

Managing work-related stress

Causes and signs of stress

Stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them'.

Some people benefit from a certain amount of pressure as it can keep them motivated. However, when there is too much pressure it can lead to stress.

Stress is not an illness but it can affect a person's physical and mental health.

If not properly managed, stress can cause:

- 'burnout' (physical and emotional exhaustion)
- anxiety
- depression

Stress can increase the risk of physical illnesses. For example:

- heart disease
- back pain
- digestive conditions like irritable bowel syndrome
- skin conditions

Causes of stress at work

There are many factors that can cause stress at work. These include:

- too many or conflicting demands
- poor working conditions
- little control over how and when work is done or decision making
- lack of support or encouragement from managers and others at work
- bullying and conflict at work, particularly if these are not managed well
- not having enough training or skills to do a job
- feeling unclear about roles and responsibilities
- low trust and not feeling able to speak up about concerns
- change within the organisation

Stress outside of work

Life events can have an impact on work-related stress.

Things that cause stress outside of work might include:

- [when someone has died](#)
- divorce
- [menopause](#)
- caring responsibilities
- poor health
- financial worries, for example cost of living

Employees do not have to tell their employer about their personal problems. But if they decide to, they might be able to get some support. For example:

- counselling services, for example an employee assistance programme (EAP)
- paid or unpaid time off to attend appointments
- time off, for example any special leave, annual leave or unpaid leave
- a temporary change in duties or working patterns to allow for changes in home life

Spotting the signs of stress

Employees should look after their own health and wellbeing at work. If they are experiencing stress, they should talk to their manager as soon as they can. Managers should also look out for any signs of stress among their employees.

Signs of stress can include:

- poor concentration
- finding it hard to make decisions
- being irritable or short tempered
- tearfulness
- tiredness
- low mood
- avoiding social events

If an employer or employee spots signs of stress, it can be helpful to have an informal chat. This can help them understand how the person is feeling and what support they need. Getting help could prevent more serious problems.

Managers could encourage their employees to do a 'Wellness Action Plan'. This can help them to:

- think about what's causing them stress
- talk to their manager and get the support they need

[Use a Wellness Action Plan from Mind](#)