

Employee stress

Tips for line managers

Stress in the workplace

A recent study by the [Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#) revealed that 1.8 million workers reported they were suffering from work-related ill health in 2022/23, which is higher than the pre-pandemic level.

For some, remote working may have blurred the boundaries between work and home, making it more difficult to switch off at the end of the day. For others, a toxic workplace culture may be partially to blame — our [survey](#) found that 86% of employees say they're more productive at work if there's a good culture.

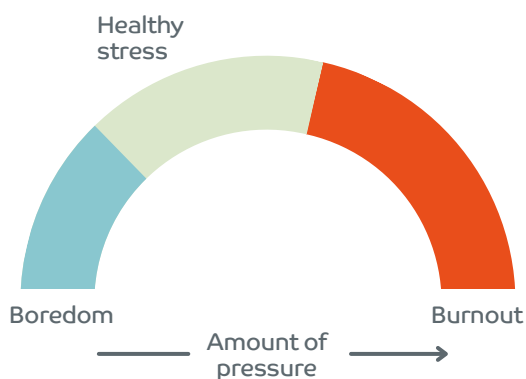
While external factors will likely contribute towards a person feeling stressed, depressed or anxious, what changes can we make in the workplace to help reduce the impact of stress on our people?



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Pressure vs performance

It's natural to feel stressed at times, and a little pressure can help keep us focused on our goals.



The stress curve shows that people perform best when working at – or slightly beyond – their comfort level. However, sustained stress can impact performance and eventually lead to burnout.

Dealing with change

Research by organisational psychologist Jim Bright suggests a third of us would avoid change if we could.

Our brains are wired to expect familiarity, but when our usual habits are disrupted we feel a sense of unease and uncertainty.

To help your team cope with change, encourage them to focus on the things they can control. Building consistent and healthy habits can help us feel more grounded when things get tough.

Allowing employees to share their worries and opinions can help you make small organisational changes to provide the support they need.



Spotting the signs of stress

While a little pressure can help us be more productive, it shouldn't negatively impact our behaviour at work.

It's important to check in with those who may be showing signs of stress or burnout. Those closest to the employee are best placed to do this, so line managers should be aware of the symptoms and know how to respond.

Look out for these common red flags within your team which may signal that it's time to step in:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Forgetfulness
- Trouble with decision making
- Booking last-minute days off
- Worrying about routine tasks
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Short-temperedness
- Increased use of alcohol or cigarettes

Five tips to reduce workplace stress

1. Ensure managers are trained to offer support and feel confident doing so. Our [health leadership training webinars](#) offer a useful introduction, suitable for all levels.
2. Encourage employees to take time out, whether it's a long weekend or simply a lunchtime stroll to recharge.
3. Where possible, allow people time to plan ahead. This healthy habit makes it easier to deal with new situations.
4. Be honest about your own stress levels and reassure employees that they can approach you for support without judgement.
5. Keep in touch with your team and ask direct questions about their workload and stress levels in your regular catch ups.

Conversation starters to try



How manageable is your workload at the moment?

What helps you switch off at the end of the day?

How do you feel about your current deadlines – are they realistic?

What can I do to support you?



Useful resources and links

[Stress.org.uk](https://www.stress.org.uk)

The Stress Management Society

[HSE Talking Toolkit: Stress](#)

A comprehensive stress toolkit for managers

[Wellbeing Strategy Workbook](#)

Learn how to drive culture change and create a successful wellbeing strategy

[Mental Health First Aid Courses](#)

Certified training to help your people support each other

[Employee Assistance Programmes](#)

Access to professional help and confidential advice to support mental wellbeing

[Health Cash Plans](#)

Employees can claim money back, up to set limits, for essential healthcare and get access to valuable health and wellbeing services

[Wellbeing Webinars](#)

On topics including resilience and work-life balance