

## COVER STORY

COMBATING STRESS AT WORK



## Staying healthy and happy

The International Stress Management Association (ISMA) in the UK and Ireland launched its National Stress Awareness Day on 7 November. Its aim is to encourage employees to spread awareness by sharing a 'smile' with co-workers or loved ones throughout the month on its website [www.nationalstressawarenessday.co.uk](http://www.nationalstressawarenessday.co.uk).

Therese Ryan is head of the ISMA in Ireland and promotes the importance of recognising stress as an issue of national well-being. She is also head of Renewal Consultants in Limerick

and is an expert on teaching employers how to reduce or, where possible, eliminate known stressors.

"I check the absenteeism rate, staff turnover and mental health days are well within the national average. Also, in some working cultures, we have what is known as 'presenteeism' problems, which relate to people who simply won't go home! Remember, even athletes with a healthy diet who are focused and train hard need some down time to rest."

Ryan adds: "For a workforce to be

healthy, employees need to go home and sleep. I also look at company culture in this area and ask employers if they encourage staff to be at their desk until there is nothing left in them or if they want to develop a talented workforce?" She adds that, if people are tired, productivity suffers.

There are many signs and symptoms of stress that employees experience on a daily basis. They include irritability, mood swings, short attention span, poor concentration, feeling tired all the time, a lack of motivation, increased blood

pressure, a lack of (or inability to) sleep, a decrease in work performance, increased intake of caffeine, poor digestion or, worse, gastric ulcers or irritable bowel syndrome.

Work Positive is a joint cross-border programme set up by the Health and Safety Authority and the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland as the ultimate tool for measuring and controlling stress levels at work.

For more information, go to [www.hsa.ie/eng/work\\_safely](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/work_safely) and click on 'Workplace Health'.