



JOB DEMANDS

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WHAT ARE JOB DEMANDS?

High and Low job demands are one of the most common workplace mental health hazards, there include both physical and cognitive demands.

Sometimes, challenging tasks can make workers feel excited and motivated about their work. However, it is important that workers aren't overloaded with excessive, unrealistic or unreasonable demands. Resource constraints or time pressures can also often lead workers to feel overwhelmed or unable to cope.

Similarly, low job demands like repetitive or monotonous tasks, can often make workers feel disengaged or underutilised.

EXAMPLES OF HIGH AND LOW JOB DEMANDS

There are many examples of jobs demands in the workplace, which can vary depending on the type of work, industry and location of the workplace, including:

HIGH JOB DEMANDS

TIME DEMANDS

- **Time pressure:** Jobs that require employees to make quick decisions or act under time pressure, such as emergency responders or air traffic controllers, can create high demands on their cognitive abilities and stress levels.
- **Tight or unrealistic deadlines:** When a job requires completing a task or project within a short timeframe, it can create high demands on an employee's time and energy.
- **Long working hours:** Jobs that require employees to work long hours, including overtime and weekend work, can create high demands and lead to work-life conflicts.

COGNITIVE & EMOTIONAL DEMANDS



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- **Complex tasks:** Jobs that require employees to perform complex tasks, such as analysing data or solving technical problems, can create high demands on their cognitive abilities.
- **Emotional labour:** Jobs that require employees to manage their emotions or deal with difficult customers, such as in customer service or healthcare, can create high emotional demands.
- **Excessive Vigilance:** Staying alert for extended periods for infrequent events
- **Speed:** the requirement to work hard and fast,
- **Low role clarity:** this is a recognised psychosocial hazard on its own and refers to a situation in which an employee has an unclear understanding of their job responsibilities, the expectations placed on them, or how their role fits into the larger organizational context

WORKLOAD DEMANDS

- **High workload:** When an employee is responsible for a high volume of work or facing unrealistic/impossible amounts of work, it can create high demands on their cognitive and physical abilities, leading to stress and burnout.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS

- having to sit or stand for long periods,
- working in hazardous conditions, such as exposure to dangerous chemicals or equipment,
- working in awkward positions for extended periods
- working in environments with extreme temperatures or poor air quality
- jobs that require physical exertion or exposure to hazards (such as leading fitness classes, construction, mining)

ENVIRONMENTAL DEMANDS

- **Remote or isolated work**
- **Poor environmental conditions,** such as extreme temperatures, noise, or poor air quality. Working in an office with poor ventilation, for example, can lead to symptoms such as headaches, eye irritation, and respiratory problems.

LOW JOB DEMANDS

COGNITIVE & EMOTIONAL DEMANDS

- **Highly repetitive, monotonous and routine tasks:** performing the same or similar tasks repeatedly, such as data entry or assembly line work



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- **Lack autonomy or decision-making authority:** when workers have little control over their work or decision-making processes, leading to stress and dissatisfaction

WORKLOAD DEMANDS

- **Long periods of insufficient work** or being responsible for a minimal volume of work

PHYSICAL DEMANDS

- **Jobs that involve exposure to repetitive motions:** Jobs that require repetitive motions, such as typing or using a mouse, can lead to repetitive strain injuries, such as carpal tunnel syndrome.
- **Jobs that involve prolonged sitting:** While sitting for long periods may seem like a low demand activity, it can still pose health risks, such as musculoskeletal disorders, back pain, and poor circulation.

Indicators include situations where:

- workloads are excessive or create unreasonable time pressure;
- workers have very little say in the way they do their work or when they can take rest breaks;
- workers are not involved in making decisions about work that affects them or their clients; and
- workers have skills and experience that are underused.

IMPACTS OF JOB DEMANDS

The impacts of job demands on both workers and organisations is numerous. Some impacts to consider include:

ON WORKERS

Stress and anxiety: High job demands can lead to increased stress levels among workers. This can result in physical and mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, and heart disease.

Burnout: If job demands are consistently high, workers may experience burnout. This is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion that can make it difficult for workers to perform their jobs effectively.

ON ORGANISATIONS

Reduced productivity and engagement: Workers who are stressed or burnt out may be less productive and have lower performance levels, which can have a negative impact on the organisation's overall productivity.

Increased absenteeism and turnover: When job demands are consistently high, workers may be more likely to miss work or leave their jobs, leading to increased absenteeism and turnover rates. This can be costly for organisations in terms of recruiting and training new employees.



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Decreased job satisfaction: High job demands can lead to decreased job satisfaction if workers feel that they are not able to meet the demands of their job. This can result in decreased motivation, commitment, and engagement.

Health problems: The stress and burnout caused by high job demands can lead to a variety of health problems, including high blood pressure, heart disease, anxiety, and depression.

Physical injury: physically demanding jobs and those with poor environmental conditions increase the risk of physical injury to an employee, such as musculoskeletal or repetitive-use injuries.

Compensation claims: Increased risk of both psychosocial or physical injury workers compensation claims, including common law claims if injury is on behalf of negligence through the organisation.

Decreased employee morale and engagement, poor workplace culture: Workers who feel overwhelmed by high job demands may experience reduced job satisfaction and engagement, leading to lower levels of motivation and commitment. If employees feel that they are overworked or underappreciated, they may have lower morale, contributing to lower engagement and productivity.

Decreased innovation and creativity: High job demands can limit workers' ability to be creative and innovative in their work, leading to decreased innovation and reduced competitiveness for organisations.

Increased costs: High job demands can lead to increased costs for organisations, including costs associated with employee turnover, absenteeism, and workers' compensation claims.

Reputation damage: via negative reviews and comments, public scrutiny and potential legal issues. Complaints from customers or clients.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk Management involves identifying potential risks, assessing their likelihood and impact, and developing strategies to mitigate or control them. It is a proactive process that seeks to prevent risks from occurring or minimise their impact if they do occur.

No person should be injured in their workplace, including psychological injury. To meet their duties to ensure health and safety, employers must identify and eliminate or minimise psychosocial risks so far as is reasonably practicable. How long (duration), how often (frequency) and how significantly (severity) workers are exposed to psychosocial hazards impacts the level of risks. Hazards interacting or combining with each other may also impact this. Further guidance on the risk management process is available in the Code of Practice: [How to manage work health and safety risks](#). For more information on the risk management process for psychosocial hazards, please view [Section 2 of the Model Code of Practice](#).



Mind Your Head advocates for *prevention* – that is, identifying risk, implementing or changing systems to prevent worker harm or injury *before it occurs*.

Examples of Risk Management Strategies for High and Low Job Demands include:

Prevention

Job design, safe work systems and procedures:

- Consult workers who may be affected by work health and safety issues, agree on consultation arrangements, and use them for changes that may impact safety. Establishing employee feedback mechanisms to identify and address issues related to job demands before they become problematic, such as health and safety committees.
- Modify and adjust work plans to accommodate changes (for example, KPIs or performance targets whilst a worker learns a new role)
- Conducting a job analysis can help organisations identify the demands of different jobs and ensure that they are appropriately matched to the skills and abilities of employees. This can help prevent both high and low job demands.
- Organisations can implement workload management strategies, such as job rotation, job enrichment, or flexible scheduling, to prevent high job demands and promote a healthy work-life balance for employees.
- Providing training and development opportunities to employees can help them acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the demands of their jobs. This can help prevent low job demands and promote employee engagement and motivation

Physical work environment:

- identify the physical demands associated with each job and perform ergonomic assessments to identify potential hazards and make adjustments to equipment, workstations, and tools to reduce the risk of injury.
- consult with workers, HSRs and experts in specific fields to identify potential hazards that may be overlooked by those who do not perform the roles themselves
- Provide training and education to employees on proper lifting techniques, posture, and ergonomics to reduce the risk of injury.
- Continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of risk management strategies to ensure that they are reducing the risk of injury and adjust them as needed, including access to improvement/suggestion forms for workers

Intervene Early

- If a review indicates that the current measures for control measures are inadequate or failing, immediately take steps to identify and establish new measures to mitigate the risks.
- In case of workers experiencing symptoms of work-related stress, the employer should consider modifying their job responsibilities and providing additional workplace support.



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- Employees who are at higher risk of suffering an injury should be offered early assistance to minimize the chance of an incident occurring.
- Consistently monitor workloads and physical environments and provide ways for workers to report potential hazardous.

Support Recovery

- Provide early assistance and support to access treatment and rehabilitation services, from the time an injury occurs.
- Support timely and sustainable recovery at work (RAW) or return to work (RTW) through effective consultation, addressing any remaining work-related hazards and risks that may exacerbate the existing work-related psychological injury or cause a new injury.

WAYS TO MANAGE RISKS

Consult workers and HSRs. Establish Health and Safety Committees with at least 50% representation from workers. Encourage feedback, especially on any changes.

Consider how long, how often and how severely workers are exposed to hazards. The longer, more often and worse the low job control, the higher the risk that workers may be harmed.

Utilise surveys and tools to assess psychosocial risks in the workplace, particularly for businesses with over 20 employees.

Establish a system for workers to report their concerns, while ensuring anonymity and treating their concerns with respect and seriousness to encourage reporting.

Observe work and behaviours, such as prolonged work duration, excessive paperwork, or customer frustration, which may indicate low job control.

Review available information, including employee retention, incident reports, complaints, time-off records, injuries, incidents, and workers' compensation to identify potential hazards.

Identify other hazards present and evaluate how they may interact or combine to create new, heightened risks. For instance, high job demands could pose a greater risk in workplaces with low job control if workers are unable to take breaks or switch tasks to manage fatigue. Finally, consider the duration, frequency, and severity of workers' exposure to hazards, as prolonged and severe exposure to low job control could increase the risk of harm.



CONTROL MEASURES

Control measures are specific actions or procedures that are put in place to manage or mitigate identified risks. They are reactive measures that are implemented after risks have been identified and assessed as part of the risk management process. Control measures are designed to reduce the likelihood or impact of risks, and they can take many forms, including administrative controls, engineering controls, and personal protective equipment.

Manage Time Demands:

- Ensure that the number of employees is sufficient for the required workload and that they have adequate time to complete their tasks.
- Give employees the chance to provide feedback on the work pace and timing. Set realistic targets that can be achieved.
- Monitor workloads during peak periods like the holiday seasons.
- Conduct regular workload reviews to ensure that employees have the necessary support.
- Encourage employees to speak up early if they feel their workload is excessive.

Manage Cognitive and Emotional Demands:

- Provide job variety and reduce the impact of repetitive tasks by rotating tasks and schedules where possible.
- Provide adequate training to leaders so they understand the risks of these demands.
- Encourage autonomy whenever possible and give employees some control over the way they perform their work, such as work pace and task order, including flexible working arrangements when possible
- Ensure workers are provided with the tools and resources needed to do their job, and that there is no expectation and work beyond the hours of the role so workers can maintain a work/life balance and are able to cognitively “switch off”.
- Implement support systems for workers who make complex or difficult decisions, such as a second person to assist.
- Provide training and ongoing support to workers on how to manage difficult or confronting situations. If these situations cannot be removed completely, limit them as much as possible.

Manage Physical Demands

- Provide regular breaks and rotate repetitive manual tasks between employees where feasible. Limit the amount of time spent doing manual physical labour, ensuring adequate recovery.
- Create a comfortable physical environment, such as making changes to the workstation, equipment, or the job process.
- Replace heavy manual tasks with machinery to reduce physical workloads wherever possible.



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- Ensure that workers are well trained and physically able to perform the job.

DO

Discuss projected workloads and address anticipated absences with workers, allowing for suggestions

Discuss workloads with individuals, identify challenges encountered or anticipated and establish feasible workplans with them

Ensure workers are aware of their job responsibilities and are not given tasks outside of their position descriptions

Identify peaks and troughs for workload and incorporate into staffing rosters

Recruit early and effectively to ensure there are no staff shortages

Allocate resources such as time and equipment to ensure workers can undertake their jobs properly

Ensure utilisation of skills within everyday work

Ensure workers have adequate time management skills and provide training where needed

Give realistic deadlines

Rotate job tasks for repetitive or highly demanding tasks or to reduce exposure time for workers' dealing with aggressive clients
minimise environmental stressors (e.g. noise, heat, vibration)

Engage workers in making decisions about the way they do their work

Allow workers to participate in the decisions making processes about issues that affect their work

DO NOT

Ask people to undertake tasks they are not trained or skilled to do

Expect people to work longer hours than rostered or work on their days off

Increase an individual's workload without appropriate resources for the task

Under-utilise skills

Limit workers to repetitive and monotonous tasks
micro-manage or dictate how workers are to carry out all duties involved in their role



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Conduct a performance review processes as this can be an opportunity for workers to have input into the way they do their work

Provide opportunities for skill development