**Workplace stressors have toxic effects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What we feel right away is ...</th>
<th>What's going on? Short-term stress effects include ..</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dry mouth, difficulty swallowing</td>
<td>Body fluids such as saliva are redirected into the bloodstream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of breath or short, shallow breathing</td>
<td>Airways widen to bring in more oxygen/energy for muscles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heart races</td>
<td>Blood pressure and heart rate increase to send oxygen/energy to muscles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach feels “funny” (butterflies, knots)</td>
<td>Liver releases stored energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweaty</td>
<td>Skin sweats to cool hot working muscle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense, achy, muscle pain, “shaky” feeling</td>
<td>Bloodstream gets more cholesterol, fatty acids and sugar for extra energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pins and needles</td>
<td>Protein production decreases, muscle tissue slowly breaks down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscles tense up</td>
<td>Calcium discharges from tense muscles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from *The anti-stress guide* by the Hospital Employees Union (2000). Available by going to [www.heu.org](http://www.heu.org) > for members > special reports.
**Strain (long-term) physical effects include ...**

- Sleep disorders, insomnia, fatigue, exhaustion
- Headaches, tension, grinding teeth
- Cardiovascular problems (e.g. high blood pressure, heart attacks, other heart and circulation system changes)
- Chest pains/problems
- Immune system problems which then make it easier to get sick
- Asthma
- Digestive system problems (e.g. spastic colon, ulcers, impaired digestion, irritable bowel syndrome); weight gain or loss
- Diabetes
- Menstrual disorders
- Sexual dysfunction
- Joint and muscle pains; arthritis
- Burnout

**Strain (long-term) non-physical effects include ...**

- Anxiety, increased tension and fearfulness
- Feeling apathetic, low self-worth, blaming ourselves for our stressed state
- Social isolation, withdrawal at home and work, stop participation in family, sports and community activities
- Inability to concentrate and finish tasks
- Mistrust, blaming others (including “the union”), paranoia
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Conflict with family and friends (sometimes violent), fights with co-workers and supervisors
- Anger, frustration, envy
- Depression, mood changes, constant negativity
- Suicidal thoughts
- Over-reaction, irrational behaviour
- Job dissatisfaction

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