WELLBEING AT WORK

Business strength through wellbeing

Promoting wellbeing at work is obviously good for the individuals and will also have a positive impact on the organisation as a whole. Wellbeing at work is about thriving not just surviving, with the clear objective of improving performance and being a key enabler for enhanced employee engagement.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reported that in 2017/18 almost 27 million working days were lost due to work-related ill health, with 1.4 million people suffering from a work-related illness.

This series of fact sheets focuses on implementing a range of wellbeing strategies in the workplace, exploring the important relationship between work, health and wellbeing. Our wellbeing strategy starts by providing a framework that includes positive behaviours for individuals, managers and employers. It then goes on to explain the benefits of implementing the strategy with guidance on how to promote it. Finally some specific guidance is provided on the three core areas of wellbeing; mental health, physical activity and nutrition.

makeuk.org/wellbeing

WORK IS GOOD FOR YOU

Studies have shown that work is good for your health and the benefits of work greatly outweigh any disadvantages. However, work has the potential to lead to illness and government statistics figures suggest that over two million people suffer an illness they believe has been caused or made worse by their work. Unhealthy workplaces are easy to spot; they usually have some of the following characteristics:

- Poor management culture
- Evidence of bullying
- Poor customer service
- High levels of absence
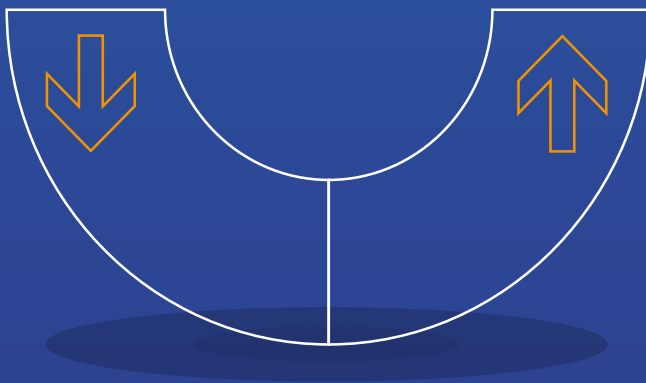- Reduced productivity
- Unreasonably high work loads

The benefits of implementing a wellbeing strategy are clear.

Unhealthy and poor motivated Individuals will:

- Have higher levels of absence
- Not be as productive
- Provide poor customer service

## Healthy and Motivated Individuals will:

- Go that extra mile
- Take fewer sick days
- Be more creative

A FRAMEWORK FOR WELLBEING STRATEGIES

Like any other business activity, wellbeing requires an effective strategy if it is going to have a positive impact on both the individuals and the organisation as a whole.

An effective wellbeing strategy requires commitment from the top. Managers must have the skills to implement the strategy and the employer must create the right environment in which people can flourish both in mind and body. Building personal resilience amongst individuals is critical in supporting the strategy. As such, a coherent strategy will have clear integrated objectives for individuals, managers and the employer or senior management team.

INDIVIDUALS

EMPLOYERS　　**MANAGERS**
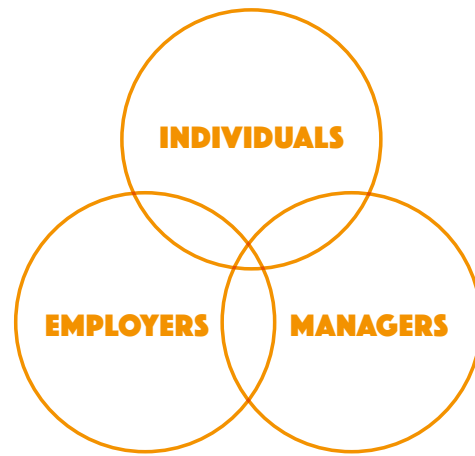
CORE OBJECTIVES

Individuals
- Look after your own wellbeing
- Learn personal coping strategies and resilience
- Learn to identify personal triggers
- Engage with line managers on wellbeing initiatives
- Support colleagues in enhancing their wellbeing

Managers
- Build a rapport with staff
- Plan work with people in mind
- Have confidence and develop knowledge in managing wellbeing
- Support work-life balance where possible

Employers
- Lead and embed a wellbeing strategy
- Reduce stigma where it exists e.g. mental health
- Tackle the causes of poor wellbeing
- Support and train managers
- Resource the building of personal resilience among staff

"The employer must create the right environment in which people can flourish both in mind and body."

PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Employers should provide support for all employees to thrive at work with more targeted support and tailored support for those who may need it. A wellbeing strategy should therefore involve the whole workforce and simply those with existing health concerns.

Support for all employees to thrive at work and build resilence

Targeted support for those struggling at work or showing early signs of poor health

Tailored support for those that are ill

(Adapted from: Thriving at Work: The Independent Review of Mental Health and Employers 2017)

**Some do's and don'ts that are worth considering when implementing a wellbeing programme:**

Do:

- Ensure that the employee wellbeing programme concept is endorsed by senior leadership, and sign up a senior management "champion" if possible.
- Be clear about what your wellbeing programme will, and will not, do in advance.
- Think about how the programme will be branded.
- Remember to build an element of evaluation into the programmes.
- Embed the wellbeing programme into the business strategy.
- Be mindful of the wellbeing offer that your existing healthcare providers might be able to supply at no, or low, additional cost (for example, explore your private medical insurance and employee assistance programme contracts for any wellbeing "extras" on offer).

Don't:

- Make the mistake of working on a "one-size-fits all" basis; do not over-prescribe programmes for individual employees but rather encourage staff to seek them out.
- View work on the wellbeing programme as a "tick-box" exercise; make sure programmes are sustainable over the medium term.
- Throw money at wellbeing; for example, make the most of initiatives run by charities and government agencies.
- Expect to be an expert in all aspects of wellbeing; call on the expertise of others when you need to, but at the same time use external providers selectively.
- Overstate the expected outcomes for the programme.

WHAT SHOULD THE WELLBEING STRATEGY FOCUS ON?

The advice is to keep it simple and focus on things that make sense to individuals so that they can easily engage. Wellbeing initiatives typically fall into three core areas:

MENTAL HEALTH

NUTRITION

PHYSICAL HEALTH & ACTIVITY
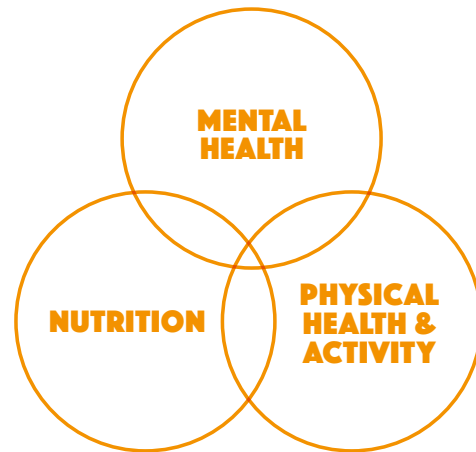
The Role of Occupational Health

Occupational Health is a specialist area of medicine which is aimed at preventing work-related illness and injury by encouraging healthy working practices, monitoring the health of the workforce where there is a known risk of exposure to physical, chemical, ergonomic or psychological risks and supporting the management of sickness absence. Occupational health services can be provided internally or more typically by an external service provider. The Wellbeing strategy is designed to work alongside the more specific Occupational Health Strategy by involving the broadest possible group of employees and not just those exposed to particular health stressors at work.

MENTAL HEALTH

Everyone has mental health and usually this is good, however, mental health problems can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or social background. Organisations that value mental health and wellbeing as core assets in their organisations will often see benefits in terms of reduced absence and higher productivity. The most common forms of mental ill-health are:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Phobic anxiety disorders
- Obsessive compulsive disorders

According to Mind more than one in five employees reported calling in sick to avoid work due to stress with a further 42% saying they had considered resigning and 14% actually leaving their job. A mental health condition may be classed as a disability under the Equality Act 2010, which entitles those with these disabilities to equal treatment and reasonable adjustments. In many cases poor mental ill-health will not necessarily be classed as a disability and will be seen as something sensitive and difficult to understand. According to the charity Shaw Trust three out of ten employees experience mental health problems each year. Organisations and Managers can manage mental health by:

- Keeping an open mind
- Being flexible
- Listening
- Providing a time and place to talk
- Seeking advice and guidance

There are some key interventions that organisations can implement to build resilience:

- Education and campaigns to reduce stigma
- Consider appointing and training mental health first aiders
- Resilience training for employees
- Creating a positive social environment at work

Some key questions to consider when tackling mental health issues at work

- Is there a dedicated time and place to support colleague and talk about mental health?
- Do managers have active listening skills to ensure they are present and engaged in conversations about mental health?

- Do employees know how to respond when someone says they have had suicidal thoughts or know how to broach the subject without feeling awkward?
- Do managers have the required skills and knowledge to support an employee with a known mental health issue?
- Is there an occupational health service available to support employees with mental health issues who are off work or in returning to work?

"Build resilience for employees and create a positive social environment at work."

NUTRITION

We consume up to a third of our daily calories whilst at work. What we consume can affect our work performance as well as our health. Eating healthily can help to improve concentration and boost our energy levels. Good nutrition can also improve mental health by reducing stress, and drinking plenty of water prevents headaches, fatigue and dizziness from dehydration.

Healthy eating has multiple benefits, including:

- Increased energy
- Improved sleep quality
- Improved mood
- Maintaining a healthy body weight
- Clearer skin
- Lowering the risk of chronic health conditions such as heart disease, stroke, and cancer

What is a 'healthy diet'?

A healthy diet is a balanced diet, which includes food from all the major food groups in the right proportions, and in quantities, which maintain a healthy body weight. Only 15% of adults in the UK eat five portions of fruit and vegetables each day. If you struggle to meet this target, there are some simple ways you can fit in more servings throughout your day.

- Have a piece of fruit with your tea break rather than a biscuit
- Make vegetable-packed soups for your lunch (beware of pre-packaged soups with a high salt content)
- Add some fruit to your breakfast cereal, such as a sliced banana
- Don't forget that pulses, lentils and beans count as one of your five-a-day. Chickpeas and lentils make great curry bases

For more advice on eating well visit the NHS website:

https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/

Some Key Questions for Organisations to Consider:

- Do people have access to a canteen at work, or local shops and cafés?
- What does the work canteen provide? Are unhealthy options currently dominating the offer? Which healthier options can be made available?
- Are the prices reasonable, or can the canteen be subsidised? Can healthier options be subsidised/promoted e.g. fruit and vegetables?
- If vending machines are available, what are they stocked with?
- Can people prepare and re-heat/cook their own food at work?
- Are there enough fridges to store fresh food and packed lunches?
- What facilities are available within walking distance? If you are a major customer – what influence can you have?
- Where do people eat? Do they eat together?
- How many people take a break from work to eat lunch, and how many eat as they continue working?
- What provision is made for employees who are not based in a single location, such as sales reps, drivers etc.

Organisations and Managers can Improve Nutrition by:

- Working with staff to identify what they need to help them to make healthier choices.
- Working with purchasing and/or catering managers to improve the offer of food and drink, and look at the wording and requirements in your contracts (particularly when re-tendering).
- Developing a pricing policy to support healthier choices.
- Providing healthier options at meetings and events.
- Begining a conversation about how special events (birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, promotions) are marked at work.
- Considering whether 'cake days' can be shared, or healthier alternatives be provided?
- Where practical, offer free fresh fruit and vegetables at strategic points in the workplace as well as any existing snack options or vending machines.
- Considering using a local vendor to bring daily fresh fruit supplies. Encourage staff to take home any fruit and vegetables left at the end of the day.
- Using family days to introduce partners and children to the organisation's healthy eating initiative. Support at home can really make a difference.
- Running cooking and healthy eating courses. Coaching on what to buy and understanding food labels can also help staff to choose healthier options.
- Encouraging water rather than tea, coffee or sugary drinks for hydration and aim to drink 6 - 8 glasses a day.

PHYSICAL HEALTH & ACTIVITY

Physical health can be affected by known stressors in the workplace such as high noise levels, manual handling or exposure to hazardous substances. These exposures will require specific risk assessments and interventions to reduce any potential impact they may have on physical health. Individuals exposed to these stressors may also require health surveillance from a dedicated occupational health professional. In addition to these known stressors there are many other potential health impacts in the workplace that can go unnoticed. Fore example, it is estimated that around a third of adults are damaging their health through a lack of physical activity. Approximately 62 per cent of trips are made by car, with only 25 per cent on foot and a mere 2 per cent by bicycle. Journeys on foot or by bicycle are healthier and more environmentally friendly.

What is a Good Level of Physical Activity?

The UK Chief Medical Officer recommends either, 150 minutes a week of activity of moderate intensity (increased breathing, still able to talk), 75 minutes a week of vigorous activity (breathing fast, difficulty talking), or a combination of both. Adults should also undertake strength exercises on two or more days a week that work all the major muscles (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms).

What are the Risk Factors?

Sedentary behaviour is a risk factor or poor physical and mental health, independent of people's level of physical activity. Even those who are physically active outside work can be adversely affected by sitting still for several hours during their working day. There is a case for employers to target sedentary behaviour in the workplace, as a separate but interlinked issue to physical activity.

Technological advancements in the workplace have made prolonged sitting the norm for many. Prolonged sitting has been linked to premature death, heart disease, certain cancers and Type 2 diabetes. In particular, sedentary behaviour in the workplace can cause musculoskeletal (MSK) problems, such as back, shoulder and knee pain. These are the leading cause of working days lost in the UK. It is estimated that 31 million days a year are lost due to these problems.

"It is estimated that around a **third** of adults are damaging their health through a lack of physical activity."

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The Manufacturers' Organisation

Practical Steps to Avoid Sedentary Behaviour

- Move items like printers, bins and water coolers further from workspaces.
- Encourage employees to get up from their desks every 30 minutes for 2 minutes, or at least every hour for 2 to 4 minutes.
- Train line managers to accept that an employee can still be productive while taking breaks away from the workstation.
- Promote standing or walking meetings and provide meeting spaces that enable this behaviour.
- Provide extra-long telephone cords, cordless phones or headsets so that employees can stand or walk during phone calls.
- Organise work tasks so that employees can stand or sit while doing their work.
- Foster an organisational culture that looks favourably upon reducing sedentary behaviour or increasing physical activity.
- Encourage employees to talk to colleagues in person instead of emailing or calling.
- Senior leaders should lead by example and use stairs instead of lifts.

Actions to Encourage Physical Activity

- Discourage a culture where line managers consider time away from the desk as unproductive.
- Encourage the use of stairs rather than lifts.
- Promote walk and cycle to work schemes. Provide advice on financial incentives.
- Provide changing facilities, showers and lockers.
- Encourage social initiatives such as lunchtime walking clubs.
- Encourage regular strength and stretch exercises such as Yoga or Pilates.
- Promote physical activity throughout the organisation and celebrate success.
- Encourage the use of wearable technology and Apps that promote movement.
- Be inclusive by considering employees with disabilities.

If you would more information on our Health & Wellbeing Services click here

makeuk.org/wellbeing