

HEALTH AND FITNESS

Enough to make you sick

Stress in the workplace can drive up health costs

If you're a boss, you may think you've got the health thing covered because you offer good insurance and encourage your employees to exercise. But there's more to achieving a fit workplace: Minimizing stress.

In fact, conflict and stress may have a bigger impact on health than smoking, obesity, alcohol abuse, inadequate exercise or poor nutrition, says Susan Heitler, a clinical psychologist at Rose Medical Center and author of the book "From Conflict to Resolution." It can raise blood pressure and lower immune system function, making us more vulnerable to disease.

Stress may be carried to the office from home, but there are stresses right under their noses that employers can detect and help prevent.

"There are positive, good stresses, like getting a project you're enthused about finished before a deadline. But negative stresses that leave us feeling frustrated are the ones that are costly to business," said Heitler.

Heitler will speak at a breakfast seminar at 7:30 a.m. Feb. 15, sponsored by Rose Corporate Health Services. "The Cost of Stress in the Workplace" is free, and will be in the basement conference rooms of Rose Medical Plaza South, 4500 E. Ninth Ave., across from Rose Medical Center. Call 331-9121 to reserve a seat.

"Our goal is to help employers and managers become aware that stress can hurt their business," said Heitler, citing such bottom-line factors as absenteeism, turnover and accidents.

An office can have environmental stress, such as poor lighting, noise and crowded conditions, or stress that occurs in the way work is structured — for example, too many people working on the same thing.

Heitler, who recently came out with audio tapes on "Anxiety: Friend or Foe" and "Conflict Resolution for Couples," is particularly interested in



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what she calls "emotional tone factors" in the office. This includes things such as employees communicating in a nasty way, or a manager who's harsh on himself or herself, setting the tone for an office full of self-critical workers.

Heitler will give managers a six-minute stress survey they can use with employees, and offer suggestions on ways they can listen to employee complaints and make simple changes that can improve the office atmosphere for everyone.