



# **LOW JOB CONTROL**

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## **WHAT IS LOW JOB CONTROL?**

Low job control refers to the extent to which an employee feels they have control over their work environment and the tasks they are assigned, including situations where an employee has limited autonomy and decision-making power over their work. This can include factors such as having little control over their schedule, being unable to choose the tasks they perform, and having limited input into workplace policies or procedures. When employees have low job control, they may feel that they have little say in how they perform their work or the decisions that affect their job. This can lead to feelings of powerlessness, frustration, and stress.

Low job control can be a hazard for a number of reasons. When employees feel that they have little control over their work, they may feel that their efforts are meaningless or that they are not making a valuable contribution to their organisation, leading to feelings of demotivation and disengagement, which can ultimately affect their productivity and job satisfaction.

Low job control can also lead to stress and burnout; when employees feel that they have little control over their work, they may feel that they are unable to meet the demands of their job or that they are constantly under pressure to perform. This can lead to a range of physical and psychological symptoms, including headaches, fatigue, anxiety, and depression.

## **EXAMPLES OF LOW JOB CONTROL**

There are many examples of what job control might look like in the workplace, which can vary depending on the type of work, industry and location of the workplace. Some examples include:

- not being able to decide what work tasks are performed and when
- having little influence on how work is performed, such as when tasks are changed or breaks taken
- not having the ability to choose where work is performed (ie: at home or in the workplace)
- not having the freedom to decide how to do work tasks (i.e.: prescriptive processes that does not allow workers to apply their skills or judgement)
- Strict processes that can't be changed or adapted to fit a situation
- being supervised heavily (i.e. requiring permission for basic decisions or tasks, requiring sign-off before progressing routine or low risk tasks)



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- a workers level of autonomy not matching their abilities
- lack of consultation about changes that impact work
- limited scope for workers to adapt the way they work to changing situations or adopt work efficiencies
- workers not having control over their physical environment.

### Indicators include situations where workers:

- have little control or say in the way they do their work;
- are not involved in decision making about their work;
- are required to work at a pace that exceeds staffing capabilities or resources;
- are being micro-managed and required to perform tasks in specific ways;
- have their skills and experiences undervalued or underutilised; and
- are unable to refuse to work with, or provide service to, aggressive customers or clients.

This hazard is exacerbated when paired with **high job demand**; situations where workers have excessive responsibility but little authority in respect to decision making.

## IMPACTS OF LOW JOB CONTROL

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

### ON WORKERS

Boredom; loss of interest or care in the job/task  
Disengaged or withdrawn from work  
Depression  
Anxiety  
Mental stress or fatigue  
Anger or mood swings  
Diminished performance

### ON ORGANISATIONS

Poor workplace culture – bored and disengaged employees  
Higher employee turnover - and the costs associated with frequent recruitment and training  
Negative or strained work-team relations and team dynamics  
Reduced productivity  
Increased absenteeism (resulting in reduced productivity)  
Complaints from customers or clients  
Increased worker injury and illness



## 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 Low Job Control include:**

### Prevention

- Ensure good work design and safe systems of work by addressing the indicators of low job control (outlined in *What is Low Job Control*) in your workplace.
- Identify work-related hazards and risks via consultation with workers and their representatives.
- Conduct risk assessments and implement effective control measures. The Mind Your Head OHS Checklist for Psychosocial Safety is [available here](#).
- Provide workers with adequate and effective training, information and supervision they need to do their job safely and well. Consult workers and ask for feedback for to assess effectiveness.
- Encourage feedback and act promptly to address it.
- Maintain, monitor and review control measures and revise if necessary.

### Intervene Early

- If reviews, consultation or feedback show control measures are not effective, take prompt action to identify and implement additional controls.
- Immediately support workers showing signs of work-related stress or distress (i.e. modifying work, extra workplace support. Consult with the individual to ensure effective support.
- Provide early assistance for those with an increased risk of injury.

### Support Recovery

- Provide early assistance and support to access treatment and rehabilitation services, from the time an injury occurs.



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- 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, low job control could pose a greater risk in workplaces with high job demands 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.***

**Job redesign:** Redesigning job tasks to provide workers with more control over their work can help reduce the risk of low job control. For example, allowing workers to have more say in their work schedules, work methods, and the tasks they perform can help improve their sense of control.



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**Communication and feedback:** Open communication channels between workers and management can help workers feel more involved in decision-making processes and provide them with feedback on their work. Regular feedback and recognition can help workers feel more valued and in control of their work.

**Encourage employee participation:** Employers should encourage employee participation in decision-making processes whenever possible. This can help employees to feel more engaged and invested in their work, and can provide them with a sense of control over their environment.

**Workload management:** Ensuring that workloads are manageable and realistic can help reduce the risk of low job control. This can include workload assessments, the use of workload management tools, and the allocation of resources to manage workload demands.

**Workplace policies and procedures:** Implementing workplace policies and procedures that promote a healthy work-life balance can help workers feel more in control of their work. This can include policies around flexible work arrangements, job sharing, and leave entitlements.

### DO

Encourage worker involvement in decision-making related to their work by allowing them to participate in the decision-making process for matters that affect them.

Conduct review processes to give workers the opportunity to provide input on the way they do their work.

**Provide clear job descriptions:** Employers should provide clear and detailed job descriptions that outline the responsibilities, tasks, and expectations of each employee. This can help employees to understand what is expected of them and can provide a sense of structure and control.

**Provide opportunities for training and development:** Employers should provide opportunities for employees to learn new skills and develop their knowledge and expertise. This can help employees to feel more confident in their abilities and can provide them with a greater sense of control over their work.

**Foster a positive work culture:** Employers should foster a positive work culture that values employee

### DO NOT

Do not expect workers to stay after hours or be available for work-related tasks/communication outside of their working hours

Expect workers to use their personal devices for work-related communication

Avoid dictating how workers should carry out all their duties, instead provide a reasonable level of autonomy by allowing workers to make decisions related to their role, wherever possible.



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well-being and promotes work-life balance. This can help employees to feel supported and valued, and can reduce the risk of burnout and other psychosocial hazards.