



April is Stress Awareness Month

We cannot afford to ignore the statistics.

Between 53% and 66% of the twenty thousand seafarers surveyed are highly stressed

& on average seafarers score just below cut off point for high stress

(Marine Benefits, 2022)

It is critical that the industry starts to pay attention to stress. Stress contributes to heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, anxiety, fatigue, poor concentration, frequent minor illness, ulcers, gastrointestinal problems... the list goes on.

Stress is not a mental health problem. Stress is normal. **BUT** prolonged and or repeated stress contributes to both mental and physical health problems. The time to change study, found that 66% of people with a diagnosable mental health problem say that work related stress contributed to it. About 50% of people who are highly stressed also struggle with depression and about 60% with anxiety. The marine benefits study showed 28% of seafarers are struggling with a diagnosable level of depression and 24% a diagnosable level of anxiety. The ITF Seafarer's Trust & Yale University Study conducted in 2019 says much the same. Simple logic would tell us:

IF:

- ✓ we want to prevent mental health problems on board.
- ✓ we want to prevent physical health problem on board.
- ✓ we want to fight fatigue.
- ✓ we want to enhance performance.
- ✓ we want to enhance wellbeing on board.

THEN we need to address seafarer stress.



What can Industry Do?

Stress Management is a *two-sided approach*. We need to look at the *causes* of stress and support good *coping skills*. Both sides are equally important.

Psychoeducation such as [*this Managing Stress and Sleeping Well at Sea guide*](#) can offer seafarers tools and strategies for coping with stress. This can be backed up by [*training*](#) in stress management skills, coping and resilience. However, many seafarers are already highly resilient, they are adept problem solvers, they often cope well and act professionally in the toughest of situations. Coping skills are important, but we must not place all the responsibility on the seafarer. It's the employer's obligation to protect employees from stress.

Preventing work-related stress is not just the right thing to do by workers, it's the law. All employers are required to prevent work related stress to support good mental health in the workplace.

Health & Safety Executive, UK

Stress is a Health and Safety Issue.

Stressors come in different forms, some are inherent in a life at sea, like being away from friends and family for extended periods of time. But some stressors *can* be addressed.

Health and Safety approaches identify risks and implement solutions to eliminate or reduce risks where possible and ensure procedures are in place where not.

1. Do a stress risk assessment.
2. Make a record of any risks identified.
3. Take steps to eliminate or reduce the risks.
4. Check on the impact.

There are plenty freely available tools for stress risk assessment; check out the [*Health and Safety Executive website*](#), refer to [*Mentally Health Ships*](#) or talk to us at [*Waypoint Maritime CiC*](#) about how we can support you to do a stress risk assessment, identify tailored recommendations for action and monitor the impact on your fleet.