

# Feeling the heat?

Workplace stress is the biggest cause of absenteeism, but could we be managing it more effectively? Niamh O'Mahony met with stress management consultant Therese Ryan to find out...

Stress can affect us all from time to time, whether it's a short-term situation that resolves itself naturally or something ongoing and more serious. CSO figures suggest that 13,000 people in the Republic of Ireland suffer from stress, depression or anxiety and it's now the biggest cause of absenteeism at work, according to an EU report.

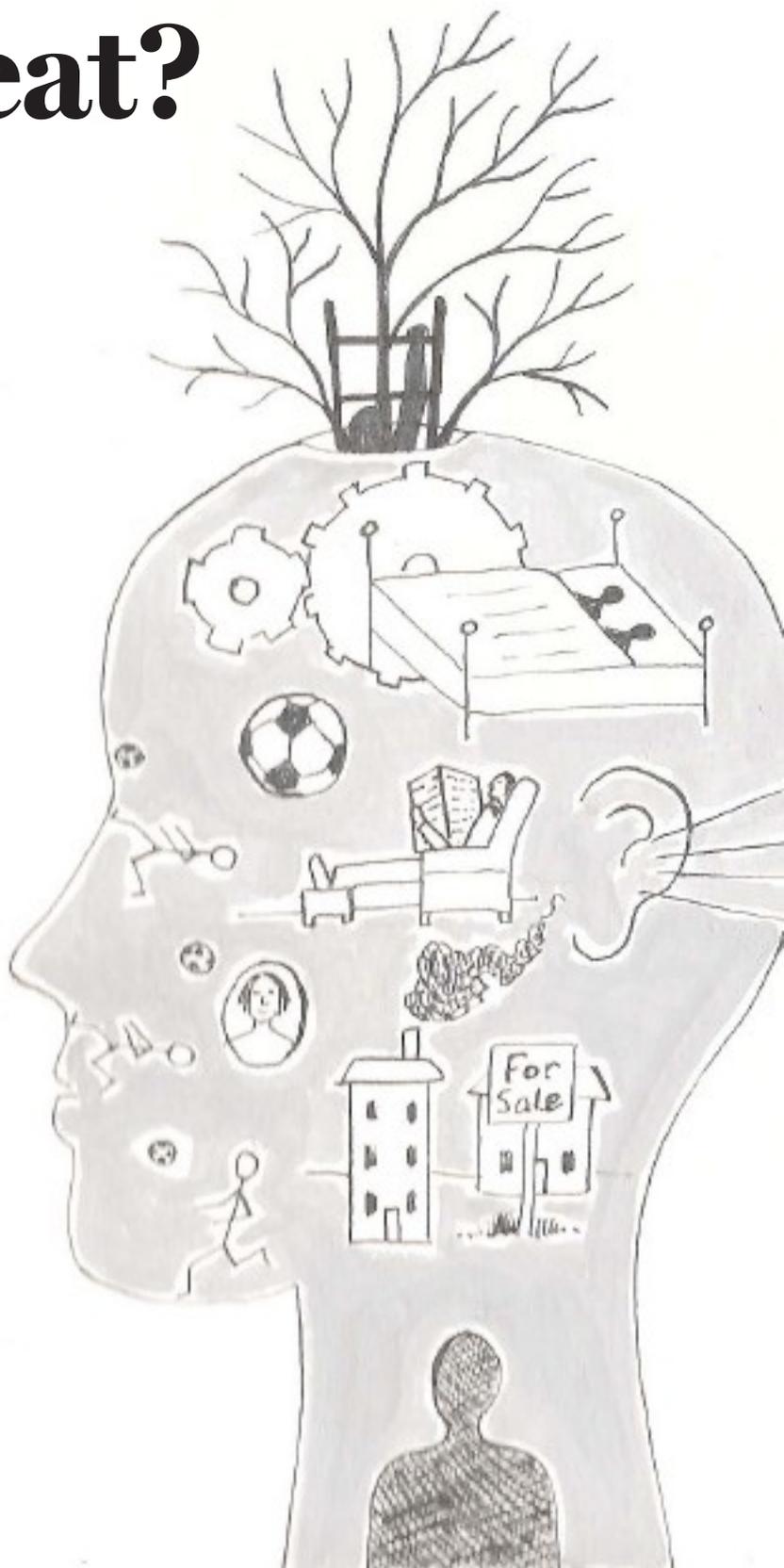
However, there are several simple measures that both employers and employees can introduce in order to reduce levels of stress in a workplace.

"Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them," Therese Ryan, a stress management consultant, explained to Cork Biz. "In

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Ireland we have a culture of having a friendly approach to things and not wanting to upset the apple cart, but we are becoming more aware, especially through campaigns like 'Mind your Mates', of the need to manage stress.

"Do not underestimate the affect it can have on your life, your job and your sense of future. Golf star Rory McIlroy's comments after he won the US Open were interesting in that he realises how much extra pressure he will be under now because of the greater sense of expectation. However, he also spoke about learning to manage it. My job is to give people the tools that will keep them in a pressurised zone and prevent them from falling into a stressed zone."



## Employers

### Demands:

Employers need to look at the demands being put on their workers including workload, work pattern and the work environment and see if any positive changes can be introduced.

### Control:

There is a lot of restructuring going on in many companies at the moment and people can feel like they haven't been consulted about changes properly. This can create unease when it's simply a case of the employer not thinking about how much say their workers should or would like to have.

### Support:

Are there supports in place for any employee who has a difficulty, be it work-related or personal? Can they go to a manager or are there

EAPs (Employee Assistance Programmes) in place to allow workers seek help confidentially?

### Role:

This is becoming a huge area. You would assume that it's clear for most people what their job entails but a lot of change is going on in the current climate and an employer may underestimate the importance of clarifying what needs to be done right now.

### Change:

Any kind of change needs to be managed. It's simply about letting people know what's going on and why. If somebody is coming to work and any of these factors are not helping them do their job, then it's very hard to be productive."

# Start-up rate at its highest since 2008

Ireland's entrepreneurial spirit is well and truly alive with the latest figures showing an increase in the number of start-up companies being registered this year. A total of 7,012 businesses were set up between January 1st and June 21st, surpassing the equivalent number for both 2009 and 2010 with a week still left in the first half of the year. In 2010 a tally of 7,009 new start-ups was recorded in the first six months of the year and while 2011's final number is unlikely to exceed the 8,218 mark reached in 2008, it is still a notable change around from the past two years.

## Symptoms of stress

- Feeling irritable
- Forgetfulness
- Increased tiredness
- Lack of motivation
- Disengaged behaviour
- Lack of optimism
- Increased heart rate



Therese Ryan

## Employees

### Look after your general health and well being:

The healthier and stronger you are, the more able you'll be to deal with pressure over a longer period of time. Make sure to have a proper breakfast, lunch and dinner and eat well and not on the go

### Hydrate:

Make a conscious decision to drink a litre and a half of water every day. If a person is dehydrated, they will be tired. Also, minimise your caffeine intake, which is not just about avoiding coffee. Chocolate, tea and fizzy drinks can trigger a stress reaction in people without them even realising it.

### Take a lunch break:

If somebody is under pressure from the moment they arrive into work, failing to take a lunch break away from their desk will lead to a dip in performance towards the end of the day. Everyone needs to physically get up and leave for lunch – even if it's just to the canteen. If you have a job that involves a lot of talking, you might want to be on your own.

### Manage your time:

It's important to have a sense of awareness about planning ahead. If you can, delegate. Give priority to tasks as they need to be done and have a plan for the day, week and month. Reacting to what's happening is never ideal when you really need to know what's around the corner.

### Make a to-do list:

We are all so busy that we rarely stop and take a breather between work and home. We can't take our brain out and leave it in the office but we can do something to consciously make the decision to leave work behind – so make a To Do list for tomorrow, put it away and go home.

### Mark your arrival home:

This is all about creating a sense of difference between your job and your home life. Some people have to gear up to deal with pressure in the workplace but it's important they also gear down. Go home, shower or change your clothes and just be aware that this is a different part of your day.

### Work-life balance:

Make sure to plan down time for yourself. People might have a crazy week at work and then find themselves with a busy weekend ahead and while that may be a good thing in one sense, it's also about balance and be aware of getting that work-life divide right.

### Exercise:

Relaxation techniques are important and building a past time like yoga and/or exercise into your week is crucial.

### Ask for help:

Seek professional help if you need it. Stress can be managed but sometimes people don't have the tools and the sooner you seek professional help, the quicker you will be able to get it.

### Feeling under pressure?

You can take one of Therese's free stress or work-life balance questionnaires at [renewalconsultants.com](http://renewalconsultants.com).

For more, see the Health and Safety Authority's Work Positive tool at [hsa.ie](http://hsa.ie).



## Final deadline for Ignite applicants

Applications close later today (Friday) for UCC's IGNITE programme. Based in the university's incubation centre, the initiative aims to help graduates of any discipline and any third level institute turn their ideas into practical products and services for sale and to accelerate business start-ups. The

(Above) Mick O'Driscoll, Munster Rugby; and Sarah Jane O'Sullivan, Seahorse Atlantic; at the IGNITE Information Evening at UCC. Picture: Neil Danton.

scheme is supported by the Cork County and City Enterprise boards as well as Cork Chamber, EMC, PFH and CorkBIC among others.

## IBEC survey: More and more firms looking to hire

The number of Irish companies intending to hire new staff in the coming three months doubled in the second quarter of the year, compared to the same timeframe in 2010. That is according to IBEC's latest Business Sentiment Survey, which shows that the majority of firms remain confident of their trading outlook, though not quite as sure about Ireland's economy in general.

"The survey highlights the gap between the fortunes of exporting firms and those dependent on domestic sales, showing a very buoyant balance of +41 for export sales compared to -4 for domestic sales," IBEC Chief Economist Fergal O'Brien said. "If we are to really tackle the unemployment problem, domestic demand must improve."

Irish businesses, meanwhile, are some of the most generous in the world when it comes to donating to

charity. New findings in the Grant Thornton International Business Report (IBR) shows that 88% of Irish firms give money to non-work related causes, compared to an

# 80%

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average of 62% across the EU and 65% globally. More than 80% of Irish companies also provide internships and work experience programmes, a figure again well above the British (73%) and global (67%) average.