

Stress at work

Stress at work can cause serious health problems and ruin your life

Stress at work is on the increase, it is becoming increasingly common

Stress at work can be prevented and controlled

We want people to stop suffering stress alone

You don't need to put up with it

Together we can tackle stress

And if you're not yet a member of UNISON

If you require further information or wish to join UNISON, call lo-call UNISON*direct*

0845 355 0845

Textphone users call FREEPHONE UNISON*direct*

0800 0 967 968

Lines open from 6am to midnight, Monday-Friday and 9am to 4pm Saturday. Alternatively visit UNISON's website **www.unison.org.uk**



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What is stress?

The usual definition of stress is ‘the adverse reaction people have to excessive demands or pressures, arising when people try to cope with tasks, responsibilities or other types of pressure connected with their jobs, but find difficulty, strain or worry in doing so.’

Stress is very common. One in every five people say they are either very or extremely stressed at work. It is one of the biggest causes of ill-health in the workplace, making half a million people ill every year.

Myths about stress

Whatever your employer may say, stress is not good for you. It is neither a natural part of life nor necessary to get the job done well. Nor is it an inevitable result of work or something that just affects the weak. You are not to blame if you suffer stress at work. There is a clear difference between challenge, stimulation, pressure and stress.

Who is at risk?

Any job can cause stress. It is not something which just affects executives or managers. The main reason for stress is simply a lack of control, and that affects lower paid employees most. Also it is not just about overwork. Boredom and monotony can also be stressful.

Some of the most common causes of stress are:

- dealing with clients or the public
- cuts, reorganisations and lack of job security
- poor working conditions
- threats of violence, harassment and bullying
- lack of childcare or flexibility
- lack of control over the work
- too demanding a job or too high a workload
- monotonous or boring work
- lack of training
- excessive hours and shift work
- general frustration with managers who just will not listen or cannot do their job.

UNISON believes that stress should not be a normal part of working life. No-one should suffer ill health because of the work they do.

Symptoms and effects

Stress can affect both our bodies and our minds. It affects everyone differently, but the main symptoms are depression, anxiety, difficulty sleeping and constant fatigue. Often people suffering from stress will get headaches, backaches, skin rashes and even ulcers.

People often try to reduce these symptoms through the use of alcohol, sleeping pills or cigarettes.

In the long run stress can lead to heart disease and high blood pressure.

Because of the way stress is seen a lot of people will not admit to suffering from stress. This can make matters worse.

Employers’ legal duties

Your employer has a duty to ensure your health, safety and welfare at work—and this includes preventing stress. They must assess the risk of stress and bring in measures to reduce that risk.

But stress is not an issue you can easily take up with your employer alone. In fact this would be a very stressful thing to do by yourself.

This is where UNISON can help

UNISON’s safety representatives have legal rights to take up health and safety matters on your behalf, so if you have a problem with stress, get UNISON involved. If you are experiencing problems or ill-health because of stress let us know. Our trained safety representatives can make approaches to your employer on your behalf. You may need changes to your job, more training or more support.

Together we can tackle stress