

# Millions of workers lie about stressed-out sick days

Charity issues tips on identifying and tackling stress

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Most workers who have taken time off with stress have lied to their boss about why they need leave. Photograph: Getty Images/Somos RF

Millions of British workers have lied to their bosses about taking sick leave when they feel overwhelmed by stress, a new survey reveals today.

[Mental health](#) charity Mind found that almost one in five workers (19%) have taken stress-induced sick leave, but virtually all of them (93%) say they have lied to their boss about the real reason for not turning up.

The taboo around stress is such that workers have told their employers they have come down with stomach upsets, face housing problems or even have a sick relative, rather than admitting the truth, Mind revealed.

The charity published its survey today to coincide with Stress Awareness Day, and says that most employees don't want to be secretive about stress levels - in fact, 70% wanted to be able to discuss stress with their bosses, and a third would like their employer to approach them directly when they are showing signs of being affected by stress.

Meanwhile, a separate survey by the Mental Health Foundation found that most people do nothing to tackle stress and opt to live with it. Although half of respondents said they felt stressed at least once a week and one in five (21%) every day, nearly two-thirds (63%) admitted they would not take any steps to deal with it.

Mind spokesperson Julia Lamb said: "Persistent, unrelieved pressure can lead to stress, feelings of anger and frustration, and physical and mental health problems.

"Work induced stress can happen for a number of reasons - relationship problems such as being bullied at work can be a big stress factor, but often stress is about unrealistic expectations being placed on people to perform more than they are capable of. This could be anything from having too much work for one person to perform, there being a mismatch between someone's skills and what they need to do at work."

She said the symptoms to look out for are:

- Insomnia and difficulty sleeping, waking up repeatedly or too early
- Fatigue
- Muscle tension or aches and pains
- Headaches
- Stomach upsets
- Heart palpitations
- Inability to focus or concentrate
- High levels of anxiety or worry
- Irritability towards others
- Loss of sense of humour
- Withdrawal from social contact

Mind's tips for preventing and managing stress include better workload management to make sure that no one is expected to deliver more than they are capable of; and training for managers to identify the risks, recognise when staff are stressed, and support their workers.

Workers should also make sure they take a proper lunch break, and stick to their working hours, so they can unwind and do not run the risk of getting over tired, said Lamb.

The working environment - with plants, natural light and quiet areas - can also help staff combat stress, says Mind, and flexible working or home working arrangements can help staff find the work-life balance that suits them.

Lamb added: "The relationship between a line manager and employee is absolutely key to looking after a member of staff who is stressed for whatever reason.

"Good communication between line managers and staff will enable managers to spot small differences in people's behaviour, from being more tense or irritable than usual, to being less enthusiastic or becoming withdrawn.

"In a good working relationship, colleagues can usually see physical signs of tension, fatigue or distress in other people. So if someone looks stressed on an ongoing basis, it's important to find out if work is the problem, and if so work together to alleviate stressful feelings."