

Health & Safety Signs of Stress



Health and Safety Review February 2025

Signs of Stress

If an employee starts to act differently it can be a sign that they are stressed. Managers should look out for signs of stress in their teams and employees and think about whether the stress could somehow be linked to the work.

If early action is taken this can reduce the impact of the pressure and make it easier to reduce or remove the causes. If managers are worried that an employee is showing some of these signs, they should encourage them to see their GP. These signs can however also be symptoms of other conditions. If there is something wrong at work, and this has caused the problem, managers should take action.

Signs of Stress in Teams

There may be signs such as:

- Arguments
- Higher staff turnover
- More reports of stress
- More sickness absence
- Decreased performance
- More complaints and grievances

Signs of Stress in Employees

A change in the way in which someone acts, for example:

- Taking more time off
- Arriving for work later
- Appearing more twitchy or nervous

A change in the way someone thinks or feels can also be a sign of stress, for example:

- Mood swings
- Being withdrawn
- Loss of motivation, commitment and confidence
- Increased emotional reactions - Being more tearful, sensitive or aggressive

Many of the outward signs of stress should be readily noticeable, although the indications will vary considerably between individuals. Stress triggers a number of changes in the body's processes.

These changes are often complex and involve a number of 'levels' such as:

- **Emotional** - Fatigue, anxiety, poor motivation in general
- **Cognitive** - Making mistakes, having accidents
- **Behavioural** - Deteriorating relationships with colleagues, irritability, indecisiveness, absenteeism, Excessive smoking, excessive drinking, overeating
- **Physiological** - Increased complaints regarding health such as headaches, dizziness and general aches and pains

It is important to realise that stress can cause long-term health effects. Stress, when prolonged or particularly intense, may lead to increased health problems including:

- Physical effects, such as:
 - High blood pressure
 - Heart disease
 - Ulcers
 - Thyroid disorders
 - Gastrointestinal disturbances
- Psychological effects, such as anxiety and depression
- Other behaviours, like skipping meals, drinking too much alcohol and excessive smoking

When to Take Action

Employers need to take action when the indications of impending harm to health due to stress at work are plain enough for any reasonable employer to recognise.

Employers are only in breach of duty if they fail to take the steps which are reasonable in the circumstances, bearing in mind the:

- Magnitude of the risk of harm occurring
- Gravity of the harm which might occur
- Costs and practicability of preventing it
- Justifications for running the risk

If you have any queries or are in need of specific Health & Safety advice, please use the contact form in the Health & Safety policy section of our system to contact a member of the AfterAthena team (part of the Napthens Group) who are able to offer your advice via email and a FREE virtual Health & Safety Audit.

AfterAthena Limited is a limited company incorporated in England and Wales (registered number 05172986) which is authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority. Our SRA number is 8001329.
Our registered address is at 7 Winckley Square, Preston, PR1 3JD.

VAT Registration Number 842 0852 39