

THYROID EYE DISEASE: Information for employers

Thyroid Eye Disease (TED) is a rare disease that causes tissues in and around the eye socket to become inflamed. This can cause the eyes and eyelids to become red, swollen and uncomfortable. The eyes can be pushed forward, giving the appearance that the person is staring. The condition is normally caused by thyroid diseases but can occur even when the thyroid is functioning normally.

The disease typically has an 'active' phase lasting about six months to two years. In this phase, regular hospital treatments may be needed for several months. After this, the inflammation settles, and this is known as the 'inactive' or 'burnt out' stage. However, damage to the eye may become permanent and sometimes surgery is required after the active phase is over.

Employees who have TED may experience mild, moderate or severe symptoms. Even mild symptoms can pose difficulty with everyday tasks, as the inflammation can cause pain, double vision, and photosensitivity. Driving, reading and using a VDU may pose difficulties. Even if the person can do these tasks, they may need more frequent breaks, or take longer than usual to complete a task.

Changes to appearance can affect employee's confidence and overall quality of life. Some have experienced harassment and discrimination because of the change in their appearance. Many people who experience TED may have such severe and long-term impairment that they become disabled.

What support and accommodations might an employee with TED require?

- Time for hospital appointments, treatments and possibly for surgery
- Adjustment to equipment, environment and/or role to enable them to continue working
- Understanding of the effects of changing facial appearance on their confidence and quality of life

You can help by taking time to ask the employee how their condition affects them at work and considering what reasonable adjustments may be made to their work environment.