

How Heart Problems Affect Employees and Employers in the UK

Impact on Employees

1. Physical health and ability to work

Heart conditions (such as heart disease, heart failure, arrhythmias, or recovery after a heart attack) can cause:

- Fatigue and reduced stamina
- Breathlessness
- Chest discomfort
- Dizziness or palpitations

These symptoms may affect:

- Long working hours
 - Physically demanding roles
 - Shift work or night shifts
-

2. Mental health and confidence

After a cardiac diagnosis, many employees experience:

- Anxiety about returning to work
- Fear of overexertion or relapse
- Reduced confidence in performance
- Depression following major cardiac events

Mental wellbeing often affects recovery just as much as physical health.

3. Sickness absence and recovery time

Employees with heart conditions may need:

- Time off for treatment or surgery
- Gradual return-to-work plans
- Ongoing medical appointments

Recovery times vary significantly between individuals.

4. Financial and job security concerns

Employees may worry about:

- Loss of income during sick leave
- Job security
- Career progression
- Disclosure of their condition

UK employment law provides protections, but fear and uncertainty are common.

5. Legal rights and protections

In the UK, many heart conditions may be classed as a **disability** if they have a long-term impact on daily activities. This gives protection under equality law, including:

- Protection from discrimination
- Right to reasonable workplace adjustments

Advice is commonly guided by **ACAS** and NHS occupational health teams.

Impact on Employers

1. Increased sickness absence

Heart-related illness contributes to:

- Short-term sickness absence
- Long-term absence
- Recurrent medical leave

This can affect productivity, workload distribution, and team morale.

2. Productivity and performance

Even when present at work, employees may:

- Tire more easily
- Need frequent breaks

- Work reduced hours

Without support, this can lead to presenteeism (being at work but not fully effective).

3. Legal and compliance responsibilities

Employers must:

- Avoid discrimination
- Consider reasonable adjustments
- Support safe return to work

Failure to do so can lead to legal risk and reputational damage.

4. Cost implications

Heart conditions can lead to:

- Increased sick pay costs
- Recruitment or temporary cover costs
- Occupational health assessments
- Insurance and benefit claims

However, supportive workplaces often reduce long-term costs.

5. Retention of experienced staff

Without flexibility, employers risk:

- Losing skilled, experienced workers
- Higher recruitment and training costs

Supportive policies improve retention and loyalty.

How Employers Can Support Employees with Heart Conditions

1. Reasonable workplace adjustments

Examples include:

- Flexible working hours
 - Reduced workload or phased return
 - Remote or hybrid work
 - Adjusted duties
 - More frequent rest breaks
-

2. Occupational health and wellbeing support

Employers can offer:

- Occupational health referrals
 - Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)
 - Mental health support
 - Stress management initiatives
-

3. Clear communication and reassurance

Open, confidential discussions help:

- Build trust
 - Reduce anxiety
 - Set realistic expectations
 - Support long-term recovery
-

4. Promoting heart-healthy workplaces

Preventative measures benefit everyone:

- Encouraging movement and breaks
 - Stress reduction strategies
 - Healthy food options
 - Smoking cessation support
-

Benefits of Supporting Heart Health at Work

For employees:

- Faster recovery
- Improved confidence
- Better long-term health

For employers:

- Reduced absence
 - Higher productivity
 - Improved morale
 - Strong employer reputation
-

UK Support and Guidance

Trusted UK resources include:

- **NHS** – medical care and cardiac rehabilitation
 - **British Heart Foundation** – workplace heart health guidance
 - **ACAS** – employee and employer rights
-

Bottom line

Heart problems affect **both health and work**, but with the right support:

- Employees can remain productive and fulfilled
- Employers can retain talent and reduce costs

A **flexible, understanding approach** benefits everyone.