

Health and well-being

FACT SHEET

PROMOTING OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH:

Introduction

Managing occupational health and welfare issues in your workplace means taking steps to promote employees' and your own well-being and prevent illness and injury.

This can range from reducing stress and drawing up a drugs and alcohol policy to stamping out bullying and harassment.

Promoting occupational Health

Occupational health concerns aren't an optional extra - all employers have a legal duty of care to their employees. In addition, taking occupational health seriously can bring a range of business benefits:

- lower absenteeism
- improved relationships with customers and suppliers
- improved productivity
- reduced staff turnover

Overall, it can cut your business' costs and improve its performance.

Tackling occupational health in your workplace broadly involves addressing:

- stress
- repetitive strain injury or work-related upper limb disorders
- back pain
- bullying and harassment by other staff, managers or members of the public
- the control of hazardous substances
- heat, light and noise

You can use the workplace as a setting to promote health in areas such as:

- smoking
- drug and alcohol use
- disease prevention and control, eg coronary heart disease and obesity

You must comply with the smoking ban in public places, workplaces and company vehicles used by more than one person.

Support employees when they become ill by:

- following best practice on rehabilitation
- making reasonable adjustments

Occupational health problems are not only limited to immediate injury and disease. They can include the effects of long-term exposure to asbestos and other fibres, vapours and dusts, bacteria and viruses, noise, vibration and other physical risks. They can also include psychological and social issues such as violence, bullying and sexual harassment.

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Key occupational health issues

You should consider anything which affects your employees' welfare as an occupational health issue:

- Smoking, and drug and alcohol abuse - not only can an addiction affect an individual's performance, their behaviour can have a significant impact on colleagues. You must now prevent smoking in workplaces and company vehicles used by more than one person.
- Stress - excessive pressure can affect your employees' psychological, social and physical well-being.
- Back pain and repetitive strain injury (RSI) - a variety of lifting, repetitive and other kinds of work, including computer work, can result in injury or longer-term disability. Good ergonomics can help reduce the risks.
- Control of hazardous substances - using chemicals or other hazardous substances at work can put people's health at risk. You must control exposure to hazardous substances to prevent ill-health.
- Disease prevention and control - you should promote good health and take measures to reduce the risks of disease, infection and allergy.
- Heat, light, noise and vibration - consider exposure to sudden changes in temperature, poor lighting and excessive vibration or noise levels.
- Violence, bullying and harassment - physical violence or psychological intimidation can have a serious impact on an employee's well-being. An effective discipline and grievance procedure is essential in tackling such problems. In addition to protecting employees from harassment from other members of staff, you should also take steps to protect employees from harassment from third parties such as customers and suppliers.
- Work-life balance - working practices help employees achieve a better balance between their work and personal lives and can make them more productive.

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Managing occupational health

To establish and maintain a working environment that safeguards staff welfare you need to put into place systems which allow you to:

- identify - and involve workers in assessing - workplace risks
- assess and consider employees' needs when planning and organising work
- provide advice, information and training to employees, as well as mechanisms for employee feedback such as a suggestion scheme
- regularly monitor and record employees' health

Effective management of occupation health aims to improve general health and prevent work-related illness and injury. It should also include intervening early when health problems arise, and helping those who have been long term sick to return to work.

Legal requirements

Some elements of occupational health are good practice, while others - such as the need to conduct a wide-ranging assessment of health and safety risks - are legally required.

However, remember that you have a legal duty of care to your employees. This means you have a legal responsibility for all health and safety issues at work even those which are not covered by specific laws. You must assess all risks to employees' health and safety and take steps to control these risks