

## When and how to talk to your manager about a health issue

There are lots of reasons you might need to talk to your manager about your health. Maybe you've been feeling more tired than usual and it's starting to affect your work. Maybe you've got a new diagnosis, or an existing condition has flared up. You might have regular medical appointments, need some time off to recover, or be adjusting to medication. You might be waiting for test results or going through a long referral process.

Some people speak up because they're struggling with pain, fatigue or stress. Others are managing a condition no one can see, like a mental health issue, migraine or autoimmune condition and just need a bit of flexibility.

The impact is bigger than most people realise. **Globally, around 12 billion working days are lost each year due to depression and anxiety alone**, that's the same as losing 50 million years of work. Health issues don't just affect individuals; they affect teams, businesses and the wider economy. Starting a conversation early can make things better for everyone.

It can feel awkward to bring up your health at work. You might worry about being judged or treated differently. You might not want to draw attention to yourself. Or you might feel like you should just get on with it.

**But talking early can make a real difference.** It means your manager has a chance to understand what's going on and help you find practical ways to stay well at work. You don't have to wait until things get worse. And you don't have to have all the answers. **Just starting the conversation is a good first step.**

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## Spotting the right time

You don't need a formal diagnosis or a long medical history to bring something up. **If your health is starting to affect your work**, even in small ways, it's a good time to say something.

### You might notice:

- You're more tired or distracted than usual
- You're finding it harder to keep up with tasks
- You're taking more sick days or cancelling meetings

- Symptoms are flaring up or getting worse
- You've got appointments coming up that will affect your schedule

Some people wait until they've **"figured it all out"** before they speak up. But you don't have to have everything sorted. Your manager isn't there to diagnose or judge. They just need to know **what support might help**. It's better to talk early than wait until things get harder.

## What to share (and what's private)

You don't have to tell your manager everything. It's your health and it's up to you what you share. Some people find it helpful to **explain their condition**. Others prefer to **focus on how it affects their work**. Both are fine.



### You could say:

- *"I've been having some health issues that make mornings difficult."*
- *"I've got a long-term condition that sometimes causes fatigue."*
- *"I've got a medical appointment each week for the next month."*

You don't need to give a diagnosis, list your medications or explain personal details. Just keep it **simple and honest**. Stick to what's getting in the way of your work and what might help.

It's also OK to say, *"I'm still figuring things out"* or *"I don't know what support I need yet."* Your manager doesn't need a full plan, they just need to **understand what's going on**.

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## What your manager can and can't ask you

Your manager can ask **how your health affects your work**, what **support you might need**, and whether **any changes would help you do your job**.

### They can't ask:

- What your diagnosis is
- What medication you're on
- For medical records (unless you're going through occupational health)
- Personal questions that aren't relevant to your work

**You're in control of what you share.** The focus should be on what helps you do your job, not explaining your entire medical history.

### Preparing for the chat

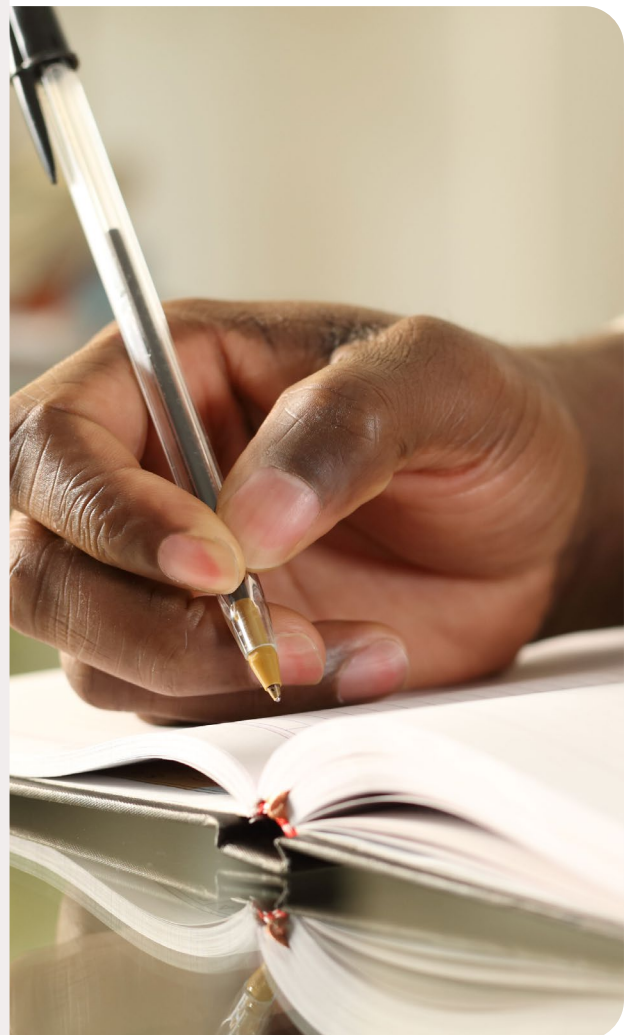
It helps to plan what you want to say. You don't need a script but **thinking it through ahead of time** can make you feel more confident.

#### Try this:

- **Write down** how your health is affecting your work
- Think about **what might help** such as flexible hours, time off for appointments, or changes to your workload
- Pick a **quiet time** when your manager isn't rushed
- Ask for a **private meeting in advance**, so they know it's important

#### You might also want to bring:

- A note from your **GP or specialist**
- **A fit note** (sick note) if you've had time off
- Any **HR documents** or **policies** you want to refer to



## During the conversation

Try to keep things **simple and focused on how your health is affecting your job**. You don't need to explain every detail, just give enough to help your manager understand what's going on.

It's OK to feel nervous. **You could start with:**

*"I've been finding things a bit harder lately because of my health, and I wanted to talk about how that's affecting my work."*



Focus on what's changed for you and what might help. **That could be:**

- More flexibility with hours
- Working from home some days
- Time off for treatment or recovery
- Clearer communication around deadlines or workload

Your manager might need **time to process what you've said**, or they might need to **speak to HR before making changes**. That's normal. You can ask for a follow-up chat to keep things moving.

And if the conversation feels too emotional or overwhelming, **it's OK to pause and come back to it later**. You're not expected to have all the answers in one go.

## If the response isn't helpful

Sometimes, even when you've been honest and clear, **the response might not be what you hoped for**. Your manager might brush it off, change the subject, or say they can't help.

If that happens, try not to take it personally. It could be that they don't know what to do, or they need advice from HR. **But you still have options.**

### You can:

- Ask for a **follow-up conversation** after they've had time to think
- Speak to your **HR team** or **employee support service**
- **Put your request in writing** so there's a clear record
- **Bring a colleague with you** next time, if your workplace allows it

You don't have to accept a bad response. You have **a right to be treated fairly** and to **get support if your health affects your job**. If you're struggling to be heard, getting outside advice can help.



## Your rights at work

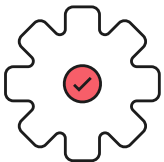
If your health affects your ability to do your job, you may have **rights under workplace laws**, even if you haven't shared your condition before.

A condition is usually classed as long-term if it lasts, or is expected to last, **12 months or more**. It can be physical, mental, diagnosed or undiagnosed. If it has a serious impact on your daily life, it might be protected under **equality or disability law**.



### That means your employer:

- Can't treat you unfairly because of your condition
- Should make "reasonable adjustments" to help you do your job
- Must keep any health information you share private



### These adjustments could include:

- Time off for appointments or treatment
- Changes to your hours, duties or workspace
- Support with equipment or communication

You don't need to give every detail. But if your manager knows your health is affecting your work, they have a **duty to consider how to support you**.

If you're unsure where you stand, **HR**, **occupational health** or an **employee advice line** can help you understand your rights.

## If you're not ready yet

You don't have to tell your manager everything, or anything, until you're ready. Some people need **time to come to terms with a diagnosis**. Others might still be figuring out what their symptoms mean.

### If you're not ready for a full conversation, you could:

- Ask for a one-off change, like time off for an appointment
- Say you're dealing with a health issue but don't want to share details yet
- Make a note of how things are affecting you, so you're prepared if you choose to speak up later

Just remember, if your health is starting to affect your work, **the sooner you say something, the easier it is to get support in place**. Even a short, honest conversation can make a difference. You don't have to get it perfect. You just have to get started.





## FAQs

- **Do I need a diagnosis before I say anything?**

No. If your health is affecting your work, you can speak up at any time. You don't need a name for your condition to ask for support.

- **What if my condition comes and goes?**

Lots of health issues are unpredictable. You can explain that your symptoms vary and talk about what might help during harder days.

- **Can I ask for changes without giving details?**

Yes. You can keep things general if that feels more comfortable. You might say something like, *"I've got a health condition that affects my energy. I'd like to talk about some changes that could help."*

- **What if I work from home or freelance?**

It's still worth being open. Remote workers can speak to line managers, clients or project leads about deadlines or workload. Freelancers may want to block out recovery time or plan around treatment. You're still allowed to protect your health.

- **What if I change my mind after sharing something?**

You can always set boundaries. If you've shared more than you're comfortable with, you can say so. And if your needs change, it's OK to ask for a new conversation.

**Contact [HealthHero](#) today for more support and advice. We're with you every step of the way.**