

Psychological injuries—chronic onset (occurring over time)

Excessive and unusual stressors that occur over time or one stressor that lasts for a long time at work, can result in a psychological injury that can be personally devastating. A claim for a psychological injury can be accepted when the condition develops as a result of an emotional reaction to these stressors.

Because we understand the impact of such event(s) on your workers, the following provides information on how we can help through the workers' compensation system.

How does WCB make a decision to accept a claim?

We accept a claim for a psychological injury when a worker has a confirmed psychological injury as a result of exposure to excessive and unusual work stressors over time or a single stressor that lasted a long time. There must be evidence that the work stressors were beyond the normal pressures and tensions of maintaining employment.

A confirmed psychological or psychiatric injury is one that has been diagnosed by a physician, psychiatrist or psychologist as defined in the most current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

What type of work events could result in a psychological injury?

WCB accepts psychological injuries arising out of a variety of work-related incidents such as:

- Verbal aggression or threats of harm,
- Harmful hazing or initiation practices,
- Harassment (sexual, racial, etc.)
- Repeated incidents of objectionable or unwelcome conduct, comments, bullying or actions intended to intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate a particular person or group.

What are normal pressures and tensions of maintaining employment?

Normal pressures and tensions at work include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Hiring employees
- Performance evaluations and/or performance corrective actions
- Staff assignments, transfers or restructuring
- Promotions, demotions, lay-offs and terminations
- Workload fluctuations and management and/or assignment changes
- Timeline/deadline pressures
- Work environment, including health and safety concerns, and union issues

What you can expect

When we receive information indicating a worker may have a psychological injury as a result of stressors at work, we may first help start treatment (if necessary).

Next, we will review the information, ensuring:

- the incidents or event(s) are confirmed and occurred in the course of employment,
- the psychological injury diagnosis is confirmed using the criteria established in the most current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM),
- there is medical information to support the incidents are the predominant cause of the condition diagnosed (cause and effect).

As every worker responds to their injury differently, treatment needs will be diverse. However, most workers will begin with counselling from a community psychologist, along with any medication management provided by their family doctor. Some workers may be referred to a psychiatrist. In either case, injured workers may select their treatment provider.

How could a psychological injury impact your employee?

Due to their nature, work-related psychological injuries require unique treatment methods and approaches. Awareness of and sensitivity to your employee's condition throughout the recovery process will enhance their likelihood of safely

recovering and returning to work, while minimizing risks for regression or delayed recovery.

Psychological trauma affects everyone differently. What may cause one person to develop a psychological injury may not necessarily affect another person the same way.

Psychological injuries can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- anxiety disorders,
- acute stress reactions,
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),
- adjustment disorders, or
- depression.

Similarly, an effective treatment plan for one worker may not produce the same results in another worker.

This [fact sheet](#) discusses how you can support your employee during this difficult time.

More information for you

You can find information about psychological injuries [here](#).

Information about modified work is found [here](#).

When in doubt, please call us

Your WCB adjudicator or case manager is a great resource for helping you navigate a psychological injury claim and coordinating a safe return to work for your employee.

We care about your employee's wellbeing and will work with them, the treatment provider and you throughout the recovery process.

