

# CHALLENGING TIMES: PREVENT STRESS AND SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH

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Stress, depression or anxiety already account for around half of work-related illness in the UK and the cost of poor mental health to employers has increased by 25% since 2019.

HSE's statistics show that 822,000 workers suffered from stress, depression and anxiety in 2020/21.

While some stressors are not work-related, employers play a crucial role in helping people stay well and working by not adding to or aggravating issues.

Project lead at [Lifelines Scotland](#), Gill Moreton, says: "We spend a lot of time at work, and the good news is, that good work is good for us. As well as providing us with the income to support our families and our loved ones, good work also gives us a sense of purpose, of self-esteem and social support with our colleagues.

"We can't protect people from the outside world, but we can create a work environment that promotes good mental health. Research tells us that supportive management; supportive teams work as really effective buffers for people."

The earlier a problem is tackled the less impact it will have for your teams and your business. Get started today with [five simple steps from our Working Minds campaign](#).

Starting a conversation is an important first step. If you need help getting conversations started, HSE's [Talking toolkit](#) aims to help managers talk with workers as part of their overall approach to preventing and managing work-related stress.

### Signposting support

You may find the following links from other organisations and partners helpful to share with colleagues and teams:

- [Money and mental health - Mind](#)
- [Mental Health & Money Advice \(mentalhealthandmoneyadvice.org\)](#)
- [Get help with the cost of living - Citizens Advice](#)
- [Your mind plan \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)
- [Samaritans](#)

# TALKING SHOP: FIGHTING FATIGUE

A recent study of office workers showed sit/stand regimes reduced fatigue. What else can be done? Four industry leaders share their thoughts.

**ALICE GUNDAVDA CMIOSH**

**Health, safety and wellbeing manager, Cumbria County Council**

The council has a variety of preventive measures to manage feelings of depression and fatigue. These include manager supervision, individual risk assessments and access to wellbeing champions.

We also have in-house occupational health facilities and mental health first aiders. The council offers flexible working and has introduced new ways of working, examining the business requirements for office work. We are also collaborating with the University of Hull to measure baseline stress across the council, with planned interventions for staff wellbeing to be launched later next year.



**ANDY HOOKE CMIOSH**

**Health and safety consultant, WorkNest**

Managing the risks to workers' mental health is of paramount importance. This is something I regularly discuss with those I support. Proper training and understanding are key to breaking down stigma.



Sit/stand desks have become the norm in many settings now, and help provide comfort for display screen equipment users, giving them a choice. Standing helps to improve the ergonomics of a workstation, and is likely to improve mental wellbeing, aid circulation and reduce fatigue.

However, it also is important to recognise the importance of changing position regularly, such as switching to sitting down every now and then.

**FRASER MORRISON CMIOSH**

**Director, M2 Safety Consultants**



Regarding fatigue, allowing homeworking with flexible hours is crucial. People should work to live, not the other way round. Encouraging, promoting and rewarding healthy lifestyle choices are small measures you can take to improve health and wellbeing. Offering an extra day's holiday for birthdays, and being flexible with when holidays can be taken, are others.

To reduce depression, it's important to have an open and honest culture where mental health is spoken about on a regular basis and isn't a taboo subject. Building and supporting a strong team – where everyone is open, honest, transparent and helps each other out when in need – is key.

**BRETT S EDKINS CMIOSH**

**Head of Health and Safety, London Projects**

The construction industry is wrought with fatigue and depression – so much so, it is undoubtedly a national crisis. To solve this, we can implement shorter working hours via staff rotation or additional site support – it's all about bespoke solutions that are smart and pragmatic.



External support programmes can be also called upon for individual cases. How the industry uses short-term labour is complex, but the key is empathy: knowing and appreciating everyone is human. By lessening the load, we can collectively achieve a healthier working environment.

# MANAGING WORK-RELATED VIOLENCE

HSE defines work-related violence as any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work.



[Work-related violence](#) can include verbal abuse or threats, as well as physical attacks.

The HSE website has a [toolkit to help reduce the risk of work-related violence](#) in licensed or retail premises.

The toolkit has links to useful [resources](#) and features practical advice on:

- [conducting a risk assessment](#)
- [control measures](#)
- [providing support after an incident](#)

# TACKLING STRESS AT WORK THIS WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

World Mental Health Day was on Monday 10 October and the theme this year is making mental health and wellbeing for all a global priority.

HSE's statistics show that 822,000 workers suffered from stress, depression and anxiety in 2020/21.

The earlier a problem is tackled the less impact it will have for your workers and business.

Get started today with [five simple steps](#) from our Working Minds campaign. You can support this campaign by signing up to [become a champion](#).

[Starting a conversation](#) is an important first step. If you need help getting conversations started, HSE's [Talking toolkit](#) aims to help managers talk with workers as part of their overall approach to preventing and managing work-related stress.

Find out what it takes to be [legally compliant](#) and download [HSE's risk assessment template](#) to record your findings and agreed actions.



# KEEP SAFE AT WORK THIS WINTER

With lower temperatures and less daylight, slips and trips accidents at work are likely to be more frequent in the coming months.

At this time of year surfaces can be perilous – there are plenty of [seasonal factors](#) to consider when avoiding these sorts of accidents.

Poor lighting, excess water from rain and even wet and decaying leaves can all cause slip and trip accidents to increase significantly.

Slips and trips cause over a third of all major injuries and can also lead to other types of accidents, such as falls from height or into machinery.

Our [website guidance on slips and trips](#) provides plenty of information and resources on how to avoid these accidents in the workplace.



# PUT MENTAL HEALTH ON PAR WITH FIRE SAFETY, SAYS SUICIDE CHARITY

[New research has found that one in four employees have experienced suicidal thoughts at work.](#)

The findings also show that more than a fifth (21%) of employees do not feel comfortable enough to talk to their employer about possible struggles with mental health.



The findings also show that more than a fifth (21%) of employees do not feel comfortable enough to talk to their employer about possible struggles with mental health.

A person is 62 times more likely to die from suicide (one in 88) than in a fire (one in 5,447). Therefore, the organisation is calling on legislators and workplaces to make suicide prevention mandatory and entrenched into their existing health and safety policies.

The research also found that around a quarter of employees (23%) don't benefit from any mental health policies in their workplace, and almost two fifths (38%) feel that their workplace mental health policies could be better. A further fifth of employees (20%) see their workplace mental health policies as a tick-box exercise.

Aaron Willis, star of BBC's *The Apprentice* and founder of Vulcan Security and an ambassador for Ripple, said: 'Mental health in the workplace is a momentous issue and should be a priority for businesses across the country.'

'Not only is it a health risk to individuals, but it's having an impact on the business also, with poor mental health cited as a factor that impacts productivity for one in five employees, contributing to costly levels of presenteeism.'

## HSE'S RISK-REDUCTION THROUGH DESIGN AWARD 2022-2023



[Our annual musculoskeletal disorders 'risk-reduction through design' award is now open for nominations.](#)

The award highlights the important contribution that ergonomics-based design changes can make to reduce the risks of work-related MSDs.

Employers can nominate any design solutions implemented in workplaces in the UK that have demonstrated how they have reduced musculoskeletal risks for their own workers.

We want to encourage businesses to nominate a design change that has made a real impact in their own workplace.

We are also interested in solutions that tackle difficult-to-solve problems.

There are no restrictions on the size of business that can enter. We encourage all employers whether large or small, and from all sectors of industry to consider making a nomination. The emphasis is on design solutions that have or can reduce the risk of MSDs for workers.

Involving the workforce in developing the solution is essential and cross-sector application, that might inspire others to think more actively about design-based solutions, will also be part of the judging criteria.

The closing date for nominations is 31 January 2023

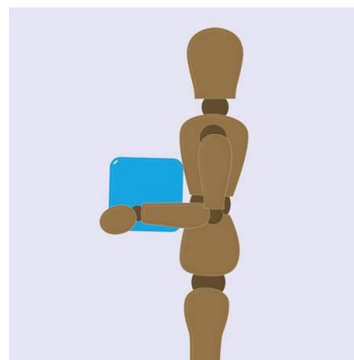
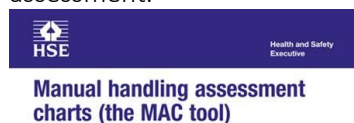
[Full application details are now available on our website](#)



# DIGITAL MSD ASSESSMENT TOOLS

The assessment part of HSE's digital MSD tools are available to use free of charge.

The [digital versions](#) of the Manual Handling Assessment Charts (MAC), Assessment of Repetitive Tasks (ART) and Risk Assessment of Pushing and Pulling (RAPP) tools have been designed to simplify the process of completing each assessment.



They have a logical step-by-step approach and will save your assessors considerable time in populating the results manually.

Employers can use these tools to easily assess the risks posed by physical, strenuous activities. The assessor can then understand, interpret, categorise, and communicate the level of risk.

You can access the tools below:

- [MAC Tool](#)
- [RAPP Tool](#)
- [ART Tool](#)

## STRONGER RESEARCH NEEDED ON WORK ADJUSTMENTS FOR NEURO-DIVERGENT WORKERS, REVIEW FINDS

[More methodically sound research to inform evidence-based guidelines on physical workplace adjustments is required to support neurodivergent workers so they are able to perform effectively without any constraints at work.](#)

That is the conclusion from a joint Switzerland-UK study that undertook a systemic review of English-language studies published between 2000 and 2021 and considered workplace adjustments for a wide range of conditions that fall under the neurodivergence (ND) umbrella. These include Autism-Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD) and dyslexia, or Dyspraxia.

Researchers from Zurich University of Applied Sciences in Switzerland and the University of Surrey and Birbeck University of London in the UK evaluated the evidence around the “extent, robustness and quality of physical workplace adjustments to support occupational longevity, performance and health/wellbeing in neurodivergent workers with specific sensory needs” for a study published in [Applied Psychology](#).

As the researchers note, ND affects around 22% of the general population but ND workers are often unnecessarily excluded from the labour market as their sensory needs are not met.

Many ND workers experience challenges in regulating sensory responses or overload, and they may, for example, experience negative responses to specific lighting, sounds or movement. Although workplace designs to accommodate ND workers, such as control over lighting, private offices or quiet zones have become more common, they are difficult to access, their implementation has been limited and they are not always effective.



Of the 20 studies reviewed, the researchers stressed that the research is 'generally not well-developed', is 'methodically weak' and only offers 'indicative effects'. In addition, they argue that the effects of the sensory adjustments that are required to support ND workers have been researched without considering the specific environments and inclusive sampling.

'Such a vacuum is preventing the development of evidence-based practice, including quality control and return on investment specifications,' the researchers note.

'None of the studies focused solely on the efficacy of physical workplace adjustments but explored a mix of psychosocial and physical adjustments in an unsystematic fashion.'

According to the researchers, this unsystematic approach made it very difficult to draw any firm conclusions for a number of reasons.

First, most of the studies reviewed used mixed work settings, the researchers found, with only four specifically focusing on office-only settings.

Second, most of the evidence only referred to workers with a primary condition of ASD, which meant that other ND groups were underrepresented.

Third, the researchers found that the studies they reviewed used mixed-diagnoses-type samples that were formally, informally and/or self-diagnosed. This means that it is difficult to tell from these studies which accommodations are useful for which condition.

Finally, they point out that it is not entirely clear whether the results from the study review are a valid representation for both genders with ASD and whether any gender-differentiated adjustment needs exist in the first place.

The researchers' study review found that employers reduced acoustic and visual stimulation as the predominant adjustment to help relieve ND workers' sensory stress. Very few studies, however, touched on tactile and olfactory adjustments.

Acoustic adjustments for a range of ND conditions included the use of headphones or earplugs and the provision of private rooms or quiet locations. Visual adjustments specifically for ASD targeted light levels and types as well as screening out visual distractions.

The researchers highlight a number of considerations that should be factored into any future studies that cover physical accommodations for ND workers.

First, they argue there is a need to 'develop a clear understanding of the sensory needs by ND condition, differentiating sensory modality and hypo- and hypersensitivity'.

They also stress that 'robust approaches should also control for potentially confounding individual characteristics and contextual conditions', including self-diagnosis and gender.

The researchers recommend incorporating Dunn's Sensory Process Model of sensitivity-environment interaction.

Second, they argue that further research is required to better understand the impact of the sensory physical environment from both the employer and employees' perspectives and encourage those using and supporting the implementation of adjustments to get involved in the research.

Third, the researchers say that in order to create evidence-based guidance, it is important first to test effective sensory interventions or adjustments as this will improve their relevance in relation to the individual person and the environment, they are working in.

Finally, they argue it is critical that researchers better understand the factors that influence the implementation of workplace adjustments so they can fully grasp "what works, for whom and under what circumstances".

Jo Yarker, who is a Reader at Birkbeck, University of London, and managing partner of Affinity Health at Work, told IOSH magazine: 'Small changes to the physical work environment can make a big impact for neurodiverse workers. Gaining a better understanding of what works, for whom, is vital, but as we wait for the evidence base to develop, we would encourage employers to adopt a test and learn approach, increasing access to adjustments to enable people to optimise their physical work environment – this will not only help neurodiverse workers to stay in and thrive at work, but are likely to help everyone work to their best.'

# BUILDING CONTROL COMPETENCE FRAMEWORK (BICOF)

Building control professionals will, in future, have to register with the Building Safety Regulator (BSR).

It is expected the register will open from October 2023 before registration becomes a legal requirement in April 2024.

Building control professionals will be expected to demonstrate their competence in order to register with the BSR.

HSE published an early draft of the BICoF in May, and over the past few months they have been engaging closely with building control stakeholders to further develop this framework to enable professionals to demonstrate the right skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours to register.

Today they have launched a consultation on the latest version of the BICoF.

The framework applies to all building control professionals in both the public and private sectors, regardless of the type of buildings or building projects they work on, it does not only apply to those working on Higher Risk Buildings (HRBs).

If you work in the profession, are a stakeholder, or employ building control professionals it's important we hear your views on the competence framework - [Take part in the consultation](#)



## FACE FIT TESTING LEGAL REQUIREMENT



AGA have 6 fully qualified Face Fit Testers ready to come to your sites

Where respiratory protective equipment (RPE) is used as a control measure under Health and Safety Legislation, it is vital that the selected RPE is adequate and suitable. RPE must reduce exposure to as low as reasonably practicable, and in any case to an acceptable level (e.g., below any applicable Workplace Exposure Limits or Control Limits).

To ensure that the selected RPE has the potential to provide adequate protection for individual wearers, the ACoPs supporting COSHH, CAR and CLAW stipulate that tight-fitting RPE must be fit tested as part of the selection process. This will help to ensure that inadequately fitting facepieces are not selected for use. Ill-fitting facepieces can create inward leakages of airborne contaminants.

AGA can advise you on:

- The different types of RPE available
- The different grades of RPE and how to understand what the right RPE for the task is
- The different exposure hazards and ill health from working with wood, silica and construction dust
- The law and requirements for RPE use
- How to correctly fit RPE

We can then test the face fit of RPE on your operatives using our testing kit and provide certification for each operative.

# FREE CDM ADVICE

Continued Professional Development for all



Do you need help understanding the CDM Regulations 2015? Not sure if you are complying with your duties correctly?

We offer a free CPD consultation to keep you up to date. One of our experienced CDM Consultants will host a virtual session and provide up to the minute, competent advice. We cover everything from Duty Holders to Design Risk Management and welcome any questions or scenarios you need help with.

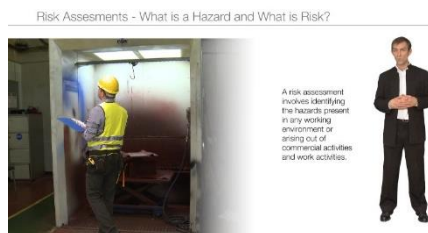
Please get in touch if this would be of interest to you [info@aga-ltd.co.uk](mailto:info@aga-ltd.co.uk)

## AGA E-LEARNING COURSES

Whether you are looking to improve your own knowledge or provide training to employees, our E-Learning courses will guide you through the regulations, your legal duties, identifying hazards in your workplace and suitable control measures. Each course is followed by a short test to clarify your understanding regarding that topic, upon which after completion, you will be issued a certificate.

Each course costs £15+vat unless otherwise stated. The courses we currently offer training in are:

- Asbestos Awareness \*Course cost is £25+vat\*
- Abrasive Wheels
- Basic First Aid
- COSHH
- Display Screen Equipment (DSE)
- Falls Prevention – Working at height
- Fire Safety
- Fire Warden \*Course cost is £20+vat\*
- Health and Safety Level 2 \*Course cost is £20+vat\*
- Legionella Awareness
- Local Exhaust Ventilation (LEV)
- Lone and Remote Workers (Personal Security)
- Manual Handling
- Office Safety
- Risk Assessment
- Slips and Trips
- The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations (Overview)



Basic Ladder Awareness - Directive Key Requirements.

Classification	Duty Rating	Maximum Static Vertical Load	Application	Symbol
Class I	130kg	175kg	Industrial	
Class EN131	115kg	150kg	Commercial	
Class III	95kg	125kg	Domestic	

The value of the safe working load is intended to cover the weight of a single person and their equipment and is also referred to as the 'Maximum Static Vertical Load'.



For more information or to book our courses visit [www.aga-ltd.co.uk/e-learning-courses](http://www.aga-ltd.co.uk/e-learning-courses).





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