



Taking sick leave as a neurodivergent employee

a quick-reference resource

Taking sick leave

Taking sick leave can be a source of stress and uncertainty for neurodivergent employees. From navigating the extra admin, to managing the change of routine, and even figuring out if you're "sick enough," the process can feel overwhelming. This guide aims to provide reassurance and practical advice to help you navigate it with confidence.



When should you take sick leave?

- **Physical Illness or Fatigue:** If you are too unwell to perform your job effectively, you have the right to rest and recover.
- **Neurodivergent-Related Challenges:** Symptoms such as sensory overload, migraines, or insomnia are valid reasons to take time off.
- **Burnout Prevention:** Avoid waiting until you're completely burnt out. Use sick leave to manage ongoing symptoms before they escalate.

Reminder: It's normal to take sick leave. Everyone needs time off to maintain their health.

Common worries

- **Fear of Judgment:** It's common to worry about how others perceive your absence. Remember, sick leave is your right, and your health matters.
- **Overthinking:** You don't need to over-explain or justify your illness. A simple statement, such as "I am unwell and need time to recover," is enough.
- **Guilt:** Taking sick leave is not letting your team down; it's ensuring you can return to work effectively.
- **Catastrophising:** It's natural to worry about worse-case scenarios, such as losing your job, but these fears are often heightened when we are unwell. Focus on the immediate need to prioritise your health.
- **Comparing to others:** It's easy to think you're taking more sick leave than your colleagues, but everyone's health needs are different. You're not being unreasonable by looking after yourself.
- **Worrying about running out of "sick days":** It's common to worry about using up your sick leave allocation and not having enough left for the future. However, this can lead you to push through symptoms when rest is needed. Taking the time off now could help prevent more severe health issues later, which might require more sick leave days! If sick days become a long-term concern, discuss options like flexible working or additional leave policies with your employer.

Remember: You don't have to be completely incapacitated to justify taking sick leave. If your symptoms are affecting your ability to work, it's valid to take time off.

Practical tips for taking sick leave

Scripts to Simplify the Process: For example, "I am feeling unwell and need to take today off. I will update you if I need more time". You can then let them know of any meetings that need to be rescheduled on your behalf.

Reduce anxiety with preparation: Save a copy of your sick leave policy for reference. Plan how to inform your manager (e.g., email if phone calls feel overwhelming).

Practical tips for returning to work

- Avoid overcompensating for your time off by pushing yourself too hard. Gradual reintegration is healthier and more sustainable.
- Communicate any ongoing needs or adjustments to your manager to ensure you can perform effectively.



Common things people take sick leave for

- Physical Illness: Colds, flu, migraines, stomach bugs, infections etc.
- Chronic Conditions: Flare-ups of ongoing health issues such as Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, Crohn's disease, or arthritis
- Mental Health: Anxiety, depression, burnout or overwhelming stress.
- Neurodivergent-Related: Sensory overload, recovery from cognitive overload.
- Fatigue: Severe tiredness that affects your ability to function.
- Injury or Recovery: Healing from accidents, surgeries or medical treatments.
- Menstrual-Related Symptoms: Severe cramps, heavy bleeding, fatigue, or other menstrual health issues like PMDD or endometriosis

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