

# Work Stress

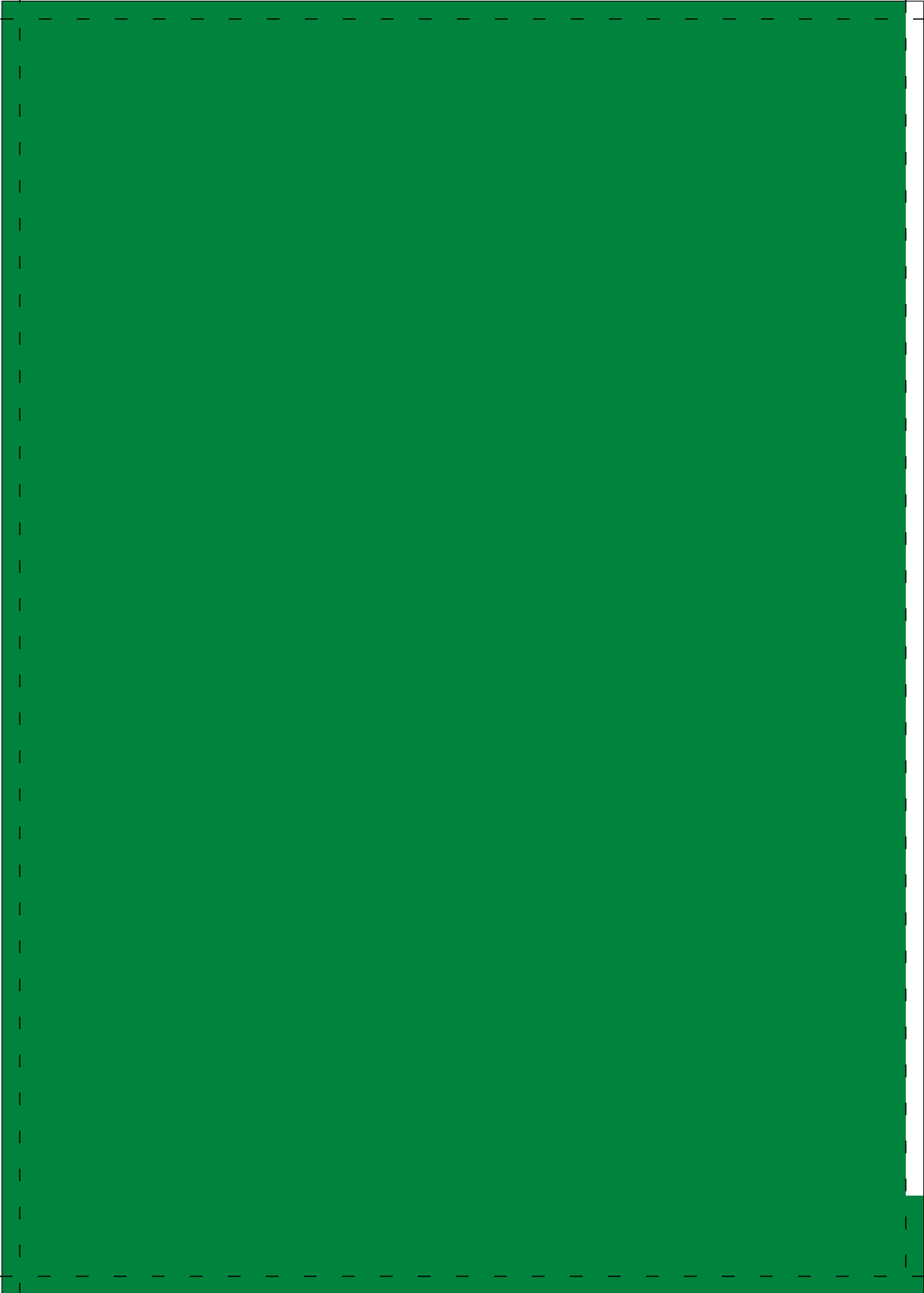
Challenges

Coping Resources

## A Self Help Guide

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## What is stress?

Stress can come from a build up of different pressures over time or may be triggered by a specific problem that has a longer lasting effect. Stress happens when the challenges you face outweigh your resources to cope with them.

Change  
Bullying  
Bad Communication  
Long Hours  
Responsibility  
Deadline

Knowledge  
Support  
Praise  
Skills

Challenges

Coping Resources

## What is work related stress?

“The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them.” (Health and Safety Executive).

## Is it common to feel stressed at work?

Yes! These are the facts:

- Stress is a very common and often very useful feeling. Stress can motivate you to solve problems and might feel like the buzz you need to achieve things. But on the other hand when the stress gets too big, it might feel unpleasant and overwhelming.
- Either way stress alerts you that some form of action above and beyond the norm is needed.
- Stress in itself is not an illness, but if it becomes overwhelming it may lead to you feeling unwell either mentally or physically.
- Stress is the most common problem that people see their GP about.
- Some people feel embarrassed by suffering from stress, perhaps because they think it means they are weak or because they think it is not a real problem like a broken arm so they should just “pull themselves together”.

## Work place triggers to stress:

There can be a number of different triggers to workplace stress, many of which are shown below:



# How does work place stress affect us?

Most people know when work is causing them to feel stressed, but some effects of stress are not always so obvious.

## THOUGHTS:

- "I can't cope!"
- "I can't be bothered."
- "I dread going to work."
- "Others can cope, so why can't I?"
- "I'm going to get sacked if I keep going like this."
- "I must be weak."

## FEELINGS:

- Upset easily by criticism.
- Intolerance to others.
- Generally irritable.
- Doom or gloom.
- Apathy.
- Feeling resigned.
- Loss of excitement with job.
- Anxiety.
- Depression.

## PHYSICAL WELLBEING:

- Poor concentration.
- Lapses of memory.
- Tiredness.
- Tension headaches.
- Nauseous/stomach upsets.
- Increased heart rate (high bloodpressure).
- Hot and cold spells.
- Tingling sensations.

## BEHAVIOUR:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Poor performance.</li><li>Making uncharacteristic errors and mistakes.</li><li>Taking a lot of time off sick.</li><li>Isolate themselves – withdraw from the social aspects.</li><li>Spending more time at work.</li><li>Aggressive or snappy.</li><li>Not taking holidays/using holidays to 'recover' rather than for pleasure.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Unnecessary risk taking.</li><li>Criticising others when feeling 'backed into a corner'.</li><li>Indecisive.</li><li>Drink and smoke more, consume more "junk foods" and caffeine.</li><li>Passivity.</li><li>Not so interested in appearance or hygiene.</li><li>Setting self strict high targets!</li></ul> |
|--|---|

## Doing things to help you feel better:

There are lots of common sense strategies to help you cope with stress – but often when we are stressed we forget the basics or other things get in the way. It takes determination and planning to do them again.

Often stress in the workplace can have a knock on effect on our home life. See below for a list of stress busting tips, that can be used for your work difficulties, and can be applied to other aspects of your life.

## Stress Busting Tips

### · Take some exercise

Exercise helps you to feel calmer and reduces the physical tension associated with stress. It can help to clear your mind so that you can think more clearly about how to tackle your problems.

### · Getting a good night's sleep

Getting enough sleep is important for your mental wellbeing. If you aren't getting enough sleep, this will have a knock on effect on your functioning the next day, tasks seem more difficult or overwhelming. If your sleep is a **NIGHTMARE**, then follow these tips:



**Noise** – Ensure the noise level of the bedroom promotes a good night's sleep

**Illumination** – Ensure unwanted light sources are blocked out

**Get up** – If you are not asleep within 30 minutes get up and do something relaxing

**Healthy** – Reduce the number of caffeinated drinks especially in the evening

**Temperature** – Make sure the bedroom temperature is comfortable for you

**Milk drinks** – A milky drink before bed can get you in the mood for sleeping

**Appropriate comfort** – Are your bed and mattress comfortable?

**Routine** – Follow the same bedtime routine to promote your natural sleepiness

**Exercise** – Try not to exercise too near bedtime

### · Talk with others

Worries can seem less intense if you can let them out and share them with others. Also, you may find they have similar experiences or tips to handle it. A problem aired is a problem shared!

### · Do nice things

Make time in your personal life to do nice things, don't let work take over the other things in your life that you enjoy. If you are not enjoying work or getting any sense of reward there, it is important to get those feelings elsewhere.

### · Prioritise

If you have so much to do that it seems overwhelming; write a list of all the tasks you have to do no matter how big or small. Then re-organise your list in order of importance and deadlines. This will make sure that you approach everything in a calm and organised way. Also, writing everything down rather than trying to keep it in your head can seem a relief too.

### · Set realistic targets

Break your problem down into small achievable steps. Set yourself **SMART** goals:

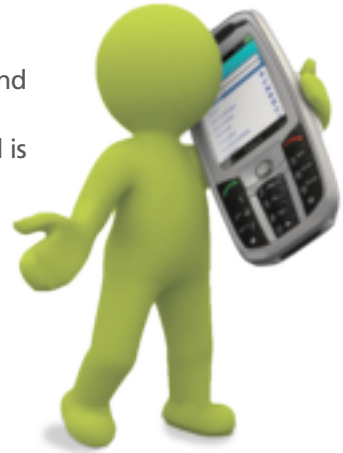
**Specific** – Select a small part of your problem.

**Measureable** – How will you know when this goal is accomplished?

**Achievable** – Set yourself a small task that you know you can achieve.

**Realistic** – Don't set yourself up to fail.

**Timed** – When are you going to do it? How long is it going to take you? Is your goal achievable in the time that you have allocated yourself to do it?







### · Take your breaks

It may seem difficult to find the time, but if you are meant to take a break, then do! Taking breaks helps you to feel refreshed and more productive. If it seems difficult to fit your break in then try scheduling it into your diary, just 10 minutes away from your desk to eat can be enough!

### · Reduce caffeine

Try to cut down the amount of caffeine you have. There is caffeine in coffee, tea, fizzy drinks, chocolate, energy drinks or even some tablets. It might be tempting to use these products as a short term solution to boost your energy and concentration, but they often tend to make the symptoms of stress worse by keeping you feeling on edge.

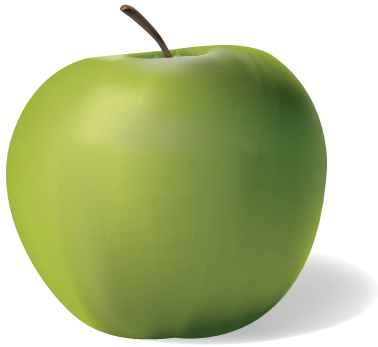
### · Make time to relax

Relaxation can take many different forms, from taking a few deep breaths, listening to calming music, or imagining yourself in a peaceful place. An example of some relaxation exercises can be accessed via the following website:

<http://www.get.gg/relax.htm>

### · Be assertive

If talking to your employer, it is important not to be aggressive but similarly not passive. Express your feelings whilst also acknowledging the feelings of others e.g. "I recognise that it is a busy time for you and you have these deadlines to meet, but I am finding my workload unmanageable at the moment so I wanted to discuss how we can manage this."



### **· Pay Attention to your diet**

What we eat and drink can have a huge impact on our mood. When we are stressed it is easy to forget simple things such as drinking enough water, and eating five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. Eating regularly and not skipping breakfast are essential for keeping up our energy levels. For more information about how diet can affect our mood, visit the Mind 'Food and Mood' Guide which can be accessed here:

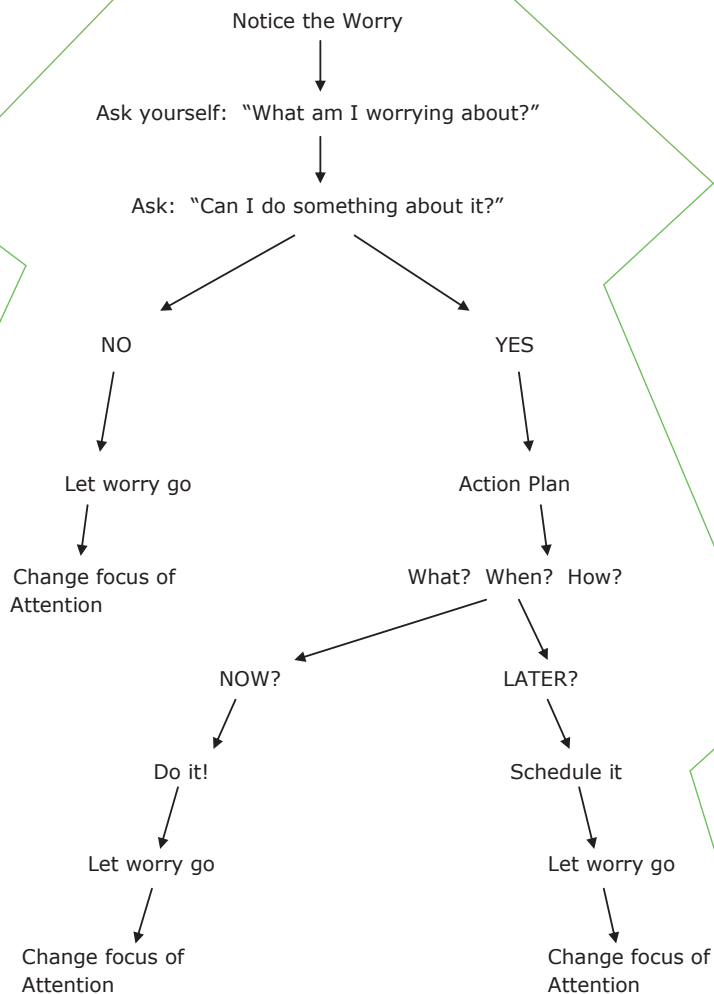
[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood/#.WJG4rtKLIU](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood/#.WJG4rtKLIU)

## **Worry management**

As with prioritising, it can be helpful to write a list of your worries at the end of your working day. However, don't just simply write a list of your worries as this can make you more stressed. Be specific, can something be done? If so, write some actions points of things that you can do. If not, lots of time and energy can be spent on worrying about things you can't change, and worrying about them even more isn't going to get you anywhere so try to focus your attention elsewhere.

It can be useful to put some worries through 'the worry tree' opposite, taken from [www.getselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk):

## THE WORRY TREE



[www.getselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk)

*Adapted from Butler & Hope 2007*

[www.get.gg](http://www.get.gg)

## Things to avoid

In times of stress it can be tempting to turn to alcohol, smoking or taking drugs to cope, or even stop doing things that normally keep you feeling well. This can be really unhelpful in the long run even though it might seem like a good solution right now.

It's important to try to keep work stress at work rather than let it spill into your home life too much. By continuing to do the things you enjoy in other areas of your life, you will feel stronger in yourself and be more able to tackle your situation at work.

### · Try not to be overly critical of yourself

Is the way we are perceiving our abilities founded in factual evidence or is it the situational difficulties that are making us feel this way? Don't get into the habit of criticising yourself. Learn from your mistakes and move on!

### · Avoid working longer hours or taking work home

This should be the exception rather than the norm. It is important that you get the chance to shut off from work. Make yourself a 'to do' list at the end of your working day including any outstanding jobs for the next day. Then leave this at work as a means of shutting off. You will feel more refreshed tackling these tasks the next day, rather than taking them home when feeling tired.

### · Avoid bottling up your feelings

It's important to talk to someone about the way you are feeling, or write your worries down.

### · Avoid eliminating hobbies from your life

It can be easy to avoid doing hobbies out of work when we are feeling tired and stressed. However, doing these hobbies is a great way to 'shut off' or get that sense of pleasure or sense of achievement which is very important for our mental wellbeing.

# Taking control of the situation

## Barriers to taking control

You may identify with some of the thoughts listed on page 6 and these thoughts may stop you from approaching anyone about your worries. You may also feel that you will be judged if you approach your employer and that you may lose your job as a result of this.

## You are not alone

In their 2011 Absence Management Survey, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development found that:

- In 2011 one of the most common causes of long term absence from work was stress.
- The top causes of stress at work are workloads, management style, relationships at work, considerable organisational change/restructuring (and non-work factors such as relationships and family).
- Stress is particularly common in the public and non-profit sectors.
- Nearly two-fifths of employers overall (50% in the public sector) reported that stress related absence has increased in 2011.

In 2010, a study by the leading mental health charity, Mind reported that:

- Talking about workplace pressure remains a huge taboo.
- Stress has forced 1 in 5 workers to call in sick but 93% of these employees say they have lied to their boss about the real reason for their absence.
- 70% of employees actually wanted to be able to discuss stress with their employers, and a third wanted their boss to make the first move and approach them when they are showing signs of stress.
- The majority of employees feel their employers aren't doing enough to look after the wellbeing of their staff which may explain why stress has made 1 in 5 workers physically ill and driven a further 1 in 10 to seek counselling in order to deal with it.

## Is my employer required by law to tackle stress?

- Employers have duties under health and safety law to assess and take measures to control risks from work related stress.
- Employers also have a duty under common law to take reasonable care to ensure the health and safety of employees.
- The Health and Safety Executive have produced Management Standards around how to tackle stress at work to help and encourage employers to meet their legal obligations.

## What can my employer do if I am suffering from stress at work?

ACAS is an organisation that helps employees and employers with issues like stress at work. Below is a summary of their guidance around the causes of stress identified by the Health and Safety Executive and possible solutions. This is not a legal requirement but these are useful issues to talk about with your employer.

| Cause of stress   | What can your employer do to help?  |
|---|---|
| <b>Demands</b><br>Overloaded and can't cope with the amount or type of work                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meet training needs.</li><li>• Ensure you understand the task.</li><li>• Discuss flexible working.</li><li>• Stress Risk Assessment.</li></ul>                                    |
| <b>Control</b><br>Employees can perform poorly if they have no say over how and when they do their work       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Think about how you are involved in decision making.</li><li>• Look at contribution from teams.</li><li>• Review your performance to identify strengths and weaknesses.</li></ul> |
| <b>Support</b><br>Levels of sick leave rise when employees feel that they can't talk to managers about issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give you the chance to talk about issues causing stress.</li><li>• Be sympathetic and supportive.</li><li>• Keep you informed about what is going on in your workplace.</li></ul> |



|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Relationships</b><br/>Failure to build relationships based on good behaviour and trust can lead to grievances, a disciplinary or bullying.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have clear procedures for handling misconduct and poor performance and raising grievances.</li> <li>• Tackle bullying and harassment and make it clear that this behaviour is not tolerated.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Role</b><br/>Employees feel anxious about their work and the organisation if they don't know what is expected of them.</p>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Induction for new employees</li> <li>• Provide a statement of employment particulars covering holiday, pay, location, sick pay etc.</li> <li>• Clear job description</li> <li>• Link the targets of the organisation to individual's goals.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Change</b><br/>If change is not managed effectively then it can lead to huge uncertainty and insecurity</p>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan ahead so change does not come out of the blue</li> <li>• Consult you about change, so you have input and work together to solve problems.</li> </ul>  |

## Discrimination Legislation

You also have the right not to be discriminated against on the grounds of disability. **The Equality Act 2010** covers disability discrimination and this includes mental health. If your mental illness affects your ability to carry out day-to-day activities then you are likely to be covered. For example, someone with a mild form of depression with only minor effects may not be covered. But someone with severe depression that has substantial effects on their daily life is likely to be considered as disabled under the Act.

Many people with a mental health condition do not think of themselves as 'disabled' - but they may have rights under **The Equality Act 2010**. There are many different types of mental health conditions which can lead to a disability, such as: depression, or obsessive compulsive disorder.

## Am I covered by the Act?

The definition of Disability under the Act is:

- A physical or mental impairment.
- The impairment has a substantial (more than trivial) and long-term adverse effect on your ability to perform normal day-to-day activities.
- **Long term:** The impairment has lasted or is likely to last for at least twelve months.
- **Normal day to day activities:** Can include everyday things such as eating, washing, walking and going shopping.

If you feel that your performance at work has been affected and this is related to disability caused by mental health it is important to alert your employer.



## Reasonable Adjustments

If you are covered by the Act then your employer has a duty to make certain reasonable adjustments to accommodate your needs. Reasonable adjustments could include the following (this list is not exhaustive and provides examples only):

- Physical Adjustments to the workplace.
- Allocating some duties to another employee.
- Moving you to another job.
- Altering hours of work.
- Allowing time of during work hours for treatment/rehabilitation.
- Arranging training.
- Acquiring or modifying equipment.
- Altering instructions/reference materials.
- Altering procedures for testing or assessment.
- Providing a reader or interpreter.
- Providing supervision.

## Does my employer have to make any reasonable adjustment I ask for?

No, it is important to remember that an employer does not have to make endless reasonable adjustments, and this always has to be balanced against the employers need to run an efficient business. Each situation will be unique and it is advisable to contact ACAS for further guidance.



## What should I do now?

- **Tell your line manager:** this may not be easy but generally you will find that they are glad you have approached them. Employers have a legal responsibility to you, but an employer only has to make adjustments to help you if they are aware of your situation.
- **Talk to you Human Resources Department:** they will have advice on any formal or informal procedures to help you solve any problems.
- **Seek help from your Occupational Health Department:** they can help with the affects of stress on your health and your ability to work. They are a support service for employers and employees.
- **Check your employer's policies:** for guidance on subjects such as stress in the workplace, bullying, harassment, and dignity at work. These may be found on your organisation's intranet.
- **Employee Support Line:** many employers operate an employee support line. Talk to your line manager, check the organisation's intranet or ask a colleague if you are not sure.
- **Consider talking to your union representative.**

## If I talk to my manager will I lose my job?

"If an employer dismisses an employee because they have work-related stress, then an employment tribunal will treat this as unfair dismissal unless they can show they acted reasonably" (ACAS advice leaflet – Stress at Work)

## Support at italk:

- If you feel you would like to discuss any of the information in this booklet further, please talk to your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner or High Intensity Therapist.
- Within italk, there is also a team of Employment Advisers who can advise on job retention issues. If you would like to speak to one, please raise this with your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner or High Intensity Therapist. Please see below for some patients' feedback on receiving employment advice from our Employment Advisers:

"I am feeling better and more upbeat. I spoke to an Employment Adviser which really helped as I received some info on stress which helped a lot and allowed me to understand stress and put some things into place to help."

"The Employment Adviser was fantastic and gave me back some of my confidence in tackling a work related problem. The Adviser was a great support and I've already told others about the service."

"Many thanks for your advice and support over the last few weeks. It really helped my confidence in the work situation."

## More information on your legal rights

This information is general guidance only and does not constitute legal advice. If you would like more information on your specific legal position please contact one of the following agencies:

- Visit Citizens Advice website at [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-we-provide-advice/advice/search-for-your-local-citizens-advice/](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-we-provide-advice/advice/search-for-your-local-citizens-advice/) to locate your local branch.
- ACAS helpline - 0300 123 1100 or visit [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)



## References

The following resources have been used to develop this leaflet and they may also be useful for further reading:

### ACAS

Advice Leaflet – Stress at Work – ACAS (30.1.17)

<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=815>

Advisory Booklet – Stress at Work – ACAS (30.1.17)

<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=782>

### Chartered Institute of Personnel Development

Disability and Employment – Factsheets – Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (1.2.17)

<http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/factsheets/disability-employment.aspx>

Stress and Mental Health at Work – Factsheets – Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (1.2.17)

<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/mental-health-support-report>

### GOV.UK

Disability and The Equality Act 2010 (1.2.17)

<http://www.gov.uk/discrimination-your-rights>

### Health and Safety Executive

Workplace Stress (1.2.17)

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/furtheradvice/wrs.htm>

### MIND

Food and Mood – The Mind Guide (1.2.17)

[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood/#.WJG4rtKLIU](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood/#.WJG4rtKLIU)

How to be Mentally Healthy at Work (1.2.17)

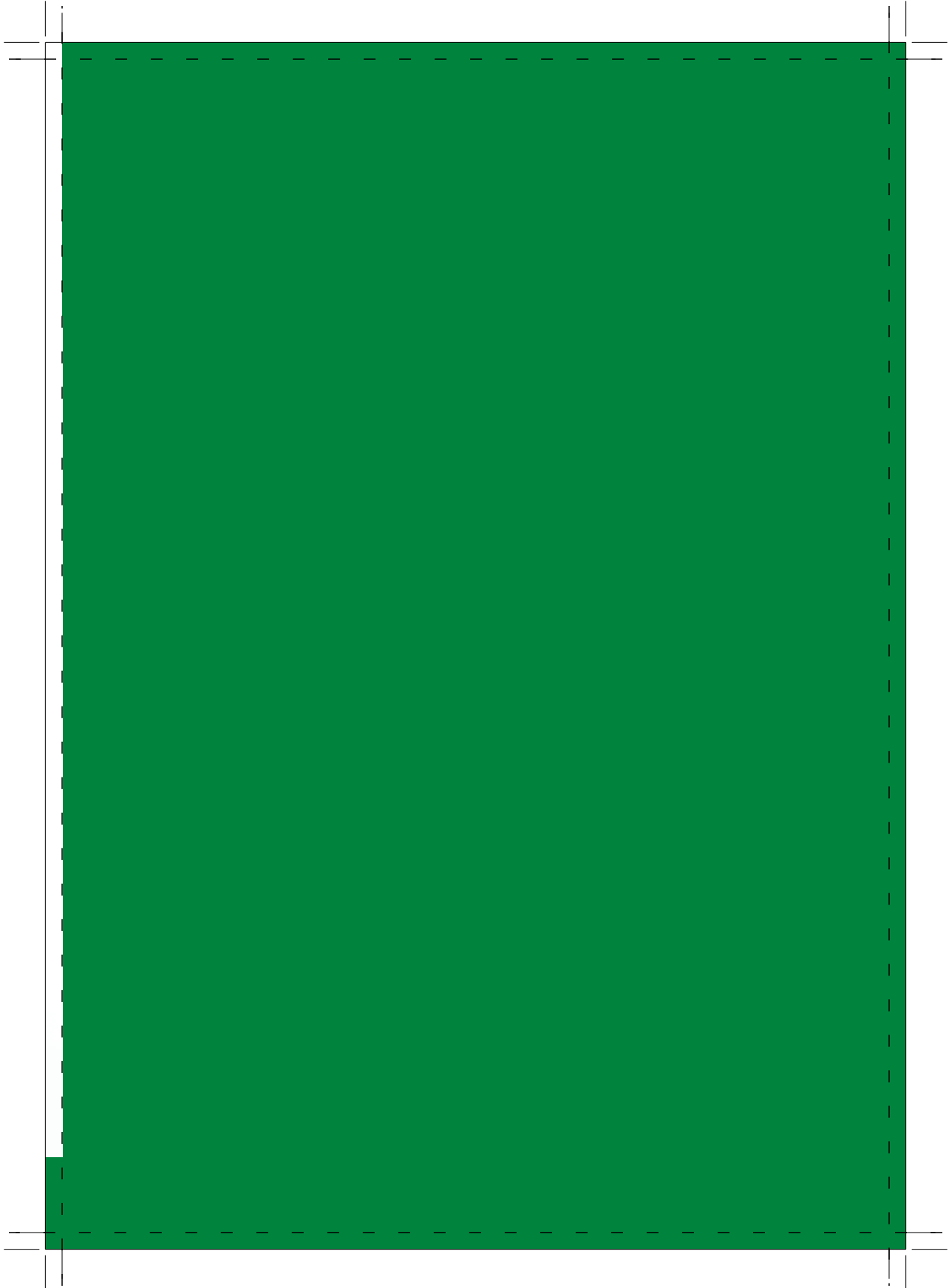
[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/work/work-and-stress/#.WJG28tKLIU](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/work/work-and-stress/#.WJG28tKLIU)

## Self help information

Get Self Help Website: <http://www.get.gg/>

Worry tree: <http://www.get.gg/docs/worrytree.pdf> (30.01.17)





Please call us on:

**023 8038 3920**

to arrange an appointment with  
a member of the italk team.

Visit us at [www.italk.org.uk](http://www.italk.org.uk)

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