

# How to kickstart your employee wellness programme



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# Chapter 1

## What is employee wellness?

Wellness is HR's new watchword.

Some call it workplace wellness, others corporate wellness, but at its core the meaning is consistent.

A wellness programme is a workplace initiative or organisational policy that's designed to support and promote the health of employees. This could be anything from encouraging healthy dietary choices, to flexible working policies.

Such programmes are becoming an increasingly important part of the overall employee experience, and HR's EVP. This is down to a combination of state intervention – such as the Government's recent Thriving at Work report and the latest regulations introduced for employment in the gig economy – and a heightened awareness of issues around health.

As well as the more obvious areas of wellness – such as physical – employers are now realising their responsibility in their people's financial, mental, and emotional wellness. Put together, these pillars support high levels of employee engagement while fostering a workforce where people are committed to achieving organisational success.



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**“It's about making sure you're looking at wellness from a total perspective and giving a reasonable weight to each of the elements, as opposed to doing the token stuff you read in a magazine article.”**



# Chapter 2

## The benefits of an employee wellness programme

Wellness programmes have typically been considered a nice to have, rather than an employer's duty. But the more we've explored the topic, the more evidence has surfaced about the positive correlation between employee engagement and business performance.

The 9-6 worker will spend roughly a third of their life at work, so it's inevitable that organisational culture and environment will have an impact on their behaviour and lifestyle.

### Employee benefits

The benefits of employee wellness programmes extend far beyond physical health. Employees with access to wellness programmes experience:

- Lower levels of stress
- Improved physical and mental health
- Improved financial wellness
- Improved self-image and self-esteem



## Business benefits

Businesses with wellness programmes benefit financially and culturally, experiencing:

- **A competitive edge during recruitment**
- **Retention of healthy employees**
- **Decreased rates of illness and injuries**
- **Reduced employee absenteeism**
- **Improved employee relations and morale**
- **Increased productivity**

# Chapter 3

## Why is employee wellness such a high priority today?

The connections between employee wellness programmes and reduced absenteeism are heavily researched, with at least 50 papers published on the topic. Organisations with comprehensive wellness programmes experience reduced absenteeism for the following reasons:

- **Healthy employees are less likely to be absent.**
- **Employees who can control their stress have lower absenteeism.**
- **Employees with healthy blood pressure, cholesterol, and glucose have lower absenteeism.**
- **Employees who are not overweight or obese have lower absenteeism.**



Industries such as retail, hospitality, and healthcare are being hit the hardest. In addition to statistically higher absence rates, employees in these fields are more likely to job hop as a result of poor engagement.

**It costs on average more than £30,000 to turnover one member of staff**

Recent Perkbox research found that 36% of the UK workforce are likely to leave their jobs within one year – a worrying statistic when considering it costs on average more than £30,000 to turnover one member of staff, according to Oxford Economics.

## **Employees are our finest asset**

Engage for Success executive director, Cathy Brown, believes employers are increasingly acknowledging that people actually are the most important asset within an organisation.

“Organisations are beginning to understand that how people feel physically and mentally at work has a huge impact on their performance, and therefore on the performance, productivity, and efficiency of the organisation. And all the research demonstrates that people who are happy, fulfilled and engaged in their jobs have higher levels of physical and mental health, and are less likely to be absent.”



## Poor employee wellness costs

Brendan Street, Professional Lead of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy at Nuffield Health, agrees the research is irrefutable, pointing towards the Government's recent Thriving at Work report. One of the key findings of which is that 300,000 workers lose their jobs each year due to mental health issues. The report puts the cost of this, combined with lost productivity and performance through mental ill health, at £42bn a year for UK employers.

"So there is that which is driving wellness initiatives commercially," he says. "Also, the bigger driving force is corporate responsibility. There is a big push to make employers responsible for the emotional safety of their employees in the same way they are for physical safety."

**300,000 workers lose their jobs each year due to mental health issues**

# Chapter 4

## How to get buy-in to your wellness programme

Armed with the proven benefits wellness programmes have to both employees and employers, along with the in-depth research highlighting their economic and medical advantage, the next step is convincing your senior leaders of their value.

So we asked our industry contributors to explain how to go about convincing those at the top to invest in wellness programmes.





## Explain why it's essential

JC Fonfreyde is Head of Reward at Wellcome Group, a charity that focuses on finding new ways of improving health, so he's no stranger to convincing people of the need for wellness initiatives. "The key issue," he explains, "is to understand why you are doing it."

Having absolute clarity over the initiative will make it much easier to pitch to senior leaders. "If the organisation is benevolent towards its employees, there will already be alignment. However this is not necessarily the case with all organisations – some organisations look at transacting with people rather than taking care of them."

## Appeal to the rational

If this rings true with your organisation, JC suggests you emphasise the cost of not introducing wellness initiatives. "Use the studies that demonstrate poor physical and mental health lead to low productivity, absenteeism and presenteeism. This costs the organisation as well as the individual and, potentially, their team."

## Appeal to the emotional

As well as appealing to their rational, logical drivers, you should also hone in on the emotional element – why it makes sense to introduce a wellness programme. JC refers to this as appealing to, "the heart and mind".





“It doesn’t mean you have to do everything for your employees,” he says. “In some cases you will enable them to make decisions by providing them with information, education or tools. It’s about finding the balance between giving employees overwhelming access and taking decisions for them – neither of which will help.”



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**“Buy-in from the top is absolutely necessary. It works best in businesses that have an executive who has had mental health problems themselves and are prepared to talk about it openly, as it sets the culture.”**

**“I’ve been involved in a number of different companies where this is the case, particularly in law. Suicide is quite a problem among lawyers. There’s a lot of law companies now where the head lawyer will come out and say, ‘I have had depression and it’s ok to talk about it’.”**

## ROI versus VOI

Few departments these days escape the challenge of demonstrating return on investment (ROI) on their initiatives, and HR is no different. The problem with measuring HR in the same way as functions such as sales and marketing is the focus on people – not leads, sales, and revenue.

Value on investment (VOI) is a newer, broader metric. It measures not just revenue, but also elements that contribute to work satisfaction, employee wellbeing and business performance – such as productivity and employee retention. Being armed with a rigid VOI plan for your wellness programme will answer measurability questions from budget holders, and therefore increase the likelihood of their buy-in.

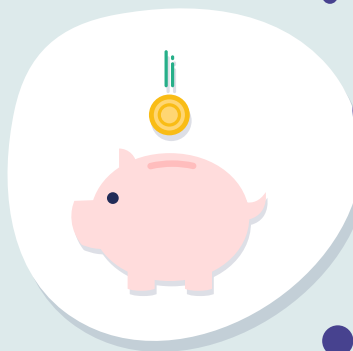


# Chapter 5

## The elements of a successful wellness programme

The most successful employee wellness programmes are ones that offer financial, emotional, and physical wellness initiatives. The following elements are based on our conversations with industry leaders, and are divided into the three aforementioned categories.

While not all items are necessary, the list aims to give you inspiration as to which directions to take your wellness programme.



### FINANCIAL WELLNESS

Poor financial wellness often affects our psychological wellness, manifesting itself in higher levels of stress and anxiety. This in turn affects productivity through poorer job performance, short-term decision-making, reduced ability to concentrate, lower productivity and absenteeism.



JC explains the importance of financial wellness initiatives: “There’s a clear case for supporting employee financial wellness in order to create healthy workplaces where people can flourish, reach their potential and make significant contributions to the organisation’s performance. There’s also the ethical argument: we should take action because it is the right thing to do.”

### **Access to discounts**

Help your employees’ paychecks go further by giving them access to a wide range of discounts and freebies. Discounts are most impactful when they cover life essentials, such as groceries and travel costs.

### **Salary sacrifice**

Introduce salary sacrifice schemes to help your employees spread the cost of big purchases and investments, such as childcare, gym memberships, technology, cars, and bicycles.

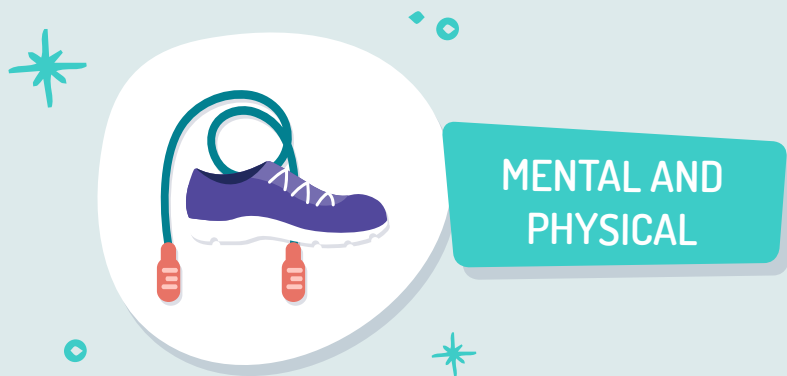
### **Financial advice**

Employee financial advice providers are surprisingly accessible. Helping your people to take control of their finances professionally demonstrates genuine interest in their wellness.

### **Communicate existing schemes**

Re-communicating your existing benefits packages, such as pension or cycle to work schemes, is a largely cost-free way to bolster your overall programme.





The solutions to mental health issues at work need to be communicated top-down. Leaders should promote a culture of openness and visibility around mental health, making it a pillar of their overall engagement and benefit strategy.

### Unlimited annual leave

Unlimited annual leave is something of an HR hot potato. While it's not possible for certain organisations, studies suggest unlimited annual leave can benefit overworked employees who can use the option of extra time off to de-stress and reboot.

### Access to gym discounts

Your wellness programme should fit around your employees' lives. Giving them access to discounted gym memberships allows them to take positive steps – on their own terms.

### An employee helpline

Stress and anxiety are among the biggest causes of employee absence. Giving them access to a 24/7 confidential helpline is a positive way to prevent such issues before they arise.

### Flexible working

Employees with flexible work schedules have higher levels of job satisfaction and less absenteeism, along with reduced rates of turnover.





Employees seek appreciation, not just from their managers, but from their peers too. If a certain action or behaviour helps the organisation reach its goals, simply requesting it will only do so much. Tangible rewards and memorable experiences instill long-lasting positive association to the organisation within the employee, and a desire to perform well.

### **Instant recognition**

Instant feedback carries a 'surprise and delight' quality, and makes whatever the rewarded action, behaviour or task all the more likely to be repeated. On an emotional level the element of personal progression outweighs material gain.

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring programmes give less experienced employees valuable feedback, insight and support, while passing down wisdom and institutional knowledge.

### **Reward and recognition**

Incentivise your team and recognise their hard work by rewarding premium products and services to individual members.

### **Gratitude**

Never underestimate the power of 'thank you'. What's immediately noticeable is the impact these gestures have on organisational culture.

### **Training schemes**

Allow your people to free up a few hours a week to use on-demand training materials. The beauty of these schemes is trainees can engage whenever suits them, breaking larger schemes into smaller modules.



# Chapter 6

## Britain's most stressed out cities

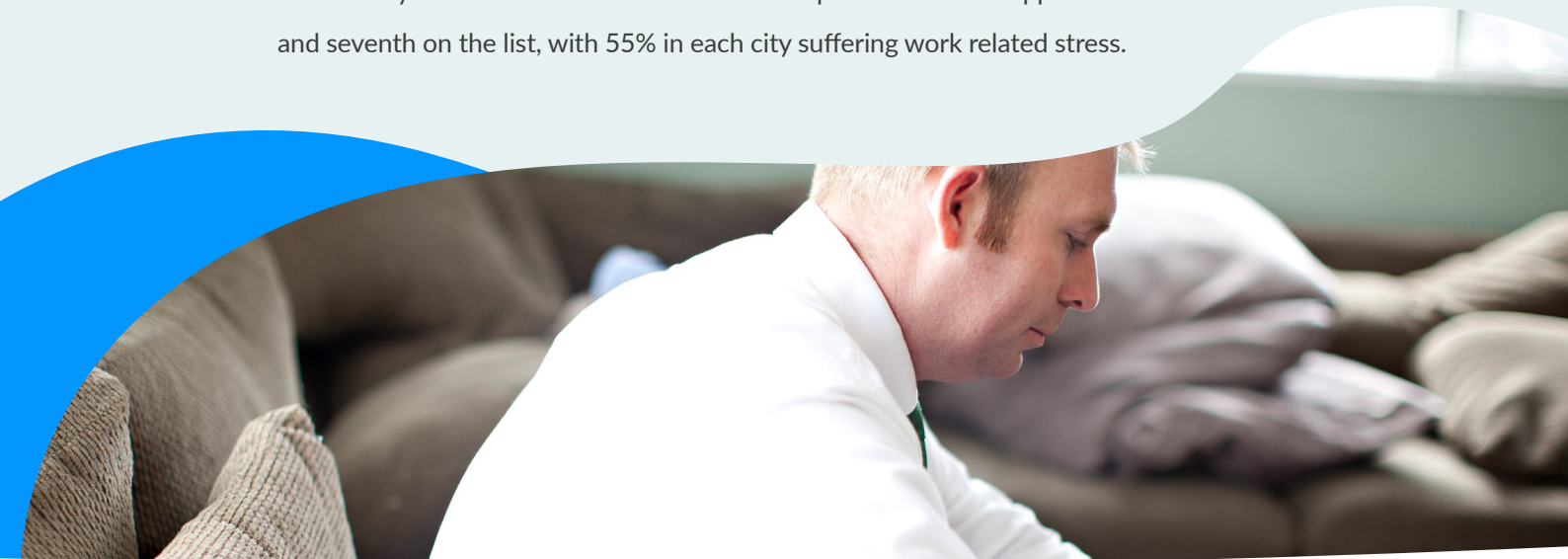
We surveyed 2001 demographically diverse UK adults to explore the differences in levels of stress among genders, as well as geographical locations, and company sizes. The questions explored the areas of people's lives most likely to lead to stress, the ways in which stress impacts them, and how they alleviate it when it occurs.

The research revealed a whopping 82% of the UK's workforce are stressed, with Cardiff workers being the most stressed (70%), followed closely by Wolverhampton (64%).

Surprisingly, those in the capital appear further down the list, with 59% of Londoners feeling stressed at work.

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While work stress is often associated with the London rat race, the research shows other cities throughout the UK are not far behind, as 57% of respondents in Coventry claim to feel stressed at work. Liverpool and Oxford appear sixth and seventh on the list, with 55% in each city suffering work related stress.





Other cities where workers are highly stressed include Leicester (53%), Brighton (51%), Southampton (51%) and Edinburgh (50%).

Overall, cities in the South of England suffer with greater work stress than those in the Northern half of the country, with workers appearing far less stressed in Yorkshire (13%) and the North East (31%) compared to London (62%) and the South East (49%).

Millennials are suffering the most, with nearly three quarters (73%) feeling the pressures of work stress, compared to only 24% of over 55s, as they head into retirement.

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Evidently, work stress decreases with age, as only 52% of 35-44 year olds suffer, which again plummets to 33% in the 45-54 age bracket.

Along with work, health and money are also keeping the nation awake at night. Money worries affect 45-54 year olds the most (48%), with younger people, 18-24 year olds, being the least affected (31%).

The combination of work, health and money stress can amount to numerous problems, with the top impacts in the UK being sleeplessness (65%), anxiousness (59%) and being more argumentative (34%).

The research clearly identifies how stress is dealt with differently across the UK. Worryingly, over a quarter (29%) are equally as likely to turn to alcohol and cigarettes as they are to talk to someone, with Brighton being the most likely city to turn to narcotics as a stress reliever (61%).



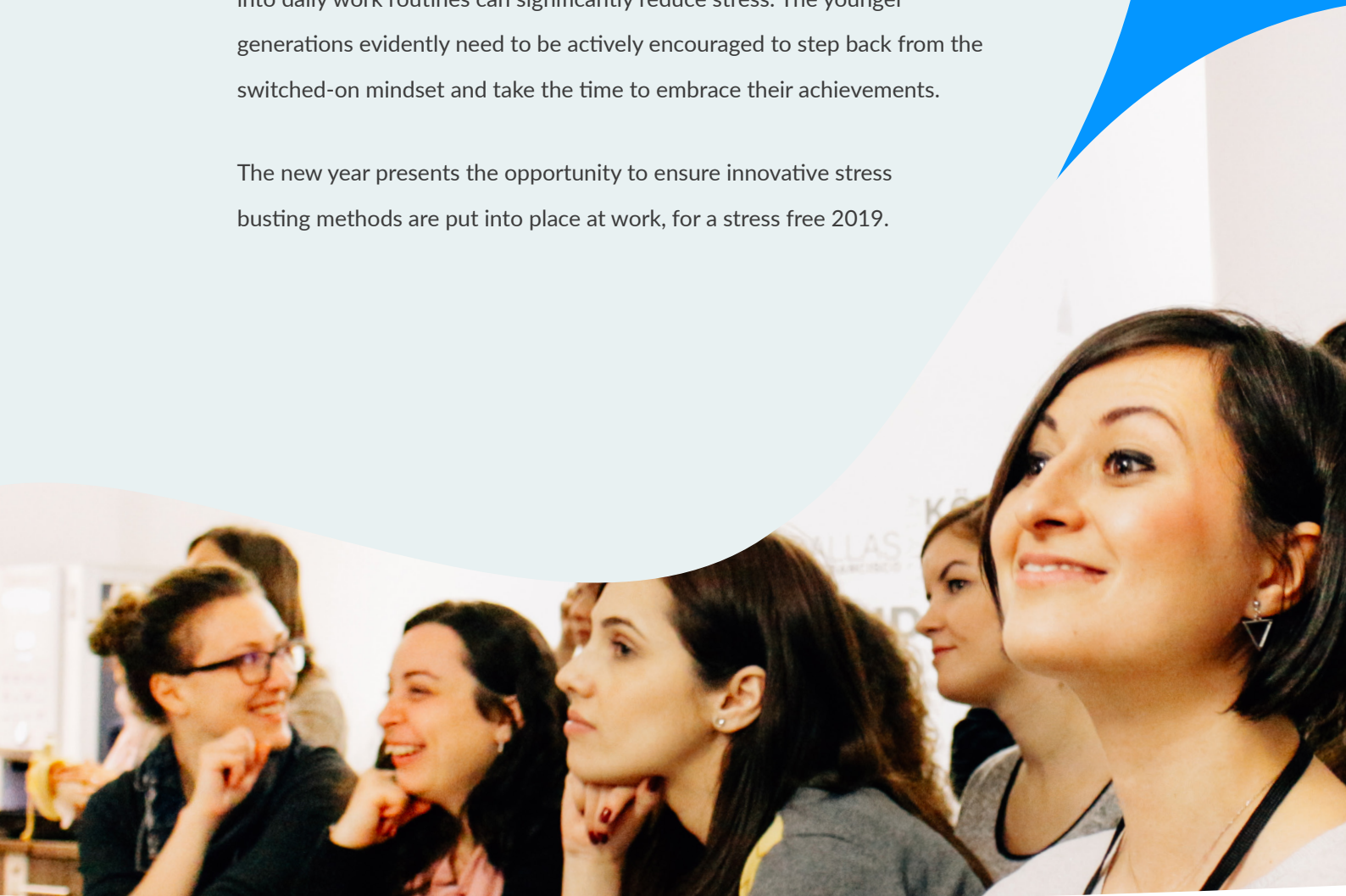
## What can we learn from the research?

Workplaces need to be proactive in offering both professional and unprofessional confidential advice, flexible working and increased holiday days, plus physical health and fitness opportunities, to reduce the population's reliance on stimulants.

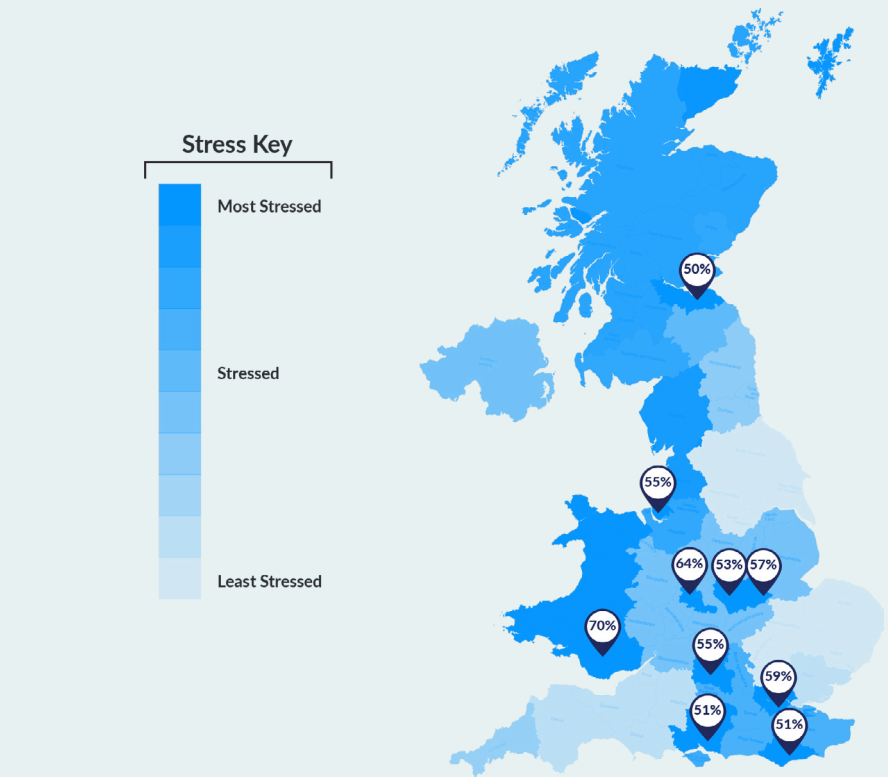
While the common recommended methods of reducing stress involve solo techniques such as mindfulness, yoga and meditation, encouraging workers to invest in their happiness together could be the solution to combating the biggest cause of stress.

Happiness should be thought of as an investment and not something that can be achieved overnight. Integrating rewards, wellness and social engagement into daily work routines can significantly reduce stress. The younger generations evidently need to be actively encouraged to step back from the switched-on mindset and take the time to embrace their achievements.

The new year presents the opportunity to ensure innovative stress busting methods are put into place at work, for a stress free 2019.



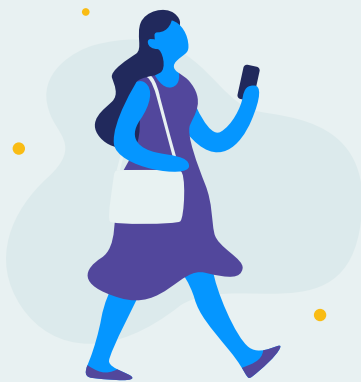
# 10 cities most stressed by work in the UK



CARDIFF	70%
WOLVERHAMPTON	64%
LONDON	59%
CONVENTRY	57%
LIVERPOOL	55%
OXFORD	55%
LEICESTER	53%
BRIGHTON AND HOVE	51%
SOUTHAMPTON	51%
EDINBURGH	50%



## Which gender suffers from work stress the most?

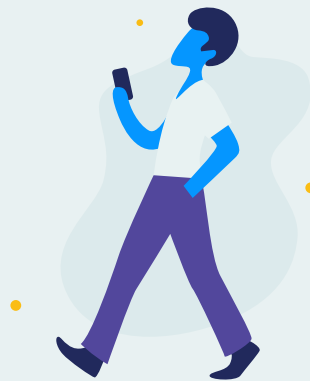


**38%**

of women say they suffer from work stress.

**50%**

of men say they suffer from work stress.



## The top three impacts of work stress

**65%**

SLEEPLESSNESS

**59%**

ARGUMENTATIVENESS

**34%**

ANXIOUSNESS



# Chapter 7

## 8 steps to launching a wellness programme

Hopefully this ebook has whet your appetite and you're keen to get a programme underway. We've boiled down the expertise provided by our contributors to form an eight point plan for launching a wellness programme.

**The steps are tailorable to fit organisations of all sizes and sectors.**

### 1. Get buy-in

Your first challenge is to get the buy-in of the senior leadership team. Express how your wellness initiative won't just change the lives of your employees, but will also help the business reach its goals.

### 2. Set up dedicated teams

Whether it's HR or a wider collaboration, the best programmes are spearheaded by wellness champions to ensure goals are achieved and the benefits are felt. The people who make up these teams should have a good understanding of the business and the backing of the organisation.

### 3. Collect the data

Go to the people whom the initiative will apply: your employees. Use a combination of existing data – absents rates and turnover data – and primary research in the form of internal surveys and in-person meetings to pinpoint the areas that need addressing.



#### 4. Make a plan

Based on your own research and analysis, build a roadmap of the actions you will take. Formally document the goals of the initiative, and the things you would like to introduce. Linking the programme to existing company programmes and demonstrating VOI will add extra credibility. Once you have a clear idea of the actions you'd like to take, do the research into costings per item. A powerful feature for your budget is to compare it to the cost of not embarking on the wellness programme.

#### 5. Design the interventions

With your plan in place, now's the time to put the wheels in motion and solve the problems. Consider the elements mentioned in this eBook, as well as other initiatives that address a holistic view of wellness. Think about initiatives to solve financial, emotional, physical and mental wellness.

#### 6. Communicate the programme

This step is perhaps the most important, yet least well performed: communicate the wellness programme to your employees. Create a buzz and make sure everyone understands the schemes, educate them as to the importance of wellness, and how it will positively affect their lives.

#### 7. Measure the impact

Measure areas such as participation, budget expenditure, behavioural changes, and participant satisfaction. This would be a good time to send out a company wide survey to gauge engagement levels. The wider analysis could link back to organisational goals: has business performance improved since you introduced the scheme?

#### 8. Celebrate your successes

Using the same communications channels, report back to your people by sharing success stories of how your wellness intervention has made a positive effect.







# Helping employees live better, in life and at work

**Perkbox is a platform designed to enrich the employee experience. Our four products help create environments in which people and companies thrive.**

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Our Perks are carefully chosen to support your team's financial, emotional and physical wellbeing.

## INSIGHTS

Insights is an agile pulse survey tool, enabling you to gather and act on feedback in a meaningful way.

## RECOGNITION

Recognition brings your company values to life, helping you incentivise and reward top achievers.

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Our latest product Perkbox Medical is the simplest and most affordable answer to accessible healthcare.

We also host events, publish books, write articles and create videos that will assist you in your journey to delivering the ultimate employee experience.

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