



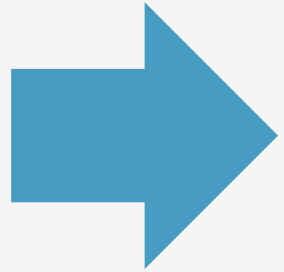
# Tackling workplace stress

Presented by Hugh Robertson TUC

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- 1 Chat with other attendees

Say something nice



- 2 Ask a question below this video

Ask a question or suggest a topic



## Scale of the problem

- HSE accepts that over **400,000 people** are suffering from stress related illness, either caused or made worse by work.
- Biggest issue for health and safety representatives.
- Responsible for **a third of work-related sickness absence.**

## Not a minor condition

- Main illnesses are **depression and anxiety** but can also be hypertension, heart disease, eczema, IBS, and a range of other conditions.
- Most stress related absence is long term (more than a week)
- Also a link with other illnesses, in particular **musculoskeletal disorders** such as back pain and WURLD.

# What causes stress 1?

- **Demands:** Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs.
- **Control:** Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work.
- **Support:** Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors.

## What causes stress 2?

- **Relationships:** Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work.
- **Role:** Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities.
- **Change:** Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change.

## How do we remove it?

Employers often claim they cannot separate work-related stress from other stresses and so it is “different”.

- Nonsense. They can deal with those that are work-related regardless.
- Do not have to wait for people to become ill and then try to work out if it is caused by work.

## How do we remove it?

Should remove or reduce the causes of stress by controlling these six factors.

HSE has developed **standards to help employers** - based on risk assessment and prevention.

TUC supports these (joint HSE/TUC guide on TUC site).

HSE management standards have been around for 10 years.



## Yet ten years on?

HSE – Oct 2014 – “The rates of work-related stress, depression or anxiety, for both total and new cases, have remained broadly flat for more than a decade”.

Working days lost to stress per worker showed a generally downward trend up to around 2009/10; since then the rate has been broadly flat and has now started going up.

Yet sickness absence as a whole has continued its downward trend.

Have 10 years of stress management standards made no difference?

# Why no difference?

- Employers have ignored the standards.
- HSE not promoting them.
- Standards not updated.
- No research into effectiveness – but those who have used them have reported considerable success.
- However, HSE have restarted work on stress.

# Two main reasons for lack of progress

- The HSE does not enforce stress.
- It costs money to reduce or remove stress.

# Tackling stress

- Remove the causes – overwork, demands, bad line management etc.
- May mean increased staffing levels or major structural changes.
- No different to reducing chemical or similar risks in manufacturing.
- Yet management often simply refuse to take action because it is too expensive or too difficult.
- No repercussions when an employer ignores legal obligations.

# Enforcement

- Employers have a **duty to risk assess for stress** under the Management regulations and if there is a risk to the worker.
- Must remove or reduce the hazard caused by stress “as far as reasonably practical”.
- HSE don’t prosecute – say “*HSE’s approach is not enforcement led*”.
- Can issue improvement notice.
- None issued for stress in past 5 years.

# What employers do

Instead of removing the causes of stress employers concentrate on changing the worker.

Include:

- Stress management
- Resilience training
- Well-Being Programmes.

# Employers focus on the individual

- Unions have no problem with employers supporting those with stress-related illnesses – but **not as an alternative to prevention**.
- Often just access to a EAP, 6 sessions of CPT or “stress awareness training”
- Usually run by private providers or consultants.
- Do not reduce the number of incidents of stress within a workplace, and rarely linked with prevention or the risk assessment process.

# Resilience

- New Kid on the block
- Attempts to “harden us to stress”
- No evidence that it has any scientific basis.
- Completely against the principles of prevention required in law.
- Growing as more consultants peddle it (often replacing NLP).



# Well-being

- The new buzzword for selling stress management programmes
- Found in every workplace – but not just workplaces.
- Has become a brand, used to sell anything from yogurt to pillows.

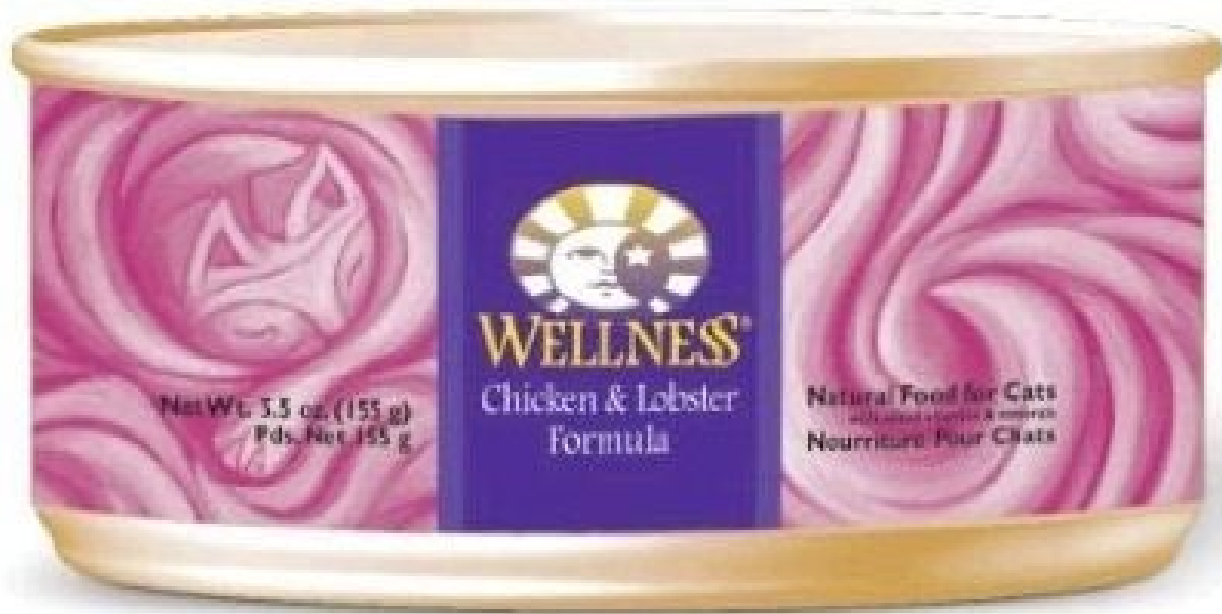


# TWININGS

WELL BEING  
TEA GIFT BAGS

SPECIAL  
OFFERS










# Well-being

- Means all things to all people.
- Well-being initiatives range from on-site massage to subsidised gym membership.
- Members often like them.
- Unions can support them and be involved.

# Well-being

- They focus on the individual, not the problem.
- No evidence base they have any effect on stress.
- If work makes people ill, change the workplace, not the workers.
- Not a substitute for stress prevention!





“Those who promote well-being in the workplace should not allow it to be confused with health and safety requirements”

Temple review 2013.

## What unions can do

- ✓ **Raise awareness** of stress as an issue and help break down the stigmas around reporting or discussing it.
- ✓ **Survey your members**, jointly with the employer or separately.
- ✓ **Ask management for a plan** of how they will tackle it, preferably using the stress management standards.
- ✓ If they refuse? Review risk assessments and **challenge them**.
- ✓ **Support employees** who experience a stress related illness.

# Summary

- ✓ Stress is no different to other hazards. It must be removed or controlled through **risk assessment and prevention**.
- ✓ Employers need to take action, but real solution is **good jobs**, with control, respect at work, security and decent pay.
- ✓ HSE and Local authority enforcers should **prioritise stress prevention** and **prosecute employers** who do not comply with legal obligations.
- ✓ Unions must work with employers to **ensure that there is support for members** who are made ill as a result of stress.