

Stress, fatigue and the workplace, 2023

Work related stress and fatigue

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 and fatigue.

Safety concerns

If workplace stress and fatigue is not addressed and managed it may lead to immediate safety problems. For example, you could be so stressed or tired that 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 (Worksafe, 2021a, 2021b).

Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Whakaruruhau Cultural Safety Standards of Practice to be implemented and guided by obligations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (te Tiriti) articles that active protection of the following key principles.

- 1. Tino rangatiratanga**
Māori are key decision-makers in the design, delivery, prioritisation, and monitoring of health services.
- 2. Equity**
Equity requires commitment to achieving equitable health outcomes for Māori. In the process, clinicians, hospital administrators and public health policy makers should not lose focus on identifying, acknowledging, and addressing existing inequities experienced by Māori.
- 3. Active protection**
Active protection ensures, to the fullest practicable extent, that the health and disability system achieves equitable health outcomes for Māori.
- 4. Options**
Options means that the health and disability system is agile in adapting and responding with emphasis on kaupapa Māori health and disability services to be able to serve Māori communities adequately.
- 5. Partnership**
Partnership means leadership works alongside Māori leaders to enable a coordinated and united response with Māori receiving adequate resources to govern, design, deliver, manage, and monitor a response and the impacts of the pandemic or emergency on Māori communities.

The key guiding principles ensures the prohibition of unlawful discrimination in employment where harassment based on race, culture and ethnic identity is questioned. Discrimination based on the grounds of age, race and/or colour, ethnicity or national origins, disability, ethical belief, political opinion are considered unlawful acts of

discrimination in accordance with the Employment Relations Act 2000 and the Human Rights Act 1993.

Prevention

The **Health and Safety at Work Act 2015** 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 practice 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

Health and safety at Work Act 2015.

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2015/0070/latest/DLM5976660.html>

Holidays Act 2003.

<https://legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2003/0129/latest/DLM236387.html>

Keenan, R. (2016). Healthcare and the law. Wellington: Thompson Reuters New Zealand.

Worksafe. (2021). Fatigue: Advice for workers.

<https://www.worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/fatigue/pamphlets/>

Worksafe. (2021). <https://www.worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/work-related-health/work-related-stress>

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.
- > <https://employerline.co.nz/employee/>

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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.

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