

KEY FACTS

Being off work with stress, anxiety or depression is not easy. It is often made even harder by feeling you don't know what or how to tell your employer.

You are not alone. Mental ill-health affects 1 in 6 people at work in the UK.

There are many common concerns when it comes to stress, anxiety and depression. People worry that they will be seen as weak or not up for the job. Some fear that they may never be able to work again...

But did you know that many people successfully manage mental ill-health at work every day? And that:

- For many of us, work is very important. Work not only allows us to earn money, but also gives us a sense of identity and supports our health and wellbeing.
- Many people with mental ill-health want to get back to work as safely and quickly as possible.
- Having mental ill-health does not always affect your ability to work. However, if you feel that it does, you may want to think about asking for some changes to your work in order to return to work and continue to do your job well.
- Taking long periods of time off work can be damaging for self-esteem and make it harder to get back into work.

Take 20 minutes to read through the six steps in this guide. These steps set out what you need to do to:

- **meet your duties to your employer**
- **maintain contact with your employer**
- **help you feel connected to work.**

You will also find exercises, checklists and templates that are designed to provide you with the tools you need to talk to your employer.

What are stress, anxiety and depression?

Everyone's experience of mental health is slightly different. People with stress, anxiety or depression may display different signs or symptoms and some might not show any at all. Often, we cannot tell by someone's behaviour alone. A more important sign is a **change** in the person's behaviour.

Some signs that you may have noticed in yourself include:

- Behavioural signs - struggling with workload, low levels of concentration and focus, difficulty in organising, low productivity, negative attitude, changes in motivation.
- Emotional signs - feeling anxious or irritable, mood changes, changes in how you interact with colleagues, too much emotion, feeling isolated or socially withdrawn.
- Physical signs – tiredness, having sleepless nights, increased drinking and/or smoking, not feeling hungry, headaches.
- For more details on signs and symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression, and the possible impact on work – see Types of mental health problems on the [Mind website](#).

What causes mental ill-health?

- It can happen suddenly, as a result of a specific experience or life event.
- It can also happen as a result of pressures that have accumulated over time.
- It can be linked to another illness such as back pain or heart disease.
- Sometimes there is no obvious reason.

Can work cause or exacerbate mental ill-health?

The causes of stress, anxiety and depression are often complex; but, for some people, work can play a part. The Health and Safety Executive's Management Standards outline six aspects of work that can cause stress, if they are not properly managed. See the [Health and Safety Executive website](#) to find out more.

However, overall research has consistently shown that work is good for our health, so getting back to work is important – as long as the work is well designed and managed.