

## Stress and the workplace

### Work related stress

Workplace stress and fatigue can lead to physical or mental harm. Stress may be caused by factors inside and outside the workplace. Your employer is responsible for managing workplace stress.

### Safety concerns

If workplace stress is not addressed and managed it may lead to immediate safety problems. For example, you could be so stressed you don't see a warning light flashing.

Stress and fatigue can create safety hazards in the workplace, particularly in health sector workplaces. It is especially critical to manage stress effectively where colleagues and patients may be affected. Please see the NZNO fact sheet 'Health and safety – managing hazards' for more information on this topic.

### Prevention

The [Health and Safety in Employment Act](#) places a positive obligation on employers and employees to work together to put systems in place to prevent hazards including stress. Workloads should be monitored and employers should take steps to ensure that hazards do not cause employees physical or mental harm. Therefore open communication with your employer about stress and workloads is essential.

### Notification to your employer

It is best practise to notify your employer of any work-related stress in writing. If you believe your work to be unsafe and affecting your health it is important to include this. Talking to your employer about your workload or stress may not be sufficient notification to warrant investigation or action by your employer.

### Medical certificates and diagnosis

The normal guidelines for when you are required to provide a medical certificate apply to sick leave taken for stress. You can check this in the sick leave provision in your employment agreement.

If you have been diagnosed as suffering from work-related stress, it is important that your medical certificate clearly identifies the work concerns so that the employer can respond to them.

#### The medical certificate should include:

- > what you are suffering from e.g. stress/depression/anxiety etc;
- > the factors this is attributed to e.g. not being able to take breaks, unachievable deadlines, long hours of work.

### Paid stress leave

Your employer may provide paid time off if you suffer work-related stress, as they would for any other disease or illness you suffer from. This is provided for in the sick leave provision in your employment agreement, and in the sick leave section of the [Holidays Act 2003](#).

## Sick leave for stress

An employee may take sick leave if they are sick or injured. This includes mental and physical symptoms which may be the result of stress. Check the sick leave provision in your employment agreement or ask payroll if you are unsure how much sick leave you have.

## Solutions

If the stress is work-related your employer should meet with you to discuss the factors which have contributed to your stress. Your employer may propose appropriate solutions and systems for you to consider. If you have ideas about how to minimise your workplace stress you should suggest them to your employer. The proposed solution/changes should eliminate, minimise or manage the contributing factors to your stress.

## Non work-related stress

Your employer is not responsible for issues outside the workplace. It is still best practise to notify your employer in writing if you are suffering from non work-related stress if there is a chance it could affect your work. If you are unsure about whether you should notify your employer please contact the NZNO Member Support Centre.

If the stress is not work related they may offer you [EAP](#) or recommend other counselling.

### References:

[Healthy Work; Managing stress and fatigue in the workplace, OSH 2003](#)  
[DOL Themes in employment law - Stress](#)

Holidays Act 2003

The Department of Labour Guideline Healthy Work: Managing Stress and Fatigue in the Workplace

### Where can I find out more?

- > NZNO Member Support Centre 0800 28 38 48
- > Speak to the NZNO delegate on your ward
- > Check your employment agreement and any employer policies relating to health and safety, stress, and sick leave.
- > [Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment Labour information](#)
- > [Health and Safety in Employment Act](#)

**Date adopted:** July 2014      **Principal author:** Industrial resources group  
**Review date:** July 2016   **Correspondence to:** [nurses@nzno.org.nz](mailto:nurses@nzno.org.nz)

**Mission statement**

NZNO is committed to the representation of members and the promotion of nursing and midwifery. NZNO embraces Te Tiriti o Waitangi and works to improve the health status of all peoples of Aotearoa/ New Zealand through participation in health and social policy development.

© 2014 This material is copyright to the New Zealand Nurses Organisation. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced by any process, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form without the written permission of the Chief Executive of the New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO), PO Box 2128, Wellington 6140.