



Workforce

**Work-related Stress Policy: guide
for employees**

This guide explains the Work-related Stress Policy and the support available to you at work.

The following guide forms part of the standard for workforce policies. These policies apply to all eligible staff within NHS Scotland, regardless of the board they are employed by. The guide covers:

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What is the purpose of the Work-related Stress Policy?

This policy aims to:

- Promote your wellbeing and create a supportive environment.
- Increase knowledge of the causes of work-related stress.
- Identify workplace changes to help reduce stress.
- Support you in managing stress effectively.

What is work-related stress?

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them.”

HSE Management Standards outline 6 main areas of work design which can affect stress levels. They are:

- Demands—This includes issues such as workload, work pattern and the work environment.
- Control—How much say the person has in the way they do their work.
- Support—This includes encouragement, sponsorship, and resources provided by the organisation, as well as line management and colleagues.
- Relationships—This includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
- Role—Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.
- Change—How organisational change, large or small, is managed and communicated in the organisation.

[Find out more about HSE Management Standards.](#)

Your manager should consider these areas when supporting you to manage stress in the workplace.

Employee responsibilities

As an employee, your wellbeing is a priority. You should:

- Be aware of your wellbeing. It is normal to feel pressure, but it's important to recognise when it's turning into stress.
- Speak up if you're feeling stressed. Talk to your manager, a trusted colleague, or a trade union representative.
- Know what support is available. There are services available to help you, so please don't hesitate to use them when needed.
- Support your colleagues. If you notice a teammate is struggling, be supportive and gently encourage them to get help.

Identifying signs of stress

Stress can affect how you think, feel, and act. It's different for everyone, but you might notice some common signs.

You may feel:

- negative, isolated, or nervous
- indecisive
- unable to concentrate

You may act differently, for example by:

- eating more or less than usual
- having difficulty sleeping
- making negative lifestyle choices

Effects of stress

Anyone can experience work-related stress because of work pressures. These may include the demands of the job or a lack of clarity about the role.

Work-related stress is not an illness, but if it goes on a long time, it can contribute to ill-health. You may experience physical effects such as:

- raised blood pressure
- heart disease
- musculoskeletal pain
- stomach problems
- minor illnesses

You may experience psychological effects such as:

- anxiety
- depression
- lifestyle choices that have a negative impact on your health

Supportive steps

Feeling stressed is not a sign of weakness, and it can happen to anyone. The most important step is to talk to someone as soon as you start to feel overwhelmed. This gives us the opportunity to assist you and prevent the situation from worsening

Your first point of contact is usually your manager. You can use the Work-related Stress Policy risk assessment to help guide this conversation.

[Download the Individual risk assessment form.](#)

If you don't feel able to speak to your manager, you can talk to:

- a senior manager or trusted colleague
- your HR department
- a trade union representative
- occupational health
- wellbeing services

Useful links

- [National Wellbeing Hub](#)
- [NHS Inform – Stress Busters](#)
- [HSE – How to tackle work-related stress guidance \[PDF\]](#)
- [HSE – Talking Toolkit: Preventing work-related stress \[PDF\]](#)
- [HSE – Management standards for tackling work-related stress: Action plan template \[PDF\]](#)
- [HSE: Information about health and safety at work](#)
- [Scottish Action for Mental Health \(SAMH\)](#)