



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

Work Pressure Guide

staff.uva.nl/workload

We are 

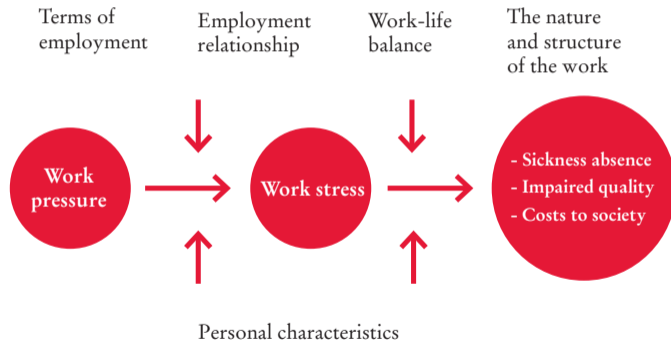
Why this guide?

According to TNO (the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research), one in six employees in the Netherlands are experiencing symptoms of burnout. Spotting the signs of burnout at an early stage and a willingness to discuss the issue are vital to the prevention and management of excessive workloads at the UvA. This Work Pressure Guide is a resource that will allow you, in your capacity as a supervisor, to spot the signs of an excessive workload in your team at an early stage, to bring up the subject and act on it.

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What is work pressure?



An employee can experience work pressure when the requirements set by the work to an employee (the “job requirements”) are not in balance with the options that this employee has to do that work well (the “control options”).

The definition of work stress is ‘stress-related complaints caused by work’.

How to increase job satisfaction?

1. Allow your employees some freedom with regard to how they perform their work.
2. Support your employees by displaying genuine attention and empathy.
3. Show your appreciation for the work your employees perform.
4. Offer flexible working hours where possible.
5. Make sure the amount of work to be done is in line with your employees' abilities and schedules.
6. Compliment your employees.
7. Make sure you are assigning the right jobs to the right people.
8. Invest in your employees' strengths.
9. Celebrate success stories and make sure that results obtained and efforts made are noted.
10. When an employee says 'no', respect that decision and ask why.

How can I manage work pressure?

Step 1: Does my employee experience work pressure?

Recognise the symptoms

Decide whether action is required

Consult your employee and/or team on your plans

Step 2: What causes work pressure?

Determine the causes

Decide which aspect you are going to focus on

Step 3: What actions can we take?

Collect possible solutions

Decide what kinds of actions you wish to take

Training courses & tools

Recognising the signs	What causes work pressure?	What actions can we take? -		
		Individual courses	Dealing with workstress	Teamtraining
Excessive workload checklist (<i>in Dutch</i>)	Gespreksleidraad (<i>in Dutch</i>)	Timemanagement	Coach supplied by the Occupational Health and Safety Service	Self-management for teams
Stresscheck+	Koerskaart	Effective meetings		Effective Meetings for teams
Preventative consultation		Time management for PhDs	Walking coach	
Training on recognizing work pressure		Jobcraften (<i>in Dutch</i>)	Mindful2Work	
		Pear Review Training	Online courses	

Signs of work pressure

Everyone deals with stress in a different way. As a supervisor, you want to focus on whether a person's behaviour is changing. There are signs that may point to an employee suffering too much stress, which may give you a reason to broach the subject with that employee. Check out the checklist on the next page.

Signs of work pressure - a checklist

Physical symptoms

- ☐ elevated blood pressure
- ☐ elevated heart rate
- ☐ tense muscles
- ☐ gastrointestinal complaints
- ☐ fatigue
- ☐ headache
- ☐ back pain
- ☐ sleep problems

Emotional symptoms

- ☐ irritable
- ☐ emotional
- ☐ restless
- ☐ tense
- ☐ anxious
- ☐ apathetic
- ☐ careless
- ☐ sense of worthlessness

Behavioural changes

- ☐ adopting an unhealthy lifestyle (smoking, drinking)
- ☐ avoiding social contact
- ☐ becoming less creative
- ☐ displaying risky behaviour
- ☐ working overtime or doing so more frequently
- ☐ an inability to relax
- ☐ complaining more often; adopting a cynical attitude

Cognitive issues

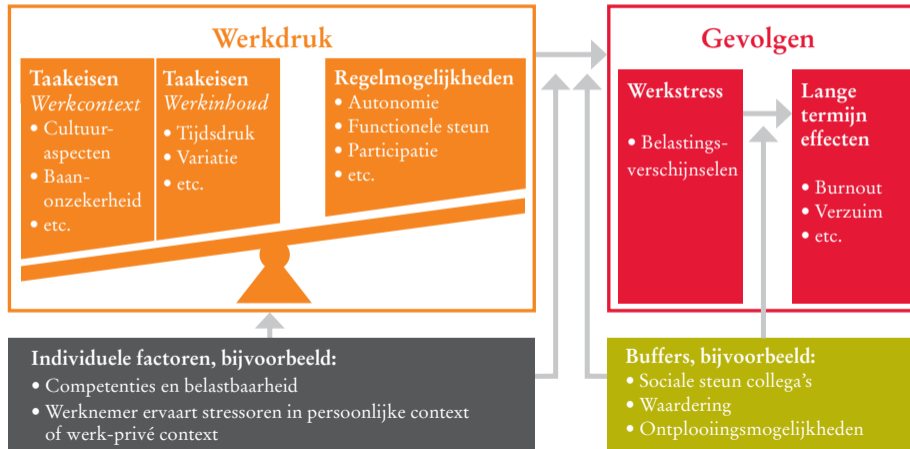
- ☐ poorly functioning memory
- ☐ difficulty focusing
- ☐ difficulty planning things
- ☐ inability to multi-task
- ☐ difficulty prioritising
- ☐ an inability to make decisions
- ☐ being less efficient at work

Recognising work pressure – tips

There are several signs that your team members may be experiencing a heavy workload.

- *Two checklists* (one for individuals and one for teams) can be found on staff.uva.nl/workload. Please use them to recognise the symptoms.
- You could refer your employees to the occupational physician's *preventative consultation* if they have any questions or concerns about their health as related to their work.
- The Occupational Health and Safety Service also offers a *training session for teams on recognising work pressure*.
- Your employee can have the Occupational Health and Safety Service perform a *Stresscheck+ examination*. This will allow your employee to discuss matters with an occupational physician, on the basis of a questionnaire and a health check-up.

What causes work pressure?



Check out
the work pressure
flowchart in TNO's
werkdrukwegwijzer
on www.tno.nl
(in Dutch).

How to bring up the issue

It is not easy to broach the subject of work stress. It is a sensitive and rather personal subject. Consult the three steps outlined on the next page to learn how to have that conversation in a respectful and constructive manner. Be aware that a good relationship with your employee forms the basis for a proper conversation. Both of you must continually seek to build and maintain that relationship.

Do's

- Listen, summarise, ask more questions.
- Take a time-out and schedule a follow-up appointment.
- Take the employee's problem seriously.
- Give your employee some personal attention.
- Refer back to previous conversations (show that you care).
- Set the right example.

Don'ts

- Finish employee's sentences and diagnose issues for them.
- Focus on job-related aspects.
- Volunteer all sorts of solutions right from the start.

A conversation in three steps

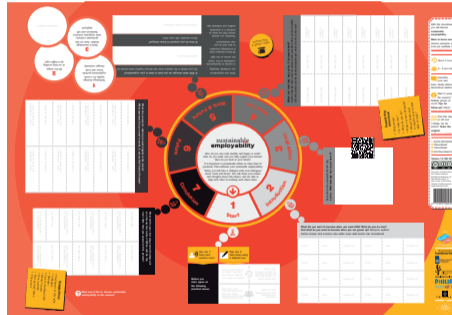
1. Create a situation in which you can bring up the subject. For instance, ask how your employee felt about a certain event: how was your weekend? How was the meeting? How are you feeling?

2. Do not discuss the nature of the work, but rather focus on the employee's well-being. For instance, when your employee brings up a work-related aspect of their job, make sure you ask a question that is specifically about them rather than the job.

3. Be open, tell your employee what you've noticed.

- Identify a type of behaviour: I have noticed that...
- Say how this affects you: this worries me, because...
- Maintain silences: give your conversation partner enough time to respond. Genuinely listen to the answer and ask more questions about it, using open-ended questions. Do not volunteer any solutions at this point.
- If your employee does not say anything of their own accord, ask another question, or say something.
- For example 'how do you yourself feel about it?'
'Would you like to discuss this some other time?'
'Shall we schedule a meeting?'

Starting the conversation - tools



*'Koerskaart' for team conversations
(available in Dutch and English)*

Thema 1:
Oorzaken van werkstress

Hoofdvragen
Wanneer is er voor jou sprake van werkstress?
Heb je hier wel eens mee te maken?

Subvragen

- Welke situaties op het werk veroorzaken bij jou stress?
- Welke dingen in het werk kosten je veel energie? Waardoor komt dat?
- Bij welke taken lukt het je niet om het werk goed te doen?
- Welke belemmeringen ervaar je in het werk?
- Wat moet in de werksituatie echt verbeterd worden?

Toelichting

Werkstress kan verschillende oorzaken hebben. Het gaat vaak om dingen in je werk die veel energie kosten. Denk hierbij bijvoorbeeld aan een hoge werkdruk, lange werktijden, gebruiksvriendelijke systemen of ongewenst gedrag. Sommige factoren kunnen van collega's komen, maar dikwijls ook van klanten. Werkstress kan ook veroorzaakt worden door een tekort aan dingen die juist energie opleveren. Denk daarbij bijvoorbeeld aan vormen van sociale steun (van je leidinggevende of collega's), autonomie (verantwoordelijkheid en regelruimte) en groei- en ontwikkelingsmogelijkheden binnen je werk. Deze buffers zorgen ervoor dat je juist wat meer kan hebben als het gaat om dingen die energie kosten.

*'Gespreksleidraad' for conversations
with individual employees
(in Dutch)*

Download the
'gespreksleidraad' and
the 'koerskaart' at
[medewerker.uva.nl/
werkdruk](http://medewerker.uva.nl/werkdruk)

Tools to manage work pressure

Since there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to prevent work pressure, there are several types of training available for both individual employees and teams to manage work pressure symptoms:

If the work pressure is caused by the way in which the employee organises their work, the following courses may be useful:

- Time Management
- New light on emailing
- Time Management training course for PhD candidates
- New light on meetings
- Effective Meetings training course
- Introduction to Job-crafting workshop
- Peer Review Training in organizational changes

If the work pressure is caused by the way in which the work is organised within a team, or by the way in which the team members collaborate and/or communicate, the following courses may be useful:

- Self-management for teams
- Effective Meetings for teams

New light on emailing

- Emails should be used to share brief information or to ask a question, but not for long ‘letters’, discussions or the addressing of sensitive issues or complex problems.
- Send fewer emails. Receiving fewer emails begins by sending fewer emails.
- Carefully select who you include in your distribution list (including in the cc): do all these people really need to read the email?
- Schedule time in your diary for handling emails, e.g. at one or two specific times during the day. This process will enable you to prevent emails from interrupting your work constantly throughout the day.
- Read your emails when it suits you, not when the sender expects you to read them. You can also turn off your email notifications between specific times.

For more tips on emailing, go to ‘what you can do together’ on *staff.uva.nl/workload*.

New light on meetings

- Provide clarity: do the meeting and the agenda items have a clear purpose?
- Who is authorised to make decisions on which topics together with which parties?
- Be mindful of people's time: do all people you wish to invite really need to stick around for all the items on the agenda?
- Establish the proper preconditions: meetings are more effective when all the participants are well prepared.
- Effective meetings result in decisions/conclusions at the close of the consultation that have been noted down in accordance with SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound).

For more tips on more effective meetings, go to 'what you can do together' on *staff.uva.nl/workload*.

Dealing with work stress

If your employee experiences a lot of work pressure and does not know how to restore their life-work balance, you may wish to suggest the following options:

Coach supplied by the Occupational Health and Safety Service: the employee will have up to five 45-minute sessions with a coach to see how their work-related stress can be relieved.

Walking coach: walking helps you get some exercise, not just physically, but also psychologically. In addition, walking will clear your mind, which may make it easier for a person to have a productive conversation with a coach.

Mindful2Work: a type of training that combines active and conscious exercise, yoga and mindfulness. After participating in this training course, employees will experience a sharp decrease in their work stress, anxiety, depression and fatigue, as well as an increase in positive feelings such as motivation, energy and mental and physical fitness.

For the complete and current range of training and coaching options, go to *staff.uva.nl/workload*.

Online Courses

All UvA employees have free and unlimited access to the Goodhabitz digital learning environment. Among other things, Goodhabitz offers training courses that can help people who are experiencing an excessive workload, such as:

- A Smarter Way to Work with Outlook 2010
- Learn how to use feedback to improve the work atmosphere and increase productivity
- Learn how to make meetings shorter, smarter and, most of all, more exciting
- Expectation management
- Mindfulness

Go to www.goodhabitz.com for a complete overview of the online training courses.

Support

To whom can you turn for more advice or help?

If you have any questions or concerns about work pressure or about your employees, please see your faculty or unit's HR adviser. Every situation is unique, so try to find an appropriate solution together.

Since there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to an excessive workload, the UvA is focusing on various types of measures to be implemented in several different fields. We identify causes, provide guidelines to help people achieve more balance in their work, encourage the reduction of administrative complexity and help to identify and acknowledge a high level of work pressure. If you have any questions or if you would like to receive more information, send an email to gripopwerkdruk@uva.nl.

Colophon

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For more
information, see
*[staff.uva.nl/
workload](http://staff.uva.nl/workload)*

This UvA Work Pressure Guide is drawn up by the 'Managing your workload' programme. It was inspired by the University of Twente's Werk pressure guide and TNO's Werkdruk-wegwijzer.