

Work-related stress is one of the most common causes of employee ill health in the UK. But with all the talk about wellbeing, mental health, and “building resilience,” it’s easy to get lost in vague advice and lose sight of what’s legally required in your workplace. If you’re wondering **does my employer have to do a stress risk assessment in the UK?**, this detailed guide unpacks what the law says, your employer’s duties under health and safety rules, and how the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) expects stress to be managed effectively.

Understanding Stress as a Health and Safety Hazard

Firstly, it’s important to recognise that work-related stress is not just “a personal issue” or something employers can dismiss as an individual’s inability to cope. Under UK law, stress caused or worsened by workplace conditions is a legitimate *health and safety hazard*. This means employers have a clear responsibility to identify and manage any risks of work-related stress to protect their employees.

The **Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974** makes it clear that employers have a duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety, and welfare at work of all their employees. This includes mental health. Stress, when caused by work or workplace conditions, falls under these protections.

Work-Related Stress Defined

The HSE defines work-related stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work.” It is not caused by negative emotions alone but by pressures or demands that overwhelm a person’s ability to cope, due to workplace factors such as:

- High workloads
- Poor management practices
- Unclear job roles
- Conflict at work
- Lack of support
- Organisational change without consultation

Does the Employer Have a Duty to Do Stress Risk Assessments?

The simple answer is **yes**. While there is no explicit legal duty stating “an employer must conduct a stress risk assessment,” the duty to manage risks under the *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999* means employers must assess risks including psychosocial risks such as stress.

Health and safety law is clear that risk assessments should cover all workplace hazards, and if stress is a hazard, it must be assessed and managed just like physical hazards (like machinery safety or slip risks).

Practical Implications for Employers

This means employers must:

1. Identify potential work-related stress risks
2. Assess how likely and severe these risks are
3. Take sensible steps to control or eliminate these risks
4. Review assessments regularly and after incidents or changes

Failing to do this can be a breach of health and safety law and may lead to enforcement action or claims from employees.

Understanding the HSE's Management Standards

One of the most useful tools available for employers is the HSE's **Management Standards for work-related stress**. Introduced in 2004, these Management Standards provide [brightonjournal.co.uk](https://www.brightonjournal.co.uk) an evidence-based framework to help employers identify, assess, and manage work-related stress following best practice.

What are the HSE Management Standards?

The Management Standards define the main causes—or “stressors”—at work that can lead to stress-related ill health. They focus on six key areas of work design that employers should monitor and manage:

Stress Risk Factor Description Demands Workload, work patterns, work environment Control How much say employees have in how they do their work Support Encouragement, resources, and assistance from managers and colleagues Relationships Promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour Role Understanding of job roles and ensuring no conflicting roles Change How organisational change is managed and communicated

Employers can use the Management Standards as a benchmark to create or improve their stress risk assessments and implement interventions that directly address these areas.

How Should Your Employer Conduct a Stress Risk Assessment?

A proper stress risk assessment should not be a tick-box exercise or a questionnaire filled in to “prove” something. It must be:

- **Specific and evidence-based:** Employers must gather actual information about your workplace—from absence records, incident reports, employee feedback, turnover rates, and even direct consultation with staff.
- **Actionable:** Identifying risks is not enough; employers must put in place tangible measures to reduce or manage those risks—for example, adjusting workloads, training managers on support skills, improving communication, or clarifying roles.
- **Regularly reviewed:** Stressors can change over time, especially during organisational changes or after incidents. Employers need to review assessments and control measures regularly.

What If Your Employer Has No HR Department?

Many small businesses, micro-agencies, cafes, or studios don't have a dedicated HR team. So when an employee asks “does my employer have to do a stress risk assessment?”, the question lands on the manager or business owner. This is exactly why a straightforward, step-by-step approach like the HSE Management Standards is valuable—it can be done without specialist HR knowledge.

Stress, Disability, and the Equality Act 2010

An important legal consideration is that stress can intersect with the **Equality Act 2010**, which protects people with disabilities at work. Stress itself is not a protected characteristic, but if the stress results from or causes a recognised medical condition that qualifies as a disability (including some mental health conditions), your employer's duties increase.

The Equality Act defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Some stress-related conditions (like clinical depression, anxiety disorders, or PTSD) can qualify.



Employer Duties Regarding Stress as a Disability-Related Issue

- **Reasonable adjustments:** Employers must consider adjustments to help you manage work despite the disability (e.g., flexible hours, changes in duties).
- **Non-discrimination:** Employers cannot treat you unfavourably because of a stress-related disability.
- **Proactive risk management:** It is even more important for employers to carry out stress risk assessments and manage risks carefully to avoid aggravating any disability.

What Can You Do If Your Employer Fails to Conduct a Stress Risk Assessment?

If you feel your employer is ignoring the risk of stress or not conducting the necessary assessments, you can take the following steps:

1. Use evidence to create an actionable list of stressors—note dates, incidents, symptoms, and workplace factors causing stress.
2. Use a simple email checklist to communicate concerns to your line manager or employer:
 - Describe specific stress-related issues (e.g., excessive workload, poor communication).
 - Request a stress risk assessment or review of existing measures.
 - Suggest possible adjustments or support.
3. Contact the HSE for guidance or the Health and Safety Executive if the situation is unsafe.
4. Consider support from trade unions or employment advisers.

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If you found this post useful, please share it on your favourite social media platform to help spread awareness about workplace stress and employer duties. Use the links below:

- WhatsApp
- Facebook
- Instagram (Share in Stories or bio)
- TikTok (Create a video about stress risk)
- Twitter/X
- YouTube (Post an explainer video)
- Telegram
- Viber
- Pinterest

Final Thoughts

In summary, yes, UK employers do have a legal duty to assess and manage risks from work-related stress. While the law may not explicitly say “stress risk assessment,” the combined requirements of the *Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974* and the *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999* mean stress must be treated as a workplace hazard.

The HSE’s Management Standards for work-related stress are the benchmark for how this should be done in practice. Employers who ignore or dismiss the risk of stress expose themselves to legal risk and, more importantly, put their employees’ health in jeopardy. If you’re experiencing stress at work, you have the right to expect your employer to listen, assess the risk, and take action.



Remember, stress at work is not a “personal resilience” failing—it’s a health and safety issue requiring proper risk assessment and management.