

# Don't Get Stressed Out with Stress!

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## Introduction

Being stressed at work is nothing new, but that does not mean organisations need to tolerate it, they just need to manage it!

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines work-related stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them'.

According to the HSE, sickness absence costs the UK about £12bn a year, and stress-related absence accounts for around £3.7bn of that. Stress is believed to trigger 70% of all visits to doctors and 85% of serious illnesses (HSE statistics).

Stress at work provides a serious risk of litigation for all employers and organisations. It carries significant liabilities for damages, bad publicity and loss of reputation. Stress prevention strategies are preferable; but employers need to take care in managing those already absent due to stress.

## What does the Law say?

Employers are responsible for the effects of workplace stress on employees. Stress-related illnesses such as clinical depression do fall within the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and therefore reasonable workplace adjustments should be considered to help employees avoid stress-inducing situations.

In a stress study, about 1 in 5 people said that they found their work either very stressful or extremely stressful. Dealing with stress-related claims consumes vast amounts of management time.

## Contact us

HR Insight  
20 Eastern Rd, Romford, Essex RM1 3PJ

Offices in Romford, London (City & West End), St Albans, Hayes and Redhill.

## So what triggers Stress?

Identified triggers include excessive time pressures, inflexible working hours, inadequate training or opportunities for learning new skills, organisational confusion and a poor work-life balance.

A combination of organisational change and stress management is often the most useful approach for preventing stress at work. Positive tips include:

- Ensuring workloads are in line with workers' capabilities and resources
- Designing jobs to provide meaning and stimulation with clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Giving workers opportunities to participate in decisions and actions that affect their jobs
- Improving communication about organisational performance, internal changes, pay reviews, career development and prospects – subjects that reduce uncertainty.

## Returning to Work

Keeping in regular contact with employees absent due to work-related stress keeps work on their agenda and offers an opportunity to discuss and plan for a return. The process can be helped through consultation with their GP, who may issue Fit Notes, and possibly Occupational Health Specialists.

Return to work discussions may help to identify what caused the stress and what adjustments their manager may need to consider. There may also be factors outside work that contributed to the person's work related stress. Do not assume that it is just related to work.

General Enquiries  
[enquiries@hrinsight.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@hrinsight.co.uk)

Legal Department  
[legal@hrinsight.co.uk](mailto:legal@hrinsight.co.uk)

## STOP PRESS! STOP! Retirement Age

The Coalition Government has just confirmed its intention to scrap the default retirement age of 65 in October 2011. Consultation with interested parties will follow but in practice, due to the need to give at least 6 months notice of an intention to retire an employee, the default retirement age will disappear from April 2011.

We recommend that all our clients review **now** what impact this may have for them. After April, employees aged over 65 will need to be taken through a formal disciplinary or capability procedure if they are not performing at the required level – retirement will no longer be an option.

## Rising Tribunal Claims

Employment tribunals are already overloaded with cases. The latest reports show a 56% increase. This is due certainly in part to the volume of redundancies over the last 18 months but also relates to the number of no win-no fee solicitors and household insurances covering the cost of employee claims.

If you, as an employer, have not yet got insurance to cover the costs of defending a claim, it is time to seriously review this.

## Can We Help?

If you have employees over the age of 65, want an insurance quote or have specific concerns about any employment related matter, please do contact us on 01708 758958 or visit us at [www.hrinsight.co.uk](http://www.hrinsight.co.uk).

Heather Matheson  
[HMatheson@hrinsight.co.uk](mailto:HMatheson@hrinsight.co.uk)

Telephone  
01708 758958