

Balance



If you're suffering from stress, you're not alone

Stress is one of the most common themes among calls to Vetlife Helpline according to its manager, **Rosie Allister**.

STRESS – defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as ‘the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them’ – is a common concern among veterinary professionals.

Indeed, it’s one of the most frequent themes among calls to Vetlife Helpline, a completely confidential line open to anyone in the profession. We also often hear about themes such as mental health concerns; working conditions and hours; job satisfaction; a lack of support; complaints and professional conduct processes; and personal issues.



This section is supported by the VDS and is aimed at improving the efficiency and wellbeing of vets. Encouraging you to have a more balanced life outside of work.

Sometimes I meet people who say stress is good for you, or we all need some stress to get things done. But the HSE definition is very clear: stress is an adverse reaction. And it can affect performance.

At a team level, that can mean issues such as increased rates of sickness absence, decreased performance, or high staff turnover.

At an individual level, there may be changes in the way someone acts or in the way they think and feel. Their timekeeping may be affected, and that can manifest as presentism – spending more hours at work than needed – as well as lateness. You might also see increased emotional reactions.

When people get in touch with Vetlife Helpline about stress our priority is to provide them with a completely confidential place to talk, and to listen and support them. Empathy – being alongside, understanding the person’s perspective, and what it feels like for them – is an important part of that.

Listening is important in workplaces



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too. It’s crucial that if someone is stressed they feel able to discuss it with their managers – and that managers know how to respond. HSE publishes helpful guidance on how to conduct a stress risk assessment of a workplace and how to act on its results. It’s easily available online at www.hse.gov.uk/stress/risk-assessment.htm

One of the most striking things about the stress-related calls we get is how long people sometimes suffer before they ask for help, and how difficult it can feel for them to ask. People apologise for contacting us, worrying they are a burden, or that their problems aren’t serious enough. It couldn’t be further from the truth. Vetlife Helpline is staffed by volunteers who know the industry. We want people to contact us. The reason we volunteer is because we don’t want people to struggle with stress alone.

Rosie Allister is a vet, lecturer and researcher, and helpline manager at Vetlife