



# Lifelink Workwell

## Winter burnout: A guide for employers





## An introduction

Winter can place an extra strain on employees, and therefore employers too.

Shorter, darker days naturally lower our energy and mood. Add end-of-year deadlines, heavier workloads, and calendars filling up with social activities and Christmas to-do lists that feel endless, it can feel like there's very little opportunity to recover or rest. By December, many staff feel depleted, and burnout becomes more likely.

Burnout is not just tiredness. It's a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion that quietly reduces performance, engagement, and resilience. In winter, it's easy for these signs to be misinterpreted as "normal seasonal fatigue," allowing problems to grow unnoticed.

For employers, recognising and addressing winter burnout protects not only your people, but productivity, morale, and staff retention, particularly as January is one of the highest months for resignations.

## Why winter makes burnout more likely

Winter creates conditions that increase burnout risk:

- Reduced daylight affects mood, energy, and sleep.
- Heavier workloads and year-end pressure raise stress levels.
- Higher sickness rates leave teams stretched.
- Emotional demands intensify stress (family pressures, financial concerns, festive expectations).
- Less social interaction reduces resilience, especially for remote workers.

Understanding these seasonal pressures helps organisations respond with empathy and intention.





## Recognising winter burnout

Burnout builds gradually. Key signs employers may notice include:

- A noticeable drop in energy, motivation, or enthusiasm,
- Reduced concentration or slower work pace,
- Withdrawal from colleagues or less contribution in meetings,
- Increased irritability, stress, or sensitivity,
- More mistakes or difficulty prioritising,
- Frequent minor illnesses or general fatigue,
- Increased absence days.

These signs can be subtle. Regular conversation is the best way to spot changes early.

## Essential actions employers can take

You don't need to introduce new programmes - just consistent, supportive practices that protect employees' wellbeing during a high-risk season.

- 1. Prioritise meaningful check-ins:** Short, regular conversations help managers understand how staff are coping. These should focus on wellbeing, not performance. A simple "How's are you this week?" can open the door to early support.
  - 2. Set clear, realistic expectations:** Winter workloads can feel overwhelming. Be explicit about priorities, reduce unnecessary deadlines, and reassure teams about what can wait until January. Clarity lowers stress.
  - 3. Reinforce healthy boundaries:** Encourage breaks, daylight exposure, and reasonable finish times. Leaders who model healthy habits help normalise them across the team.
  - 4. Support connection:** Create small moments of human connection, such as brief check-ins at the start of meetings, informal conversations, and inclusive planning for remote and hybrid staff. Connection protects against burnout.
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**5. Make support easy to access:** Ensure employees know how to access counselling, EAPs, or internal wellbeing contacts. Share this information clearly and repeatedly, especially in December when people are less likely to ask directly.

**6. Take pressure off the “festive period”:** Not everyone finds winter celebrations easy. Be mindful of different needs, avoid hosting mandatory social events, and create a culture where employees feel comfortable expressing when they're finding the season difficult.

**7. Support managers too:** Managers often absorb the most pressure. Give them space to reflect, access wellbeing support, and ask for guidance when needed.

Winter burnout is common, but it doesn't have to be inevitable. With small but consistent actions, employers can make a significant difference to how staff cope during the darkest months. Supporting employees through winter helps protect morale, strengthen resilience, and create a healthier, more connected workplace, moving into the new year with stability rather than exhaustion.





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