

## **Stress and Vulnerability to Substance Abuse and Suicide**

### **What is stress?**

- Stress responses help your body adjust to new situations. Stress can be positive, keeping us alert, motivated and ready to avoid danger.
- Stress becomes a problem when stressors continue without relief or periods of relaxation.
- Chronic Stress leads to an excess production of cortisol—aka the stress hormone.
- Symptoms include: fast heartbeat, sweating, racing thoughts, poor sleep, memory challenges, headaches, possible immune system challenges. .
- Chronic stress can make you feel sick and unwell.
- Chronic stress increases likelihood that a predisposition becomes a disease, such as **mental illness or addiction**.
- Chronic stress can make bad situations worse.

### **Problems with Chronic Stress**

- Immunosuppression, heightened inflammation-being more prone to disease
- Metabolic and cardiovascular issues
- Issues with digestion and malnutrition
- Stunted growth and repair
- Negative affect, cognitive impairment, accelerated aging, suicide risk

### **Suicide and Stress**

- 83% of construction workers experience a mental health issue
- The CDC reports that builders' and construction industries are especially vulnerable to depression, substance abuse and suicide.
- Often the first signs of declining mental health are increased irritability or anger, increased substance use and trouble sleeping.

### **Know the Suicide Warning Signs**

- Talking about wanting to die
- Talking about hopelessness, purposelessness
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Disrupted sleep
- Withdrawing from friends, family, colleagues
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge; increased conflict at work
- Extreme mood swings

**People with chronic stress may try to manage it with unhealthy behaviors which create further problems including:**

- Drinking alcohol too much or too often.
- Gambling.
- Overeating or developing an eating disorder.
- Participating compulsively in sex, shopping or internet browsing.
- Smoking.
- Using drugs.

### Substance Use Facts in the Trades:

- 15% of all construction workers in the US have a substance abuse disorder, compared to 8.6% of the general adult population.
- 12% have an alcohol use disorder compared to 7.5% nationally
- 16.5% of construction workers reported heavy alcohol consumption in the past month, twice the average of full time workers
- 11.6% of construction workers reported illicit drug use within the past month
- Heavy drinking is consuming 15 or more drinks weekly. Binge drinking is consuming 5 or more drinks in one sitting.
- Consuming substances in larger amounts, greater frequency, and longer duration increases risk for addiction.
- Stress increases vulnerability to addiction.

### What are some strategies for stress relief?

- You can't avoid stress, but you can stop it from becoming overwhelming by practicing some daily strategies.
- Exercise when you feel symptoms of stress coming on. Even a short walk can boost your mood.
- At the end of each day, take a moment to think about what you've accomplished — not what you didn't get done.
- Set goals for your day, week and month. Narrowing your view will help you feel more in control of the moment and long-term tasks.
- Consider talking to a therapist or your healthcare provider about your worries.

### Many daily strategies can help you keep stress at bay:

- Try relaxation activities, such as meditation, yoga, tai chi, breathing exercises and muscle relaxation. Programs are available online, in smartphone apps, and at many gyms and community centers.
- Take good care of your body each day. Eating right, exercising and getting enough sleep help your body handle stress much better.
- Stay positive and practice gratitude, acknowledging the good parts of your day or life.
- Remind yourself that the stress of work is temporary and situational. This won't last forever.
- Accept that you can't control everything. Find ways to let go of worry about situations you cannot change.
- Learn to say "no" to additional responsibilities when you are too busy or stressed.
- Decide what must get done now and what can wait.
- Stay connected with people who keep you calm, make you happy, provide emotional support and help you with practical things. A friend, family member or neighbor can become a good listener or share responsibilities so that stress doesn't become overwhelming.
- Cut down on smoking and drinking. While alcohol and tobacco have had a reputation for helping you relax, they actually can make you **more anxious** in the long run.
- Get a good night's sleep. You may need to cut down on caffeine during the day and screen time at night.

Are you unsure of what you are feeling? Start with TEAM. TEAM is part of the union membership benefits. TEAM services are provided to you and your household at no additional cost to you. TEAM's trained counselors can help you assess for symptoms and plan next steps.



France Place: 3601 Minnesota Drive - Suite 400 | Edina, MN 55435

651.642.0182 | 800.634.7710