

Make a resolution to reduce stress in the workplace

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As most of the New Zealand workforce returns relaxed and refreshed after the summer holiday, the Mental Health Foundation encourages employers to make it a priority to look after the mental health of their staff throughout 2008 and beyond.

Judi Clements, Chief Executive of the Mental Health Foundation says: "The Foundation wants employers to make a New Year's resolution to reduce stress and make their workplaces more mentally healthy.

"Employers need to realise that they can't ignore the issue of mental health and stress in the workplace. Stressful work environments can lead to poor mental health, and increase the chance of a person developing depression or anxiety.

"It is essential for employers and managers to put support structures in place to assist employees in their day-to-day work environment. A positive, mentally healthy workplace can and does prevent employees from experiencing episodes of anxiety or depression, which in turn reduces the future burden on health services."

Meanwhile, it's not just employers that can make a difference to workplace mental health. Working Well, a Mental Health Foundation programme that aims to help create mentally healthy workplaces offers the following advice to help people ease the back-to-work blues and maintain wellbeing in the workplace throughout the year:

- Alleviate back-to-work blues by planning your next break!
- If you are stressed or unhappy with aspects of your job, don't bottle things up. Speak to your manager, supervisor or a colleague.
- Create a harmonious work environment – organise your workspace, clear away clutter, have flowers or photos of family or friends on your desk.
- Reduce day-to-day stress – get organised and break projects into small manageable steps.
- Take a break from your desk – go for a short walk or chat with your colleagues.

- Think about your personal growth – Do you have any skills that you would like to develop further? Why not enroll in a learning course this year. It doesn't even have to be work related!

Back-to-work blues can evolve in many forms. Some people feel disorientated and have a go slow attitude, while some have little interest in their work. On top of that you may feel irritable, find yourself in a bad mood or even suffer with headaches.

While it's not unusual to feel blue when you first get back to work, it's not usual for this feeling to continue. If you do continue to feel this way for more than two weeks and you constantly feel down and tearful for no apparent reason, please speak to someone you trust or see your GP for help. You can also phone the following numbers for advice:

- Lifeline – 0800 543 354
- Depression support line – 0800 111 757

Or visit www.mentalhealth.org.nz, www.thelowdown.co.nz, or www.depression.org.nz

ENDS

For more information about workplace stress:

Melchor, M and others (2007) 'Work stress precipitates depression and anxiety in young, working women and men' in *Psychological Medicine*. Vol: 37. (NZ based research)

Stress and how to handle it – A Mental Health Foundation publication

http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/resources/stress_v3_indd_final.pdf

OSH – Healthy Work: Managing stress in the workplace

<http://www.osh.govt.nz/order/catalogue/stress/managestress.pdf>

Promoting mental wellbeing in the workplace: A British case study (2003)

<http://www.workingwell.co.nz/resources/MMurray%20Ramon.pdf>

Media enquiries to:

Hayley Callard

Senior Communication Officer

Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand

09 300 7028 or 021 918 220