

Stress @ work – guidance for employees

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Stress – “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them”

UK Health and Safety Executive

Your employer now has a duty in law to ensure that you are not made ill by your work. And [work stress](#) can make you ill. Although being *under pressure* can help improve your performance and productivity, excessive levels of pressure can result in stress, which can lead to mental and physical ill-health. According to a recent report by MIND, the UK’s leading mental health charity, more than 5 million people complain of extreme stress in their jobs, putting them at risk of a breakdown.¹ Employers who don’t take **work stress** seriously may leave themselves open to compensation claims from employees who have suffered ill health from **work-related stress**.

In November 2004, the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) published a new guide for managers on how to prevent excessive work-related stress – *Tackling Work-Related Stress: A Managers' Guide To Improving And Maintaining Employee Health And Well-Being*.² With the aid of 12 new management standards, the guide provides a step-by-step approach for employers to use when handling the different causes of **stress in the workplace**. The guide recommends that employers should work with employees and their representatives, and provides advice on identifying those at risk from **work stress** and on how to prevent problems occurring.

What does HSE expect employers to do?

HSE expects every employer to conduct risk assessments for health and safety hazards, including **work-related stress**. HSE recommends a three-step approach to risk assessment, to be taken in consultation with employees and their representatives:

1. Identify pressures at work that could cause high and long-lasting levels of stress
2. Decide who might be harmed by these, and how
3. Assess whether enough is being done to prevent that harm and, if not, decide the steps to be taken.

At each step, findings should be recorded, regularly monitored and reviewed. The HSE have identified six key aspects of work that, if not properly managed, can lead to **work-related stress** and, within these key aspects, have established 12 management standards (see Table).

Key aspect of work	Management standard
The demands of your job (includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment)	1. Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs 2. Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns
Your control over your work (how much say you have in the way you do your work)	3. Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work 4. Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns
The support you receive from managers and colleagues (includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues)	5. Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors 6. Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns
Your relationships at work (includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour)	7. Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviour (e.g. bullying) at work 8. Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns
Your role in the organisation (whether you understand your role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that you do not have conflicting roles)	9. Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities 10. Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns
Change and how it is managed (how organisational change [large or small] is managed and communicated in the organisation)	11. Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change

	12. Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns
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What does HSE expect employees to do?

As an employee, you too have a duty to take care of your health and safety at work. The HSE recommends that you:³

1. Familiarise yourself with the HSE's management standards (see Table above) so that you can contribute more fully to discussions.
2. Talk to your managers if you're experiencing a problem – it's part of their role to help you reach a solution.
3. Take an active part in any discussions, action planning meetings, stress risk assessments, etc., and make sure you complete any questionnaires when you are asked to do so – your managers need your help in putting effective plans in place.
4. Remember that consultation is a two-way process. Your managers must take your opinions into consideration when deciding what actions to take, and must communicate the reasons for their decisions.
5. Read all communications. Make sure you understand the reasons for decisions and provide feedback if required.
6. Attend any stress management training courses arranged by your employer. These should help you understand **work related stress** and how to deal with it.
7. Recognise that you have a responsibility for your own personal stress and try to help yourself where possible.

References

1. *Stress and Mental Health in the Workplace.* <http://www.mind.org.uk>
2. *Tackling Work-Related Stress: A Managers' Guide To Improving And Maintaining Employee Health And Well-Being.*
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/information.htm>
3. *Working together to reduce stress at home. A guide for employees.*
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/leaflet.pdf>

Further information

For more information visit <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/information.htm> or call the HSE's InfoLine on 08701-545500, or write to: HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

A free employee leaflet is also available from the HSE website: *Tackling Work-Related Stress – A Guide For Employees* (Leaflet INDG341). This leaflet explains what stress is and how it affects people, providing details of what individuals can do at work to help their manager in tackling the problem.

The International Stress Management Association has produced a leaflet *Working together to reduce stress at home. A guide for employees*. The leaflet is supported by HSE, Acas, TUC and the CIPD. Visit <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/leaflet.pdf>

Copies Of *Tackling Work-Related Stress: A Managers' Guide To Improving And Maintaining Employee Health And Well-Being* (ref HSG218; ISBN 0 7176 2050 6; price £7.95) can be ordered online at www.hsebooks.co.uk, or are available from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 2WA, tel: 01787-881165; fax: 01787-313995.

For more information on stress at work and essential oils, visit: <http://www.aromatherapy-stress-relief.com/stressatwork.html>

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