

hero

How to support mental health in the workspace

A useful guide for HR professionals to improve mental wellness and contribute to positive change





The impact of mental health

One in four adults in Britain have been diagnosed with a mental illness. According to the World Health Organisation, poor mental health is an invisible disease affecting 450 million people worldwide.

Conditions falling under the mental health umbrella range from anxiety and depression right through to schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, affecting both insight and cognition. These statistics could be dismissed as just numbers on a page, but these numbers are people's lives across the country right now.

The person you engage with in conversation every morning whilst making a cup of tea, the person you sit next to day-in, day-out, the person you

chat to via video link or a person that passes you in the hallway every so often, could all be fighting a daily battle with themselves.

Aside from impacting their working life, mental health can also create a knock-on effect to the worker's family and their local network. Mental health conditions can have a significant impact on absenteeism and productivity levels of employees in the workplace.

Supporting people to focus on being healthy is the foundation to create a balanced and engaged workforce. We support physical, mental, social and financial health with comprehensive tools, education and services. All to help motivate staff to achieve goals, whether that be as a team, or individually.

You can make a difference

We hold the ethos that no employee should be just another figure on the books. When it comes to combating mental ill health, now more than ever HR professionals have an opportunity to endorse a healthy, open and compassionate culture, accessible to every single individual.

Now is the time to be even more passionate about diversity, inclusion and reachable care to those in your organisation who need it most. Don't know where to start, or need some ideas to jumpstart awareness in your business?



Eliminating the stigma surrounding mental health

Addressing mental health is a public challenge. Those suffering from mental health conditions are often subjected to social stigma that mental health conditions can often bring both in and outside of work. Early intervention and awareness is key.

“It is imperative we encourage an open culture of disclosure to combat the issues surrounding mental health stigma in the workplace, and it starts with education.”

**Samantha Gaunt,
Head of Content and Delivery, hero**





What influences mental health?

There are several lifestyle and environmental factors that can affect mental health. It's easy to feel overwhelmed, especially if more than one factor is affecting a person's ability to stay in control.



GENETIC PREDISPOSITION

Common psychiatric disorders are genetically linked, including bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.



RELATIONSHIPS

An employee's ability to stay focussed at work could be affected by their relationships outside of work.



ENVIRONMENTAL

A worker's mental health status can be affected by the environment; factors include: lighting, air quality, space, office layout and noise levels. A positive surrounding can reduce anxiety and disengagement. Meanwhile, a negative environment can trigger anxiety which can promote social isolation and agitation.



NUTRITION

One of the most under-recognised factors is the role of nutrition and mental health. However, it is becoming more well known that diet and gut health are intrinsically linked, affecting mental health symptoms, such as stress-related disorders, depression and anxiety.



STRESS

An employee's capability to maintain good mental health can be associated with stress. Too much stress, or excessive pressure, can put the body through system overload. The most common stress indicators are work, financial worry and relationships. Early intervention is key.



ACCIDENTS/ILLNESS

The impact of traumatic events or illnesses can devastatingly affect a worker's mental health. These include road accidents, serious illnesses, violence or prolonged abuse.

We believe in a whole-person health approach and our expert team can help in supporting employee lifestyle and positively impacting behaviour change.



How to tackle work-related stress in an organisation



Samantha Gaunt,
Head of Content & Delivery, hero

“By tackling work-related stress, an organisation can reduce staff turnover, improve attendance levels, become desirable places to work - increasing their recruitment pool, increasing customer satisfaction, and therefore overall image and reputation.

Key challenges such as remote working and technology dependence within an organisation can be identified and linked to an effective support plan and wellbeing strategy.

Ideally, all Managers from Executive Board to Heads of Department should undergo a CPD accredited Wellbeing Manager one day training course.

This will provide them with an overall understanding of wellbeing in the workplace. Good communication across an organisation will help foster a culture of trust and cooperation.

Having a clear business purpose with effective and ongoing communication, providing staff with the opportunity for training and personal development and encouraging teamwork will all create a positive working environment.”

The hero approach

Discovery

Gather a baseline with a wellbeing survey which captures data to support a tailored and meaningful wellbeing strategy across your organisation

Train

Empowerment through education. Invest in basic mental health awareness for all employees and introduce a Wellbeing Champions network to support line manager capability

Take Action

Implement practical solutions and an actionable toolkit to help put theory into practice

Review

Utilise real time data, employee feedback and case study reviews to measure effectiveness of the overarching strategy



Nutrition and Mental Health

The role of nutrition in relation to optimising our physical health is something that individuals have always made us aware of. The importance of this has been stressed for many years now. However, recently how our nutrition influences our mental health has come to the fore and is of equal importance to what it means to be healthy.

You may have heard the term ‘gut-brain axis’. This is the communication network that connects your gut and brain. This axis is quite rightly receiving more attention, as the gut is known as our second brain for good reason.

Neurons tell your body how to behave and feel and there are 100 billion active in your brain. However, there are also 500 million at work in your gut. These are connected to the brain via the nerves in your central nervous system (CNS).

Neurotransmitters also impact how you feel and many of these are created in the gut by cells and microbes that inhabit it. For example, we create most of our serotonin in the gut. Serotonin (also known as the happy hormone) is responsible for how we feel. Microbes in the gut also produce a neurotransmitter called GABA, which helps control feelings of anxiety and fear.

Have you ever felt nervous about a situation and slightly stressed and felt your stomach feel a little strange? Feeling stressed about a situation can impact how we feel in our gut.

Improving the health of your gut is one of the best ways to enhance your own personal feelings of mental wellbeing.

How can we do this?

“Focus on eating a variety of foods that are wholesome and nutrient dense and ensure you adopt a moderate and inclusive approach to food.

Eating plenty of fibre is crucial to digestive health, which helps to culture a harmonious gut environment. The microbes in our gut feed on fibre and when they have what they want we feel better in our gut and brain. This is why we often feel low, lethargic and suffer from brain fog when we consistently eat poorly, as processed/highly processed foods are often nutrient sparse and lacking in fibre.

Pro and prebiotics have become quite popular, but instead of jumping on a supplement, we can simply alter what we eat. The aforementioned fibre is obtained from eating plenty

of fruit, veg, beans, legumes and whole grain products. We can also get natural pro and prebiotics from specific foods such as kefir, natural yoghurt, lassi, pickles, sauerkraut and kimchi.

One thing we can always control is our nutrition. Given the positive impact it can have on both our physical and mental health, it makes so much sense to do what we can to improve it.”

Dom Haigh,
Nutritionist (ANutr)





What are the benefits of mental health and wellbeing in the workplace?

“By promoting wellbeing in the workplace and creating positive working environments, it enables individuals and organisations to thrive and perform. By creating more happy hours, organisations can decrease absenteeism and be a core enabler of employee engagement and organisational performance.

To improve mental ill health in the workplace, the organisation needs to educate staff to improve the understanding of the existing mental health challenges. An organisation that encourages an open culture of disclosure will enable staff to communicate with managers effectively and reduce the stigma associated with mental ill health. Subsequently, staff become healthier and happier and sickness rates are reduced.”

Vicky Fytche,
Senior Wellbeing Coach, hero



The Stats

- **300,000**
jobs are lost each year due to mental ill health
- **12.8 million**
Working days lost due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety (LFS 2018/19*)
- **676 million**
are affected by mental health issues worldwide
- **Nearly two fifths (37%)**
of respondents have seen an increase in stress-related absence over the last year, while three-fifths (60%) report an increase in common mental health conditions (CIPD*, 2020)
- **602,000**
Workers suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety (new or longstanding) in 2018/19 (LFS 2018/19*)



Identifying change...

Organisations which attempt to identify and reduce stress see clear benefit. Stress reduction methods to consider include: introducing flexible working hours, improving work life balance, conducting stress audits and mindfulness sessions.

Mindfulness can improve performance, employee engagement and reduce absenteeism. Mental health absence that is work related could be prevented with manageable and proactive mindfulness strategies for every working environment.

What if you could contribute to the change in mental wellness and put simple strategies into action right from the very start?

Our preventive health educational learning and development program, which includes in-person and digital seminars and workshops, covers all types of physical, mental, social and financial health. For more information email hello@herowellbeing.com

How can your company help towards mental health?

Due to the nature of mental illness, it would be impossible for just HR professionals to affect every single influencer of mental health, such as genetic predisposition, or the relationships they hold outside of work.

Our comprehensive solutions cover every area of wellbeing provision and have been designed to ensure that all wellbeing requirements can be met. Our experience in creating and evolving this sector with our clients means we have new solutions which you may never have considered, we use them because they work for people.

Our approach is to utilise a wellbeing strategy, which is combined of tech solutions and services, powered by our Navigator platform, covering a whole persons health at all levels, in one place: physical, mental, financial and social.

Navigator app

Our Navigator platform is a groundbreaking complete lifestyle support tool to support preventative health. Track data insights to help support an individual's wellbeing with real measurable ROI. Set goals, track sleep, movement, physical activity and check in daily with your mood. Book on demand one-to-one's with specialists; from Wellness Coaches, Nutritionists, Counsellors, PT's and more. Set challenges individually or as a team. Build your community with the chat and groups functionality and have access to a wide range of wellness related discounts from hero's signature partners and videos, articles and 100's of tips and tools.





Supporting HR with proactive tips

Good health is now more important than ever – not only for general wellness but also for the added benefit of better COVID-19 outcomes. Here's some tips to support the people in your organisation from the team of experts at hero.

- **COMMUNICATION**

Make sure you communicate and stay in touch with your employees. Ask if they need support. It is important to let them have a chance to share their thoughts and feelings as it can often help just to be able to share how you feel.

- **STAY ACTIVE**

One great way to improve your teams mental and physical health is to encourage them to stay active. A study from BioScience Journal (2018) showed that the positive effects of a single exposure to nature – a walk, run or stint in the garden – can last for 7 hours after an individual has experienced it. That means that taking time to go for a walk can really leave you feeling happier all day!

- **EDUCATE STAFF**

Knowledge is a powerful tool and more employers are focusing on education as a way to assist their employees. Our preventive health educational learning and development program, which includes in-person and digital seminars and workshops across all types of physical, mental, social and financial health.

- **DIGITAL EVENTS**

Booking a digital team event, like an exercise class, or an informative seminar or workshop can support your employees. hero offer a range of different topical workshops and seminars on mental health. It is important that employees know the organisation they are working for cares.

- **TEAM CHALLENGES**

For remote workers and teams which are spread out across multiple locations, looking after wellbeing can be really tough. How about using technology to set a challenge across your whole team – whether that's to increase the number of steps they do in a day, encourage a random act of kindness, or even just connect with a colleague they haven't spoken to in a while.

- **FLEXIBLE WORKING**

Just because people are working from home and not travelling into work, it doesn't mean they need to be stuck to the screen all day. Why not recommend that your team does something they may have wanted to do for a while, during the time they would normally be travelling? It is important to be flexible, and this shows that you have trust and a strong relationship. Encourage regular breaks to reset the mind, it has been proven that people are more productive after taking a break.



Let's get mental health out in the open...

Wellness strategies recognise that taking care of mental health is taking care of the mind and body. Empowering employees through mental wellness strategies can have a profound impact on workers across your business. After all, 'the brain is a platform for the mind and therefore the platform for our mental health', as recognised by the Mental Health Foundation.

An increase in long working hours and workload contributes to stress, which leads to a reduction in productivity, poor mental health and absenteeism, both short-term and long-term.

Now more than ever, HR managers have the opportunity to implement proactive mental health measures with the right procedures and benefits in place to support employees and their wellness.

Strengthening and widening the options of a nutritious and balanced diet, along with combatting stress through several techniques displayed above, can promote healthy wellbeing, resulting in improved productivity, reduced absenteeism, and good mental health in the workplace.

Our partners, affiliates & leading experts



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Get in touch

If you're looking for more support for your employees or with your team's wellbeing, get in touch to find out more about our tech solutions, wellbeing seminars and workshops, and telephone coaching sessions.

Email: hello@herowellbeing.com

