



The Importance of Managing Stress in the Workplace

While the problem of workplace stress is not new, awareness of managing it, and the responsibility that employers play, has gained traction in recent years.

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act, employers have an obligation to try to prevent and reduce work related harm amongst their staff. This includes the obvious things like safety around dangerous equipment, but also includes mental or physical ill health due to less measurable criteria such as workplace stress.

One of the consistent messages around managing stress is the contribution physical activity can make. It doesn't help when a workplace is desk or office based, and there is little room for movement and physical activity, which is one of our bodies way of dealing with the hormone response caused by stress.

Richard Ellis, an Auckland based REPs registered personal trainer who works with corporate health and exercise states "*sitting has been coined the new smoking, but in fact it's not just sitting that is the issue, it's a lack of movement that really is the problem*".

As most people are aware, exercise and lifestyle changes can play a huge role in managing stress levels. Adopting an effective programme and culture of exercise and activity can therefore result in a win/win situation for both employees and the business they work for, and it's not just about the way an office is set up. Richard mentions "*when people sit for a number of hours at work, it's the duration that is the real problem. If people are up and about often enough during their day, then some of the negative health implications associated with a sedentary life can be mitigated to a certain extent*". He suggests that while a standing desk may go some way to assisting with this inactivity, the key is more structured movement, and finding a way to incorporate this into the everyday work life, and this will reap the health rewards.

The Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment is very clear when it comes to workplace stress and the need for workplaces to consider the impact on staff. Employers can face fines for breaches of their obligations under the law if they fail to adequately address workplace stress. With the research showing exercise contributes significantly to the management of workplace stress, and workplaces obligated to reduce stress, it makes sense that employers should encourage staff to get physically active.

One of the issues in workplace stress management is that while many employers can see the benefits, they have lacked the resources or the incentive to take the step to get their team healthy.

Richard believes one of the key issues facing the decision makers wanting to implement a programme in their work place is whether there will be a return on investment. Fortunately, in 2014 The Exercise Association of New Zealand introduced an endorsed stress management programme for workplaces to improve the health, and reduce the stress levels of employees.

The Stress Management Exercise Association Endorsed Programme (SMEAEP) requires exercise professionals delivering the programme to meet certain criteria which then allows them to offer the programme to businesses for a fee, that is not subject to Fringe Benefit Tax (FBT).

For the workplace and stressed workforce, this has a couple of key benefits. Firstly it reduces the cost of providing stress management to the employer. And secondly, it gives workplaces an assurance that the money they do invest in workplace stress management is going to result in a programme designed and implemented by exercise professionals who are qualified and experienced to achieve the results desired.

For more information: <http://www.stressmanagementexercise.co.nz>

Contact details for further information about the exercise industry:

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NZ Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs) - Independent not for profit quality mark of exercise professionals and facilities. 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 safe exercise advice and instruction. REPs is affiliated globally to other national exercise professional registers representing over 210,000 exercise professionals through the International Confederation of Registers for Exercise Professionals (ICREPs) - www.icreps.org

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Exercise Association of New Zealand - Not for profit exercise industry representative organisation. Its *mission is to proactively support a sustainable exercise and fitness industry in New Zealand by growing participation in structured exercise through advocacy, information and industry standards.*

