mind

Wellness Action Plan

Guide for people working in a workplace

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Helpful definitions

For the purpose of clarity, when we refer to 'mental health' in this guide we are using it in the broadest possible sense.

Some useful definitions to terms used in this guide can be found below.

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Mental health

We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. How we feel can vary from good mental wellbeing to difficult feelings and emotions, to severe mental health problems.

Mental wellbeing

Mental wellbeing is the ability to cope with the day-to-day stresses of life, work productively, interact positively with others and realise our own potential. When we talk about wellbeing we are referring to mental wellbeing.

Poor mental health

Poor mental health is when we are struggling with low mood, stress or anxiety. This might mean we're also coping with feeling restless, confused, short tempered, upset or preoccupied. We all go through periods of experiencing poor mental health – mental health is a spectrum of moods and experiences and we all have times when we feel better or worse.

Mental health problems

We all have times when we struggle with our mental health. A mental health problem is when difficult experiences or feelings go on for a long time and affect our ability to enjoy and live our lives in the way we want. You might receive a specific diagnosis from your doctor, or just feel more generally that you are experiencing a prolonged period of poor mental health.

Common mental health problems

These include depression, anxiety, phobias and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). These make up the majority of the problems that lead to one in four people experiencing a mental health problem in any given year. Symptoms can range from the comparatively mild to very severe.

Severe mental health problems

These include conditions like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder which are less common. They can have very varied symptoms and affect your everyday life to different degrees, and may require more complex and/or long-term treatments.

Work-related stress

Work-related stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them at work. Stress, including work-related stress, can be a significant cause of illness. It is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and other issues such as increased capacity for error. Stress is not a medical diagnosis, but severe stress that continues for a long time may lead to a diagnosis of depression or anxiety, or other mental health problems.

Burnout

Burnout isn't technically a diagnosis, but instead refers to a collection of symptoms. You may feel exhausted, have little motivation for your job, feel irritable or anxious and you may see a dip in your work performance.

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What is a Wellness Action Plan?

Given the high levels of stress and poor mental health we are seeing in UK workers, there is a growing demand for innovative and proactive ways of managing our mental health at work.

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The Wellness Action Plan is inspired by Mary Ellen Copeland's Wellness Recovery Action Plan® (WRAP®): an evidence-based system used worldwide by people to manage their mental health.

Wellness Action Plans are a personalised, practical tool we can all use – whether we have a mental health problem or not – to help us identify what keeps us well at work, what causes us to become unwell, and how to address a mental health problem at work should you be experiencing one.

It also opens up a dialogue with your manager or supervisor, in order for them to better understand your needs and experiences and ultimately better support your mental health, which in turn leads to greater productivity, better performance and increased job satisfaction.

We all have mental health just as we all have physical health, and this Wellness Action Plan has been designed to support us all to manage our mental health, wherever we are on the spectrum.

Wellness Action Plans are also particularly helpful during the return to work process, as they provide a structure for conversations around what support will help you and what workplace adjustments might be useful to discuss and consider with your manager.

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Using a Wellness Action Plan

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How to get started with a Wellness Action Plan

Plan some time in to fill in your Wellness Action Plan and think about the current pressures you're facing, the impact they're having on your mental health and wellbeing and what you can put in place to deal with these.

Being situated with your colleagues in a workplace can support social connection and aid collaborative activities, but it can present unique challenges. You might wish to reflect on the extent to which it enables you flexibility to carry out responsibilities you might have outside of work, the extent to which you can concentrate on work in a busy or loud environment and the extent to which it might be more difficult to communicate with colleagues across other teams or departments if they're working remotely.

It's useful to think about what support your manager can put in place to support you and discuss these topics with those in your household if working from home.

Once you've completed your Wellness Action Plan, it's helpful to review it monthly. This can help you log any learning or helpful practices from the previous month. It's also beneficial to understanding your triggers and to make sure you're adapting to any changes in your work arrangements as we continue to emerge from the pandemic. Things can change daily so it's important to keep on top of identifying what keeps you well and check the things you've put in place are working.

Ways of working

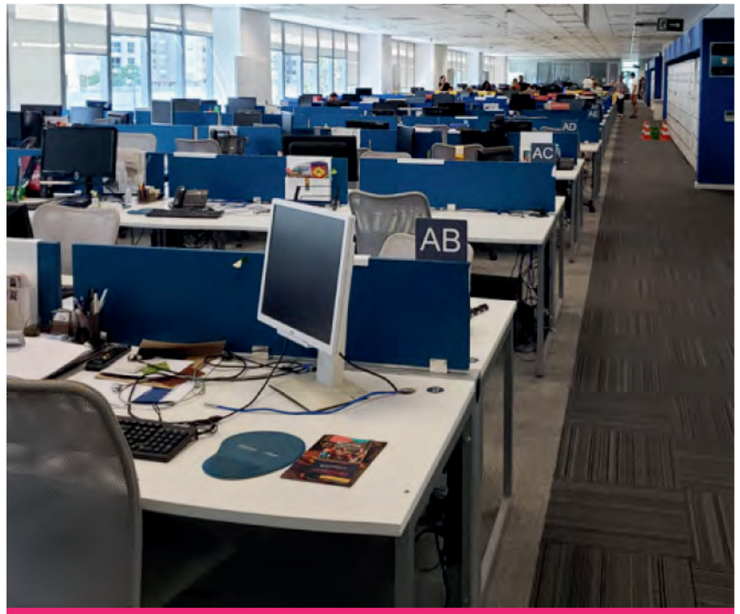
Following the emergence of the coronavirus, a number of organisations have been working in new ways with an increased number of employees working remotely, across a greater range of locations and with increasing levels of flexibility. These new ways of working can present new challenges as well as opportunities for improvement. Many of these may be unique to specific business units or teams or to particular roles within a business.

As you and your organisation begin to recognise these challenges and understand how best to address these, you may find it useful to update your Wellness Action Plan to reflect these changes.

Sharing your Wellness Action Plan

A Wellness Action Plan can be a useful self-reflective tool, but if you think it would be helpful, you can share your completed Wellness Action Plan with your manager to support conversations about your wellbeing.

Your manager can help identify when you may be becoming unwell or help you put things in place to help you stay well. You could also share it with colleagues to promote openness and understanding so you can work effectively with each other and offer support.



A note on confidentiality

You own your Wellness Action Plan. It should only be read and shared with your permission.

If you are filling out a Wellness Action Plan as a result of being unwell, your manager may ask whether you consent for a copy of it to be held with HR, along with any other information about your wellbeing, such as an Occupational Health report or a Return to Work plan. It should be up to you whether you are happy for it to be held by HR or kept confidential between yourself and your manager. If in doubt, check your company policy on this.

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Top tips for staying well at work

Identify your triggers

We're all different. What affects someone else's mental wellbeing won't necessarily affect yours in the same way. Whether it's challenges in work or the current circumstance we all find ourselves in, we all have times where we feel stressed, upset or find it difficult to cope. Working out what triggers poor mental health for you can help you anticipate problems and find solutions. Whether it's taking in too much negative news and media regarding the current circumstance or a heavy workload. Finding out your triggers can help.

Take time for yourself

Spending time on yourself is essential for your wellbeing, and helps you be more resilient. It's vital to prioritise your own needs sometimes, rather than the demands of your work. Ignoring your needs can lead to stress and burn-out. Take short breaks throughout the day as well as at least half-an-hour to get some food. A short break can help you feel recharged and refreshed. It can also give you a different perspective on any work problems.

Be kind to yourself

It's important to be kind to yourself and remember it's okay to not be okay. We may feel different from one day to the next as situations change so it's important to be kind to yourself.

Connect with colleagues

Evidence suggests that feeling close to and valued by other people is a basic human need. Good relationships are important to our wellbeing. Explore the social opportunities that might be available through your employer such as fitness classes or book clubs. Joining lunch and learn sessions or striking up conversations with colleagues over a coffee in the break room can also be great ways to build professional relationships.

Celebrate the small successes

We all want to contribute and make a difference to the things we work on, we want to feel accomplished and that we've achieved something. So it's important to celebrate the successes, big and small. Some days that might mean a great piece of work, other days it could mean doing housework or making the bed. Try to identify one small thing each day that you can accomplish.

Quick tip: Set boundaries

It can feel easy to bring work home, especially if you've had experience of working remotely. Consider how you communicate clear boundaries with colleagues through making clear your working hours using your diary or email signature and investigate how you can properly manage work notifications to your digital devices outside of working hours.

Quick tip: Get the basics right

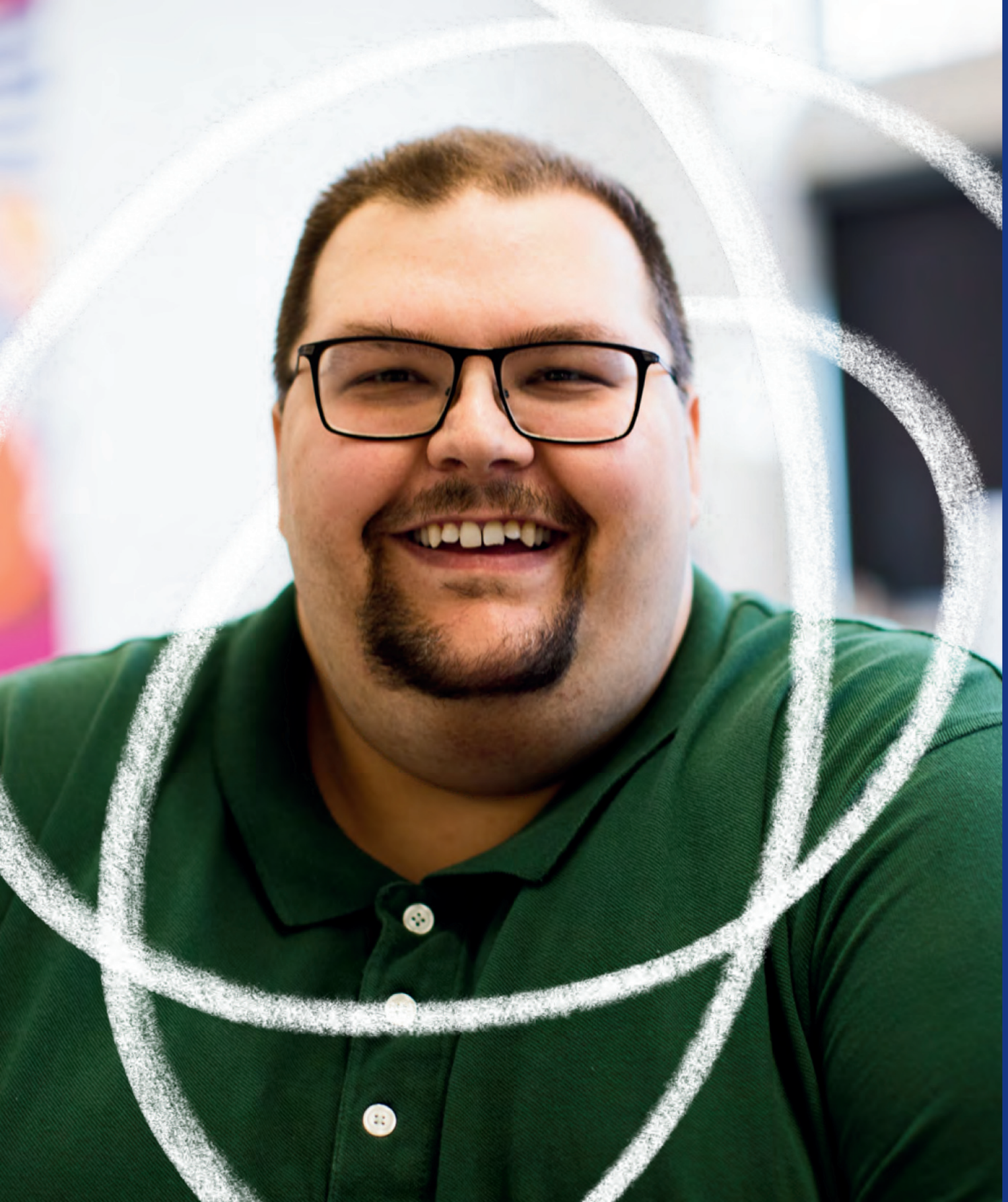
Quality sleep, a good diet and proper hydration can make all the difference to your work day. Be sure to keep yourself well hydrated throughout the day and if struggling with sleep consider consulting Mind's guidance.

Ask for help

If you feel your workload is spiralling out of control, take the opportunity to discuss it with your manager or supervisor. Discuss what work you should prioritise and reflect on what is possible to negotiate in terms of timelines and deadlines as well as the scope or scale of the work to be completed. If you're encountering a bottleneck related to other teams, departments or staff, discuss what support your manager might be able to provide in addressing some of these issues.

Learn to say no

It can be easy to take on more work than you can manage, but over time this can lead to stress and burnout. Try to protect your mental health by politely saying no to extra demands when you've not got capacity. If you feel unable to decline additional work, be sure to clarify with your manager what existing work should be deprioritised or dropped to accommodate it within your workday.



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Wellness Action Plan template

A Wellness Action Plan reminds us what we need to do to stay well at work – whether working from a physical workplace or remotely – and details what we can do to look after our own mental health and wellbeing.

It also helps us develop an awareness of our working style, stress triggers and responses, and enables us to communicate these with our manager and colleagues.

How you work

What are your current and intended working arrangements?

You might wish to highlight any flexibility you've agreed with your manager, for example working hours.

Are there any characteristics of your individual working style that you'd like to make your manager or colleagues aware of?

For example a preference for face to face conversations or digital communications when being allocated work including negotiation on deadlines before they are set, a need for adequate time to prepare prior to meetings or creative tasks, having access to a mentor/buddy for questions you might not want to contact your manager about, having a written plan of work in place which can be reviewed and amended regularly, clear quality criteria for work outputs if you have a tendency to over-work a task, tendency to have particularly high or low energy in the morning or in the afternoon.

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Staying mentally healthy at work

What helps you stay mentally healthy at work?

For example, taking an adequate lunch break away from your workspace, getting some exercise before or after work or in your lunch break, natural light at your workspace, opportunities to get to know colleagues.

Are there any situations or behaviours that can trigger poor mental health for you whilst working?

For example, conflict at work, organisational change, tight deadlines, something not going to plan, difficulties in contacting colleagues whilst they are working remotely.

What can you, your manager or colleagues put in place to proactively support you to stay mentally healthy at work and minimise these triggers?

For example, regular feedback and catch-ups, flexible working patterns, explaining wider organisational developments.

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Experiencing poor mental health at work

How might experiencing poor mental health impact on your work?

For example, you may find it difficult to make decisions, struggle to prioritise work tasks, difficulty with concentration, drowsiness, confusion, headaches.

Are there any early warning signs that might be noticed by your manager or colleagues when you are starting to experience poor mental health?

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Experiencing poor mental health at work

What actions would you like to be taken if any of these early warning signs of poor mental health are noticed by your manager or colleagues?

For example, talk to you discreetly about it, contact someone that you have asked to be contacted.

Is there anything additional you would like to share that would support your mental health at work?