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Media Release for immediate use – Managing Workplace Stress - Do You Fight or Flight?

From: NZ Register of Exercise Professionals

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## Managing Workplace Stress - Do You Fight or Flight?

One of the benefits of being in the modern world is that on an average day, we do not need to outrun an animal larger than us who is planning to eat us for dinner.

However our bodies still retain a stress response mechanism called the fight or flight response, which is a physiological reaction that occurs in response to a perceived harmful event, attack, or threat to survival.

The trouble is the stress we are often responding to today is not the type of stress we can literally run from, so we get stressed and stay that way. Workplace stress is an example of this in action, with office workers who are often already facing the negative effects of a sedentary lifestyle having elevated stress levels from work related issues.

The problem of workplace stress is not new; in fact it's an area of concern that organisations here and across the world have been investigating over the last few years. While quitting your desk job and spending time engaged in a work free and therefore less stressful life may not be realistic for most, managing workplace stress is something achievable for almost everyone.

One of the consistent messages around managing stress is the contribution physical activity can make.

While exercise professionals always champion the benefits of exercise, they are not alone with the NZ Heart Foundation telling us that - *“any type of exercise releases feel-good chemicals into the body, helps you sleep better, and contributes to your overall physical health, making you better able to cope with difficulties”*.

The Mental Health Foundation keeps it simple when they offer advice for managing stress - *“make some time for exercise”*.

There is no denying it that not only does regular exercise and physical activity do wonders for your health and your waistline, it's benefits carry over into your working life too.

Work Safe New Zealand is clear when it comes to workplace stress and the need for workplaces to consider its impact on staff. Employers can face fines for breaches of obligations under the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 if they fail to adequately address workplace stress. With the research showing exercise contributes to stress management, and workplaces obligated to reduce stress, it makes sense that employers should encourage staff to get active.

What has been lacking until now is a clear incentive and mechanism for employers to manage the costs of investing in employees' health, as the fringe benefit tax that stress reducing exercise programmes attracted, created a financial disincentive. It is great news then that Exercise New Zealand has endorsed a new stress management programme for workplaces (called SMEAEP) that uses REPs Registered Exercise Professionals and facilities to improve the health, and reduce the stress levels of employees.

**It is as simple as three easy steps:**

1. Decide as an employer you want to contribute to the health and wellbeing of your employees.
2. Select a local REPs Registered Exercise Professional who is endorsed to run the programme and sign up with them.
3. Claim the cost of the programme as an FBT exempt business expense.

So for the over 60% of businesses that considered improving employee well being to have some level of priority over the next 12 months (as reported in a recent 'wellness in the workplace' study), the time is right for investing in staff stress management through exercise.

**References:**

<http://www.heartfoundation.org.nz/healthy-living/managing-stress>

[http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/file/downloads/pdf/file\\_89.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/file/downloads/pdf/file_89.pdf)

<http://www.dol.govt.nz/er/services/law/case/themes/2009-12-workplace-stress.asp>

[http://www.businessnz.org.nz/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/74615/Wellness-in-the-Workplace-Survey-2013-Report.pdf](http://www.businessnz.org.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/74615/Wellness-in-the-Workplace-Survey-2013-Report.pdf)

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**Who is the NZ Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs)?**

REPs is an independent non profit organisation administrating the New Zealand exercise professionals register to ensure that the public receive safe and effective exercise advice. Using REPs Registered Exercise Professionals is the "Warrant of Fitness Check" that exercise professionals and facilities meet New Zealand and internationally benchmarked standards to deliver exercise advice and instruction. REPs is affiliated globally to other national exercise professional registers representing over 70,000 exercise professionals through the International Confederation of Registers for Exercise Professionals (ICREPs) - [www.icreps.org](http://www.icreps.org).

