of mind*. London: Greenwich Editions.

¹³ Hillier, D., Fewell, F., Cann, W. & Shephard, V. 2005. *Wellness at work: enhancing the quality of our working lives*. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 17(5): 419-431, October.



| Tips for Individual stress management |

Learn to manage your stress approaches and create pathways to release tension and stress. It is important to look for triggers of stress and symptoms of stress that impact your overall wellbeing. Here are some helpful pointers to assist:

1. Action-orientated: confront the problem / stressor, try to change the environment / situation.
2. Emotionally-orientated: if you cannot change the situation, change the way you interpret or view the problem.
3. Acceptance-orientated: if something outside of your control happens, accept it. Focus on coping mechanisms to survive such as stress management training.
4. Find healthy mechanisms to release the stress. According to the American Psychology Association¹⁴, stress can be managed by 5 techniques¹⁵:

¹⁴ <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/manage-stress.aspx>

¹⁵ <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/manage-stress.aspx>

Take a break from the stressor.

It may seem difficult to get away from a big work project, a crying baby or a growing credit card bill. But when you give yourself permission to step away from it, you let yourself have time to do something else, which can help you have a new perspective or practice techniques to feel less overwhelmed. It's important to not avoid your stress (those bills have to be paid sometime), but even just 20-minutes to take care of yourself is helpful.

Exercise.

The research keeps growing — exercise benefits your mind just as well as your body. We keep hearing about the long-term benefits of a regular exercise routine. But even a 20-minute walk, run, swim or dance session in the midst of a stressful time can give an immediate effect that can last for several hours.

Smile and laugh.

Our brains are interconnected with our emotions and facial expressions. When people are stressed, they often hold a lot of the stress in their face. So laughs or smiles can help relieve some of that tension and improve the situation.

Get social support.

Call a friend, send an email. When you share your concerns or feelings with another person, it does help relieve stress. But it's important that the person whom you talk to is someone whom you trust and whom you feel can understand and validate you. If your family is a stressor, for example, it may not alleviate your stress if you share your woes with one of them.

Meditate.

Meditation and mindful prayer help the mind and body to relax and focus. Mindfulness can help people see new perspectives, develop self-compassion and forgiveness. When practicing a form of mindfulness, people can release emotions that may have been causing the body physical stress. Much like exercise, research has shown that even meditating briefly can reap immediate benefits.

Stress is a common problem that most of us face in different areas of our life. It can be managed and controlled by simply understanding our limits and threshold. It is also about what we can focus on and how we can deliver it. Time plays an important part when attempting to manage stress, and this could be because there are too many things to deliver on, and time is not increasing. We need to practice control on what we take on and how we manage it, so to avoid stress creeping in. A few pointers that can assist with taking control over stress are:

1. Manage your job stress: confirm your understanding of your job priorities, goals, and career possibilities. Take control of deadlines. Delegate non-priorities.
2. Manage your time: create a To-Do list; analyse your daily activities and allocate enough time for each. Learn to say NO to outside demands.
3. Learn to calm your mind: close your eyes, breathe deeply, holding your breath for 5 seconds. Think of a happy and safe place or memory. Don't focus on the problem. Take a 10-minute rest break (not smoking) when things are overwhelming. Refocus your mind.
4. Exercise for mental health: exercising 3-4 times a week for 30 minutes will release endorphins and help you feel good about yourself; release muscle tension; stimulates your heart rate positively; reduces anxiety; and helps you sleep better. Try aerobics, walking, cycling, hiking, yoga, pilates, or taking the stairs!
5. Eat for health: don't eat for comfort. Eating healthy is a lifestyle, not a diet. Create a healthy eating plan, drink 8-glasses of water a day (alcohol does not count!). Take a multi vitamin or supplement in the morning.
6. Balance between work and personal life: you know you are stressed and heading for burnout if work is all you think of and do. Work during the week, weekends are for recovery with family and friends.
7. Build your support network: don't isolate yourself. Talk to a trusted colleague / friend at work to help gain perspective. Spend time with family and friends outside of work.
8. Sleep 7-8 hours each night: lack of sleep disturbs your physiological and psychological functioning (see stress symptoms). Go to bed at the same time each night.
9. Keep a wellness journal: write about the things that cause you stress. Reflecting on the day helps to release it from your mind, and gives you perspective.
10. Explore wellness activities: attend stress management workshops and employee assistance programmes. Go for massages and reflexology. Take a walk in nature. Get out of your head!



What is work related stress?

“To define the term, stress in an employee arises from the situation where work demands exceeds the capability and capacity of the individual. In a scenario, where the company is expecting ‘too much’ from the employee, irrespective of their capability and efficiency, it leads to work related stress. Often, unclear goals and duties, and bullying or harassment are related to the causes of work related stress in employees. This is a significant reason behind diseases and illness in employees, and is often correlated with the staff turnover, higher rates of employee absenteeism, and other key indicators of underperformance.”¹⁶

Stress in the workplace impacts performance and well-being of the employee. For example, “unrealistic work targets” or “continuous demotivation of staff” creates a high level of stress for staff, that could lead to other challenges like anxiety, mental illness,¹⁷ lack of confidence, fear, lack of self-worth and absenteeism. This eventually leads to low performance, loss of talent and even burnout. Since most businesses function on tight deadlines and a consistent sense of urgency, stress increases accordingly. Since stress is evident, it therefore requires attention in managing it. According to the CIPD Annual Survey Report: Absence Management 2016¹⁸, stress and mental illness featured on their top 5 most common reason for absenteeism.

Table 4: Common causes of short-term absence (% of respondents)

	Most common cause			In top 5 most common causes		
	All employees	Manual	Non-manual	All employees	Manual	Non-manual
Minor illness (for example colds/flu, stomach upsets, headaches and migraines)	75	64	81	95	80	88
Stress	13	3	7	47	32	42
Musculoskeletal injuries (for example neck strains and repetitive strain injury, but excluding back pain)	2	13	2	44	48	34
Home/family/carer responsibilities	2	2	2	35	25	33
Mental ill health (for example clinical depression and anxiety)	2	2	3	34	26	30
Back pain	2	10	1	34	45	25
Recurring medical conditions (for example asthma, angina and allergies)	0	1	0	31	24	31
Injuries/accidents not related to work	1	1	0	18	20	20
Acute medical conditions (for example stroke, heart attack and cancer)	1	0	1	16	14	18
Pregnancy-related absence (not maternity leave)	0	0	0	11	7	10
Work-related injuries/accidents	0	1	0	6	15	3
Drink- or drug-related conditions	0	0	0	2	3	2
Absence due to non-genuine ill health (that is, ‘pulling a sickie’)	1	2	1	24	30	20

Base: all employees 879; manual 271; non-manual 316

- ¹⁶ Balaji, R. (2014) Role of Human Resource Manager in Managing Stress of Employees in Manufacturing Concerns. International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology. Volume 3, Issue 4,
- ¹⁷ <http://www.sacap.edu.za/blog/counselling/mental-health-south-africa-whose-problem-counselling/>
- ¹⁸ https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/absence-management_2016_tcm18-16360.pdf

| The Role of HR in Stress Management |

HR is an important component to manage stress in the workplace. Through its wellness initiatives and its ability to understand the employee needs and thresholds of stress, HR can assist employees and employers manage stress.

“To cope up with stress in employees, it is important to take effective actions. This not only benefits towards promoting the employee performance, but also enhances the scope for team and organisational development. Most importantly, within certain countries, it is a legal requirement for the HR managers to “diagnose, treat, and rehabilitate” the employees who experience stress at workplace.”¹⁹

According to Balaji (2014), who supports the importance of HR’s roles and responsibilities in the management of stress include²⁰:

- To understand what is work related stress, what are the causes behind it, and how it can be managed and prevented.
- To formulate relevant and effective stress management policies to cope with this budding issue in organisation.
- To communicate and engage with the employees regarding this issue, and raising awareness in the way of working with trade unions or other related aspects.
- To undertake effective Management Standards or other outlook towards identifying the level of stress in the organisation and what solutions can be implemented to improve from the current situation.
- To work with other departments of the organisation, including Health and Safety, in formulating and implementing solutions that have been identified by the employees.
- To review and monitor stress management solutions, along with procedures and policies.
- To work with other bodies and support line managers to prevent and manage employees experiencing stress, and to help them return to work.
- To identify and develop other initiatives and policies that can promote well-being and health of the employees.

¹⁹ Balaji, R. (2014) Role of Human Resource Manager in Managing Stress of Employees in Manufacturing Concerns. International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology. Volume 3, Issue 4,

²⁰ Balaji, R. (2014) Role of Human Resource Manager in Managing Stress of Employees in Manufacturing Concerns. International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology. Volume 3, Issue 4,

| Don't stress - keep calm |

Today companies realise that they have a responsibility to look after the wellness of their employees and especially when it comes to stress factors. As a result, Employee Wellness Programmes (EWP) are becoming more common. Large companies such as Eskom, Transnet and Pick 'n Pay are even employing specialised employee assistance practitioners to give employees the support they need to deal with their problems. An example of this is the implementation of coaching programmes that are becoming a very strong trend to assist in the area of stress, and the importance of employees receiving the benefit of a coach.

Moral concerns aside – and one certainly does have a moral responsibility, especially with regard to any problems the organisation has in fact caused – employees who remain well are more likely to remain satisfied, and keeping them well removes unnecessary obstacles to employee performance. Healthy employees make healthy companies, and healthy companies, in turn, are more likely to make healthy profits. The wellbeing of the employees integrates with the business strategy through their performance to achieve maximum benefit for all. Companies that institute EWPs will benefit from:

- Improved employee morale and therefore better performance.
- More employee loyalty because the employer is seen as a caring company.
- Improved quality and productivity.
- Reduced sick leave and absenteeism.
- Lower labour turnover.
- Fewer injuries.
- Reduced use of health benefits.
- Control of health insurance.
- Reduced workers' compensation.

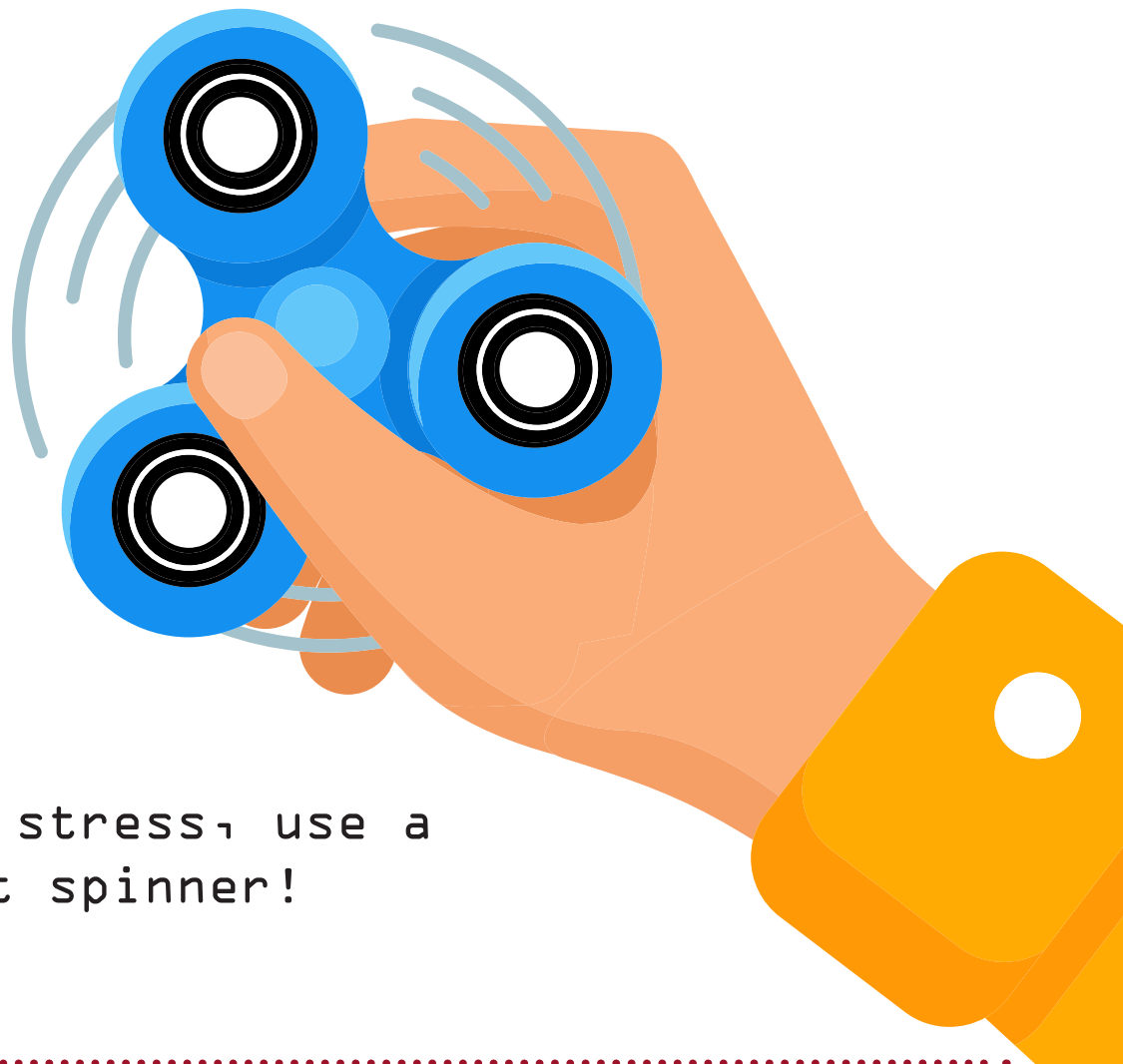
An employee's state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing is not merely the absence of diseases and stress, but the presence of good support programmes to deal with symptoms of stress before it starts impacting the physical, mental and social wellbeing of the employee. Stress is a reality and employers need to be aware of the challenges it poses on their workforce.

Progressive companies realise the need for employee wellness programmes that assist in the management of stress. They understand the simple truth that happy workers are good workers and vice versa. To quote one of the world's greatest CEOs, Jack Welch: "People first, strategy and everything else next." Take care of your employees, find the right programmes that assist them with their stress, and keep calm - don't stress!



SABPP™
SA BOARD FOR
PEOPLE PRACTICES
Setting HR standards

**KEEP
CALM
AND
DON'T
STRESS**



Don't stress, use a
fidget spinner!

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FACT SHEET

DATE	NUMBER	SUBJECT
2013		
February	1	GAINING HR QUALIFICATIONS
March	2	ETHICS, FRAUD AND CORRUPTION
April	3	NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN
May	4	BARGAINING COUNCILS
June	5	EMPLOYMENT EQUITY
July	6	HR COMPETENCIES
August	7	HR MANAGEMENT STANDARDS
September	8	PAY EQUITY
October	9	COACHING AND MENTORING
November	10	HIV/AIDS IN THE WORKPLACE
2014		
February	1	EMPLOYING FIRST-TIME JOB MARKET ENTRANTS
March	2	PROTECTION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION ACT
April	3	QUALITY COUNCIL FOR TRADES AND OCCUPATIONS
May	4	WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING
June	5	RECRUITMENT - SCREENING OF CANDIDATES
July	6	HR RISK MANAGEMENT
August	7	BASIC HR REPORTING (1)
September	8	BASIC HR REPORTING (2)
October	9	EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
November	10	SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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DATE	NUMBER	SUBJECT
2015		
February	1	AMENDMENTS TO LABOUR LEGISLATION 2014
March	2	THE REVISED BROAD-BASED BLACK ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT CODES OF GOOD PRACTICE
April	3	LESSONS LEARNED FOR EMPLOYERS FROM CCMA CASES
May	4	EMPLOYEE WELLNESS SCREENING
June	5	CHANGING THE EMPLOYMENT EQUITY LANDSCAPE
July	6	EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING
August	7	DEPRESSION IN THE WORKPLACE
September	8	EMPLOYEE WELLNESS
October	9	EQUAL PAY AUDITS
November	10	BASICS OF EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION
2016		
February	1	PRODUCTIVITY BASICS
March	2	SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT
April	3	TALENT MANAGEMENT: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE
May	4	BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITIES
June	5	CHANGE MANAGEMENT
July	6	INNOVATION IN HR
August	7	HR TECHNOLOGY
September	8	HR IN BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY
October	9	THE LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT LANDSCAPE IN SA
November	10	TOWARDS A CODETERMINATION MODEL FOR SOUTH AFRICA

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DATE	NUMBER	SUBJECT
2017		
February	1	MODERN SLAVERY
March	2	PENSION LAW FOR EMPLOYERS
April	3	THE GAME CHANGER: ROLE OF HR
May	4	HR GOVERNANCE
June	5	INTEGRATING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, EMPLOYMENT EQUITY AND B-BBEE TRANSFORMATION
July	6	STRESS MANAGEMENT

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