

Fact Sheet

Signs and Symptoms

Supervisors need to watch out for the signs and symptoms of an employee being unfit for work. It may be difficult to determine whether the employee is unfit for work due to alcohol or drugs, or some other reason such as a medical condition. Therefore, supervisors are encouraged not to focus on why the employee is unfit but the actual signs and symptoms, and how they determine if the person is unfit for work. This will also assist in minimising conflict and managing the situation in a calm and professional manner.

Fitness for work includes an individual's physical, mental and emotional state. Even if the person does not have alcohol or drugs in their system, they may still be hungover or coming down from a drug, in either case, they are not fit for work.

The time to raise the possible causes of the signs and symptoms is when the employee has recovered and you have made a time to discuss the incident with them. It is reasonable for a supervisor to think that a person's condition may have been the result of alcohol and/or drugs if there is no medical explanation for the symptoms.

Below are symptoms supervisors should look out for to help determine if an employee is not fit for work. Less concerning symptoms will need to be present with other symptoms for an employee to be deemed unfit for work. For example, blood shot eyes would not be a reason to send an employee home, but blood shot eyes in conjunction with uncoordinated movement, irritability and fatigue, might be. However, fainting on its own would be a reason to send an employee home.

Physical Symptoms

- Shakiness
- Bloodshot eyes
- Dilated pupils
- Uncoordinated movement, loss of balance and problems walking
- Irregular breathing
- Slow reactions and responses
- Vomiting
- Slurred speech
- Hyperactivity
- Fainting
- Fatigue

Psychological Symptoms

- Unclear judgement / confusion
- Aggression
- Loss of memory
- Depression
- Irrational behaviour
- Hallucinations
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Appearing 'high' or drunk by laughing or talking more than usual

Indicators of potential problems

A person's alcohol use can be defined as a problem when it starts to impact on their life and those around them.

The potential areas of concern or patterns of drinking behaviour that could indicate problems include but are not limited to:

- drinking as a means to cope with stress, anxiety or depression
- having an increased tolerance and therefore requiring a significant amount of alcohol to feel its effects

- drinking with the intention to get drunk on a regular basis
- drinking quickly or gulping drinks
- attempting to reduce or cut down on drinking with limited success
- skipping meals while drinking

If a member of your team is concerned about their drinking or they mention any of the points above, you should suggest they see their GP for guidance or call Direct Line on 1800 888 236.