

Creating a **healthy** workplace



Produced by the **Faculty of Public Health**
and the **Faculty of Occupational Medicine**

Creating a healthy workplace

Do you want to **reduce absence, employee turnover and legal risk**, and at the same time **increase performance, employee engagement and productivity**?

This leaflet provides practical ideas to support employers and employees to improve health and wellbeing in the workplace. For each of eight key areas it suggests five simple steps that can make a real difference to your organisation and the people working in it.

Cost of ill health to your organisation

- Sickness absence costs UK employers around £12.2 billion each year. Between 2% and 16% of the annual UK salary bill is spent on sickness absence.
- The cost of making reasonable adjustments to keep an employee who develops a health condition or disability will almost certainly be far lower than the cost of recruiting and training a new employee.
- Stress-related conditions and musculoskeletal disorders are now the most common reported causes of sickness absence from work in the UK.
- An estimated 34 million days a year are lost in England and Wales through sickness absence resulting from smoking-related illness.
- Physical inactivity has major health consequences – including obesity, coronary heart disease and cancer – and in England is estimated to cost the wider economy £8.2 billion per year.
- Alcohol misuse among employees in England costs up to £6.4 billion a year in lost productivity through increased absenteeism, unemployment and premature death.

Why?

The workplace has a powerful effect on the health of employees. How healthy a person feels affects his or her productivity, and how satisfied they are with their job affects their own health, both physical and psychological.

Evidence shows that, when organisations proactively improve their working environments by organising work in ways that promote health, all adverse health-related outcomes, including absence and injuries, decrease. This makes a strong business case for creating a healthy workplace. This is reflected in the Government's *Health, Work and Well-being* strategy which encourages and supports employers in initiatives to improve the health and wellbeing of working age people.

Benefits of a healthy workplace

- **Improved productivity and performance**
- **Reduced absenteeism and other costs associated with ill health**
- **Fewer injuries, accidents, and insurance and compensation claims**
- **Improved employee morale and staff retention**
- **Employees more receptive to and better able to cope with change**
- **Enhanced business reputation and corporate responsibility**

How?

Leadership is the key to a healthy workplace. Health promotion initiatives will only be effective under conducive managerial conditions, primarily those that stimulate employee job satisfaction.

Other important factors to consider include: how work is organised and carried out; physical working conditions; employee consultation and involvement; and the organisation's policies, procedures and rules.



Enhance the wellbeing of your employees and increase efficiency in your organisation

Creating a safe and healthy workplace

- 1 Be aware of your responsibilities as an employer under the Health and Safety at Work Act and associated legislation. www.hse.gov.uk
- 2 Consult with your employees on what concerns they have about their health and safety in the workplace, and involve them in the development of any initiatives that aim to improve their health and safety.
- 3 Carry out risk assessments. Assess the possible risks to the health and safety of your employees – both physical and psychological – from their work. www.hse.gov.uk
- 4 Lead by example. Employees are more likely to take health and safety seriously if they can see that you, the employer, are serious about these issues.
- 5 Consider how you could use internal or contracted-in occupational safety and health services to improve the health of your employees. www.facocmed.ac.uk, www.nhsplus.nhs.uk, www.poosh.org

Recruitment, retention and rehabilitation

- 1 Be aware of your responsibilities as an employer under the Disability Discrimination Act. www.cipd.co.uk
- 2 Assess the costs of employee turnover and recruitment in your organisation.
- 3 Develop a policy for managing sickness absence, including accurate data collection and reporting. www.hse.gov.uk
- 4 Maintain contact with employees during their sickness absence, and carry out return-to-work interviews to plan how to support them with their return to work. www.eef.org.uk, www.dwp.gov.uk
- 5 Provide flexible working arrangements to facilitate rehabilitation and early return to work.

Mental wellbeing and minimising stress

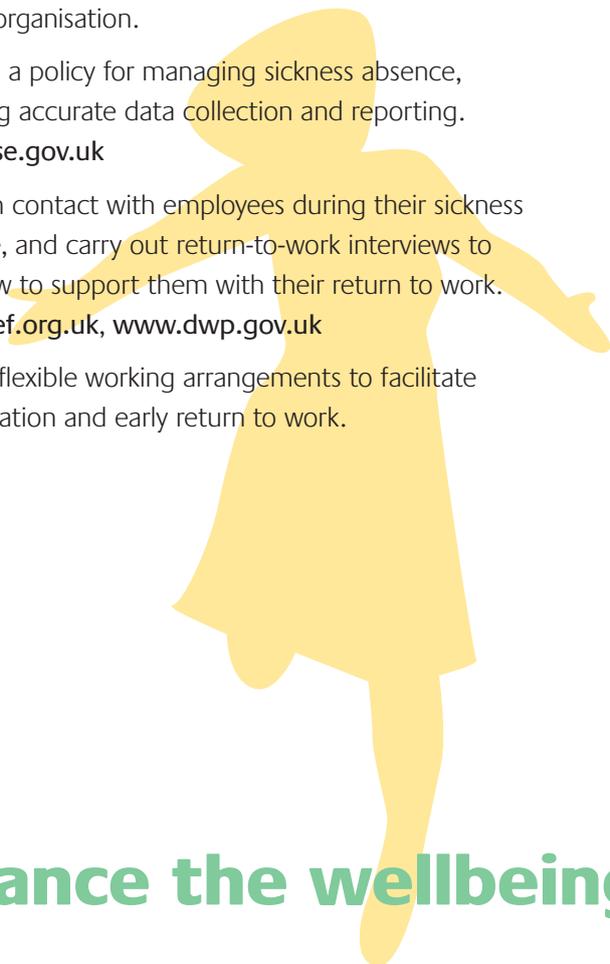
- 1 Undertake a risk assessment for work-related stress using the HSE (Health and Safety Executive) guidance. www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/about.htm, www.eef.org.uk/UK/publications/guidance/
- 2 Consult with employees and their representatives to identify problem areas and make a commitment to take action in partnership.
- 3 Make an action plan. An example plan and stress policy are available at www.hse.gov.uk.
- 4 Make sure that your organisation has in place a good equal opportunities policy, anti-discriminatory practices and clear routes for reporting and seeking redress. www.cipd.co.uk
- 5 Reduce the problems encountered by people with mental health difficulties by raising awareness and understanding of mental health issues among the rest of the workforce.

Musculoskeletal disorders

Musculoskeletal disorders include conditions such as low back pain and joint injuries.

- 1 Involve employees in risk assessment, paying special attention to the HSE's *Manual handling assessment charts* and the risk assessment tool for upper limb disorders. Revisit the risk assessment when planning any changes to the organisation of tasks. www.hse.gov.uk
- 2 Where work involves frequent repetitive tasks, consider appropriate rest breaks and rotation of workers between tasks to allow muscles to recover.
- 3 Implement procedures to ensure prompt reporting of possible musculoskeletal symptoms, early assessment, and discussion and follow-up of assessments. Agree with employees changes aimed at preventing others being affected.
- 4 Support the rehabilitation of employees with musculoskeletal disorders by offering flexibility over working hours, tasks and breaks, to enable them to remain at work or to return at an early stage and continue working as normally as possible. www.facocmed.ac.uk
- 5 Be ready to accept people back to work even if they are not totally free from symptoms. In many cases recovery is assisted by activity, including return to work.

Enhance the wellbeing of your employees ...



Tobacco smoke and smoking cessation

- 1 Develop a smoke-free policy in the workplace that applies to everyone. Put together a group of appropriate people, including employee representatives, to develop the policy. Ensure appropriate consultation with employees and unions, and the commitment of senior management.
www.ash.org.uk, www.hse.gov.uk,
www.cieh.org/research/smokefree
- 2 Give reasonable notice of the introduction of a smoke-free policy and set a date for your organisation to become smoke-free.
- 3 Find out what help or support is available from your local stop-smoking service and advertise it.
www.givingupsmoking.co.uk
- 4 Ensure that every employee is informed of the smoke-free policy and its implications. Include the policy in all recruitment and induction packs.
- 5 If you have any designated smoking areas, make sure they are effectively screened so that smoke does not adversely affect other employees at work.

Alcohol and other substance misuse

- 1 Establish a policy and code of conduct for alcohol and substance misuse in the workplace, involving employee representatives. www.hse.gov.uk/alcoholdrugs/
- 2 Ensure that the policy makes it clear whether or not employees are allowed to consume alcohol at work, drink during working hours, or drink before attending work.
- 3 Make sure that the policy includes information about the level of support – including counselling or professional help – that an employee will receive if alcohol or drug problems are recognised.
- 4 Provide employees with information on the effects of alcohol and drugs and sources of support. For alcohol see: www.alcoholconcern.org.uk. For substance misuse see: www.talktofrank.com.
- 5 Review access to alcohol within the organisation – for example, at social functions or in social facilities.

Physical activity

- 1 Encourage employees to walk or cycle to work.
www.dft.gov.uk
- 2 Involve employees in organising a workplace activity programme to encourage employees to be more active both in and outside working hours.
www.bhf.org.uk/thinkfit
- 3 Make the stairwells more attractive and use signage to encourage use of stairs rather than lifts.
- 4 Provide information on the benefits of physical activity.
- 5 Consider negotiating discounted membership of a local gym for employees, and supporting activity or sports programmes in and outside the workplace.
www.sportengland.org

Healthy eating

- 1 Ensure that eating facilities are clean and attractive, to encourage employees to take a break away from their workstation and to eat in a hygienic area.
- 2 Make sure that vending machines contain low-sugar drinks, water and fruit, rather than just high-sugar soft drinks, chocolate and crisps. Experiment with pricing of vending items – for example, subsidising the healthier ones and increasing the price of less healthy ones.

If you have in-house catering facilities:

- 3 Make sure that you provide a range of healthy foods and drinks, and that portions are not too large. Remove salt from tables; provide it on demand instead.
- 4 Identify the healthier options on menus – for example with simple labels, or with a traffic lights or logo system. Provide information on food content.
- 5 Provide information on healthy eating and support ‘healthy eating weeks’. www.healthatwork.org.uk,
www.food.gov.uk, www.5aday.nhs.uk,
www.nutrition.org.uk

For more detailed information on why and how to improve health in your workplace, see *Creating a Healthy Workplace – A Guide for Occupational Safety and Health Professionals and Employers*, which is available at www.fph.org.uk and www.facocmed.ac.uk.

... and increase efficiency in your organisation

"We fully support this initiative to help create safe and healthy workplaces. Employers, employees and health and safety professionals working together can achieve great improvements here. Key measures, such as leadership, planning, worker involvement and competent advice can help ensure work activity does not harm people. Work-related ill health is preventable and as a country we need to do more to ensure that people are protected."

Neil Budworth

President, Institution of Occupational Safety and Health

"Companies should recognise the association between employees' health and their working effectively. The pursuit of business excellence requires us to promote and maintain the physical, mental and social wellbeing of all our people."

John Rivers

Director – Human Resources, Rolls-Royce plc

Produced by the Faculty of Public Health and the Faculty of Occupational Medicine

Faculty of Public Health

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The Faculty of Public Health is the standard-setting body for specialists in public health.

Faculty of Occupational Medicine

www.facocmed.ac.uk

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