

# Occupational Health

The business benefits of a proactive approach



## Preventative solutions to protect your workforce

For many employers, occupational health is the aftercare that follows a workplace accident or injury – including post-incident solutions like rehabilitation, absence management, or return-to-work programmes. But reactive support is only part of the picture.

According to the Health and Safety Executive, 33.7 million working days were lost in 2023/24 due to work-related ill health and injuries, costing the UK economy around £21.6 billion. While occupational health delivers much-needed expertise following job-related health issues, its true value lies in incident and illness prevention – and the productivity boosts of a wellness-led workforce.

Investing in occupational health (OH) heads off illness and absence before they impact your business. Through front-footed initiatives like health surveillance, workplace risk management, employee education, and mental health support, OH tackles the root causes of disengagement, poor performance, and extended absenteeism. Without a proactive approach, companies risk the high cost of lost talent and long-term sickness.

This paper shares the basics of occupational health, its business benefits, and the key elements of a cost-effective OH programme. We'll also explain your legal compliance requirements and how early intervention can enhance both your team and your turnover.

**BECAUSE WHEN YOUR PEOPLE  
THRIVE, SO DOES YOUR BUSINESS.**

### 33.7 million working days lost

According to the HSE, 33.7 million days were lost in 2023/2024 due to work-related ill health and injuries.

### £21.6 billion

This is the cost to the UK economy of work related ill health and injuries in 2023/24

### After 6 months away from work

Staff are only half as likely to successfully return, making robust, results-driven employee care a critical strand of your organisational strategy.

## Occupational health explained

Occupational health protects your employees' safety, welfare, and health at work. Covering a range of disciplines, OH aims to pinpoint, mitigate, and manage physical and mental health risks – from occupational asthma and musculoskeletal disorders to burnout and depression.

A knowledgeable health and safety partner tailors these services to the specific needs of your team, sector, and compliance challenges. Office-based businesses, for example, may focus on ergonomics and screen-related eye strain, while builders merchants may require manual handling assessments, driver medicals, and hearing checks.

Treating workplace health concerns in isolation is costly, counterproductive, and a significant compliance risk. OH provides an all-in-one alternative, delivering whole-person care and financially sound solutions.

A joined-up approach to occupational health – with assessment, prevention, and treatment working in tandem – allows you to identify hazards, design effective interventions, and give employees the support they need to excel.

Importantly, occupational health not only treats workplace illnesses and injuries – it uses a customised, coordinated approach to prevent them entirely. Support can include:

### Workplace risk assessments

Comprehensive audits to identify and reduce health and safety hazards.

### Health surveillance

Regular checks to detect the early signs of job-related illness.

### Mental health support

Help for issues like stress, anxiety, and workload pressure.

### Workplace design and ergonomics consultations

Guidance to minimise strain, fatigues, and discomfort on the job.

### Hazard monitoring

Measuring and managing harmful exposure to noise, vibration, chemicals, and dust.

### Return-to-work programmes

Plans to help employees safely resume work after illness or injury.

## Six occupational health myths that could cost you money

We've outlined what occupational health is, but it's equally important to explain what it isn't. Common misconceptions can deter employers from adopting full-circle OH programmes, preventing them from realising the benefits of integrated risk management.

Let's set the record straight.

### **Myth 1: OH only applies to physical injuries**

OH expertly handles workplace injuries – as well as mental health, stress management, long-term illness support, ergonomic risks, and overall employee wellbeing. OH practitioners are trained to deal with whatever's holding your team back – and impacting output – by suggesting solutions for anything from slipped disks to anxiety disorders.

### **Myth 2: You only need OH after an accident**

Some employers see OH as a reactive service that kicks in only when a staff member is off sick. However, OH delivers maximum benefits when used preventively – spotting early warning signs, tracking trends, and implementing controls to avoid long-term absence.

### **Myth 3: OH is a nice-to-have, not a business priority**

OH isn't a luxury reserved for large companies. Growing organisations that neglect their occupational health requirements often face higher, hidden costs via sick leave, unproductive presenteeism, compensation claims, and regulatory fines. OH is a strategic pillar directly affecting work rate, compliance, cost control, and employer reputation – and a high-priority investment, whatever your headcount.

### **Myth 4: OH is a one-and-done duty**

Your responsibility doesn't end with an occupational health referral. OH is part of a continuous – and critical – process that includes pinpointing risks, promoting long-term wellbeing, reviewing employee progress, and refining support programmes. The goal is to guide staff safely through work, creating conditions clear of stress, sickness, and injury.

### **Myth 5: OH is wrapped up in red tape**

Many businesses expect OH processes and paperwork to slow their pace. However, OH programmes are built for speed and competitive advantage, using coordinated strategies to reduce absence, decrease turnover, and enhance productivity. Digital tools like Opus Compliance Cloud accelerate results by placing key safety and compliance data within instant reach.

### **Myth 6: OH is only for manual workers**

OH protects every type of employee, not just those with physically demanding roles. From remote workers to office-based staff, your entire team is covered with role-specific services including ergonomic support, display screen equipment (DSE) assessments, and mental health advice.

## The business case for occupational health

Occupational health is far more than a tick-box compliance requirement – it's a strategic operational asset. A comprehensive OH programme reduces risk, elevates your reputation, and sends a clear message that employee wellbeing is a core priority.

**By expanding your approach from standalone fixes to systematic prevention, you can achieve a range of measurable business benefits.**

### **Legal compliance: Meeting your duties as an employer.**

As a UK employer, you have a legal obligation under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to ensure your people's health, safety, and welfare on the job. Your fundamental duties include training staff on health and safety procedures, providing suitable welfare provisions, and offering relevant information, instruction, and supervision to take care of your team. You must also ensure a properly maintained environment where individuals can safely perform their roles.

Working with an experienced consultant ensures your occupational health programme covers sector-specific requirements and protects your business from heavy fines, reputational damage, and criminal prosecution.

Depending on the nature of your operation, this may include regular health surveillance for conditions related to workplace hazards, such as noise, vibration, chemicals, or dust. Key requirements may cover:

### **Hearing and audiology tests**

Required when employees' daily or weekly noise exposure exceeds 85 dB(A) as a personal noise exposure level or when the peak sound pressure reaches 137 dB(C).

### **Lung function tests**

Compulsory in industries – including woodworking, manufacturing, and construction – where workers may be exposed to respiratory hazards, including dust, vapours, or fumes.

### **HAVS (Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome)**

Regular screening and health surveillance are mandated for workers using vibrating tools for tasks like jigsaws, hammer drills, and powered sanders.

### **Dermatological assessments**

Screening is required in workplaces with regular exposure to irritants or allergens that cause dermatitis and other occupational skin conditions.

## Early intervention: Spotting issues before they escalate

Occupational health teams are trained to spot emerging risks, often before employees notice a problem themselves. These red flags are vital for mental or physical conditions that develop gradually or that workers are reluctant to report.

By identifying developing issues, you can safeguard staff welfare while reducing costs linked to long-term sickness absence, rehiring, and knowledge drain. Early intervention is particularly beneficial for:

- **Stress-related conditions**

Through regular check-ins, stress risk assessments, or anonymous surveys, occupational health professionals can pinpoint signs of burnout or anxiety. This allows prompt intervention, such as workload adjustments, flexible working arrangements, or counselling referrals.

- **Repetitive strain injuries (RSI)**

Mild symptoms triggered by tasks like lifting, carrying, stacking, and using hand tools can become a long-term condition if left untreated. Occupational health can assess posture, technique, and working patterns to prevent ongoing strain.

- **Exposure-related illnesses**

Lung disease or skin conditions may progress undetected over time. Regular health surveillance and employee education help catch warning signs to avoid more serious conditions like occupational asthma, silicosis, and contact dermatitis.



## Improved productivity: The link between wellness and work rate

Just as studies show the spiralling cost of work-related illness and injury, research reveals that better health powers better performance.

- A recent survey by GRiD, the industry body for the group risk sector, indicates that almost half (47%) of participating businesses see throughput increase when employees know their overall health and wellbeing is supported.
- Similarly, a Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) survey found that well-executed occupational health support can decrease short-term absences by over 30%.
- Mental health support, such as counselling or resilience training, has been shown to dramatically improve performance and limit burnout-related leave. In fact, a Deloitte study highlights that for every £1 spent on supporting workers' mental health, employers get about £4.70 back in increased productivity.

The outcome of structured staff care is stronger retention rates, deeper loyalty – and people at work for all the right reasons. Occupational health programmes can reduce workdays missed due to illness and tackle presenteeism, which involves individuals attending work while unwell and performing below par as a result.

Workers who feel physically and mentally well are more engaged, focused, and motivated, making risk assessment, health surveillance, and whole-person support both an employee-focused and financially sound investment.

# 47%

See throughput increase when employees know their overall health and wellbeing is supported.

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# 30%

Short-term absence decrease through well-executed occupational health support.

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# Every £1

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## Risk reduction: Prevention is better than cure

One of the most compelling aspects of occupational health is its proactive approach. Rather than waiting for problems to surface, OH aims to uncover and address concerns before they affect your business. Ideally, it seeks to avoid physical and mental health issues altogether.

After all, workplace health issues don't happen in isolation. They can derail team dynamics, reduce overall output, and lead to substantial financial losses through compensation claims, insurance premiums, or regulatory penalties. Meanwhile, long-term absence can cause a disruptive domino effect, putting other colleagues at risk of fatigue and overwhelm.

Staying ahead of health hazards lessens the burden on your business, allowing you to identify emerging considerations that could be more costly and complex to treat down the line.



A strategic occupational health programme keeps you agile and resilient by:

Preventing chronic conditions, such as respiratory illnesses or repetitive strain injuries.

Mitigating stress-related mental health problems.

Correcting unsafe practices or hazardous environments before they cause accidents.

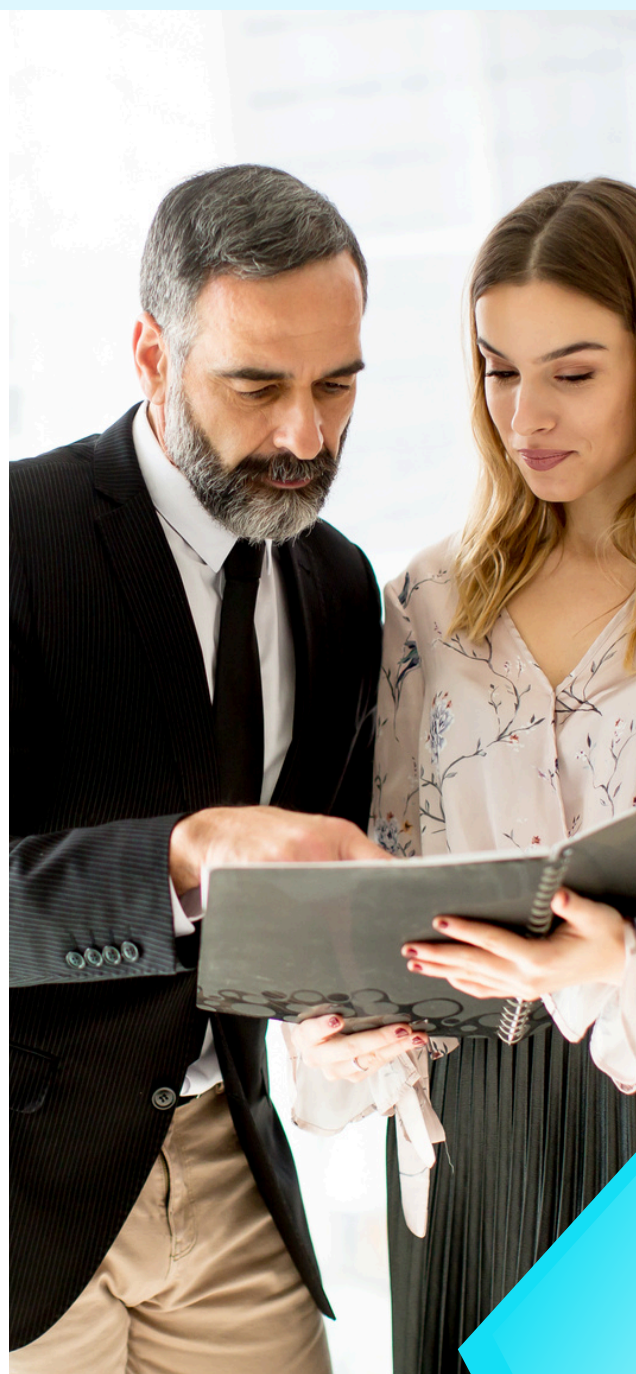
## Recruitment and retention: The advantages of a caring culture

**Beyond delivering compliance and cost savings, a progressive occupational health programme can significantly enhance your corporate reputation.**

Amid shifting employee priorities, companies that invest in work-life balance, mental health, and physical safety typically enjoy higher recruitment and retention rates. A solid occupational health plan demonstrates your commitment to staff wellbeing – so ensure you maximise its potential:

- Work with your occupational health partner to actively promote their services, helping your team understand the benefits of screenings and assessments.
- Appoint in-house champions to engage with workers, answer questions, and signpost support.
- Train managers to spot the signs of poor physical and mental health – from performance dips to increased sick days.
- Lead by example, encouraging senior leaders to speak openly about the importance of health and wellbeing at work.
- Use your occupational health programme as a critical attraction tool, spotlighting your duty of care to potential hires.

By creating a culture of openness and support, you can make the most of your occupational health investment, stand out in an increasingly competitive market, and reap the rewards of a healthier, happier workforce.



## Building a people-first occupational health programme

Your business is unique – and your approach to occupational health should be too.

While your overall plan should be tailored to the nature of your organisation, its specific risks, and your employees' needs, an effective programme will likely cover five core elements:

- **Health surveillance** – Including routine checks and risk-based assessments aligned with your industry's compliance regulations.
- **Workplace assessments** – Covering ergonomic evaluations and hazard identification, such as noise, vibration, or chemicals.
- **Mental health support** – Offering access to counselling services, training, and mental health first aid.
- **Return-to-work planning** – Spanning personalised rehabilitation roadmaps, GP and therapy support, and adjustments to duties and working patterns.
- **Policy development and education** – Training and procedures for reporting and responding to health concerns, alongside approved guidance on HR and safety requirements.

Engaging an occupational health practitioner ensures you establish a best practice-based programme without paying for unnecessary assessments and services. Your goal should be consistent, value-based compliance that helps you operate in line with legal requirements, while keeping your workforce safe and well.

An experienced occupational health partner will:

Guide you through the initial risk assessment process.

Make expert recommendations on the most suitable screening options.

Establish the right solution for your safety challenges and objectives.

# Services we provide



Our services range from ad hoc assessments to full-service partnerships, built around your business and budget.

At Opus Safety, we provide a comprehensive suite of support for every stage of the employee lifecycle:

- Health surveillance medicals
- Musculoskeletal assessments
- Skin surveillance testing
- Urinalysis
- Vision/colour vision testing
- Audiology services
- Drug and alcohol testing
- Fitness-to-work letters
- Glucose and cholesterol testing
- Blood pressure testing
- Face fit testing
- Full fitness for work assessments
- Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) assessments

In addition, assessment results can be housed on a cloud-based health and safety platform, available 24/7 from any device. Moving testing information online replaces outdated paperwork and spreadsheets, allowing instant access, easier issue identification, and data-led decision-making.

## Prioritising health, for now and the future

Occupational health is so much more than a compliance requirement. It's a core differentiator that minimises risk, fuels performance, and showcases a firm commitment to employee health, safety, and wellbeing.

As the annual economic cost of sickness absence, including reduced output and other factors, climbs over £100 billion, employers can't afford to let staff physical and mental health issues sabotage future growth.

Comprehensive occupational health support can help companies take back control. Through a forward-looking programme of routine physical assessments and robust mental health services, your employees can navigate health concerns, overcome illness and injury, and work positively and productively for the long term. In addition to lower absence rates, you'll experience the proven benefits of enhanced trust, retention, and engagement – as well as a stronger reputation among prospective recruits.

Your people are the lifeblood of your operation, but only if they're fit, well, and fulfilling their full potential. Investing in a proactive occupational health programme is your key to continuous compliance and career-long productivity, helping you protect your people while you futureproof your business.





# Team up with a trusted expert

To learn more about Opus Safety's tailored occupational health services, get in touch.



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