



# Tackling work-related stress



## Further information

*Tackling work-related stress: A managers' guide to improving and maintaining employee health and well-being* HSG218 2001 HSE Books ISBN 0 7176 2050 6 is available from HSE Books

This leaflet is available in priced packs of 20 from HSE Books, ISBN 0 7176 2065 4. Single free copies are also available from HSE Books.

For more information on stress, you can visit [www.hse.gov.uk/stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress).

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the references listed in this publication, their future availability cannot be guaranteed.

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This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

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## A guide for employees

## Who is this leaflet for?

You may have seen the guidance book *Tackling work-related stress: A managers' guide to improving and maintaining employee health and well-being*. That guidance is aimed at your manager, who has a duty to ensure your health is not harmed by work-related stress. In particular, he or she must:

- assess the risk to your health from work-related stress;
- put in place measures to eliminate (or where that is not possible, reduce) that risk;
- consult you, either directly or through your trade union (TU) or other representative, about workplace and organisational changes that are likely to significantly affect your health or safety.

This leaflet contains information on what you can do to help your manager.

**REMEMBER: stress is not a weakness and you don't have to suffer.**

**Your employer has a duty to protect your health and safety at work and a good employer will appreciate any suggestions you have for reducing work-related stress. Work-related stress is a symptom of an organisational problem, not an individual weakness.**

## What is work-related stress?

Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them. It can be caused by things at work or by things outside of work, or both. This leaflet is concerned with work-related stress: that is, stress that arises from, or is made worse by, work. Work-related stress is not an illness, but it can lead to increased problems with ill health, if it is prolonged or particularly intense. For example:

- physical effects:
  - heart disease;
  - back pain, gastrointestinal disturbances and various minor illnesses;
- psychological effects:
  - anxiety and depression.

You are not alone if you feel very or extremely stressed. In the country as a whole, as many as one in five people could be feeling the same way. In the workplace, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require you as an employee to tell your employer about any shortcomings in their health and safety arrangements. This is particularly important when tackling work-related stress – it requires a partnership between you, your manager, and your employer: a partnership based on honesty and trust, where you all say what you feel.

## What can you do at work?

You can help at work by:

- 'doing your bit' for managing work-related stress by talking to your employer: if they don't know there's a problem, they can't help. If you don't feel able to talk directly to your employer or manager, ask a TU or other employee representative to raise the issue on your behalf;
- supporting your colleagues if they are experiencing work-related stress. Encourage them to talk to their manager, TU or staff representative;
- seeing if your employer's counselling or employee assistance service (if provided), can help;
- speaking to your GP if you are worried about your health;
- discussing with your manager whether it is possible to alter your job to make it less stressful for you, recognising your and your colleagues' needs;
- trying to channel your energy into solving the problem rather than just worrying about it. Think about what would make you happier at work and discuss this with your employer.

## What can you do out of work?

The following advice will not prevent work-related stress, but may help you take care of yourself and ensure that you don't make the problem worse. You can:

- eat healthily;
- stop smoking – it doesn't help you to stay healthy, even though you might think it relaxes you;
- try to keep within Government recommendations for alcohol consumption – alcohol acts as depressant and will not help you tackle the problem;
- watch your caffeine intake – tea, coffee and some soft drinks (e.g. cola drinks) may contribute to making you feel more anxious;
- be physically active – it stimulates you and gives you more energy;
- try learning relaxation techniques – some people find it helps them cope with pressures in the short term;
- talk to family or friends about what you're feeling – they may be able to help you and provide the support you need to raise your concerns at work.

## What to do after a stress-related illness

If you have been off work with a stress-related illness, talk about it with your employer when you return. Say how you feel, explain what led to the event and what you would like to see happen. Take a TU representative or a work colleague with you if you do not feel you can do this on your own.