



Wellbeing Index

03 | Physical Activity

A quarterly in-depth look into the state of the nation's wellbeing, at home and in the workplace.





A responsibility and an opportunity

Introduction from Dave Capper, CEO, Westfield Health

When we started this third Wellbeing Index, we were expecting to find that people weren't aware of how much exercise they should be getting, but that isn't the case.

The majority of people know the NHS guidelines and know the risks of a sedentary lifestyle. It's not a lack of awareness that's the problem, it's a lack of responsibility.

As individuals, only 12% of us are trying to reduce our sedentary time; as employers, we have to recognise just how much the structure of the work day and the office environment contribute to this escalating national health issue.

With lack of time as the main barrier to getting active, there's a huge opportunity for employers to help their people build exercise into the working day.

When budgets are tight, it's always hard to make the case for proactive investment.

But ignoring people's physical wellbeing has a significant impact on the bottom line that's rarely acknowledged.

Yes, putting in showers, providing a fitness facility or offering online classes to remote workers costs money, but the longer-term costs to individuals and companies of ignoring physical wellbeing are so much higher.

We have to take action to protect our health and our businesses. To remain competitive at both a national and business level, we have to become more productive. That can only happen when you take good care of your team and create an environment where they can perform at their best.

In this report, we'll look at how active we are as a nation, our barriers and motivations and how employees expect businesses to step up.



Sedentary Britain

This quarter's Wellbeing Index takes a deep dive into physical activity levels and sedentary behaviour across the UK. The take-home message is clear — Brits simply aren't hitting the mark: just 16% manage to achieve the amount of physical activity recommended by the NHS.

A deep dive into physical activity across the UK

People in the UK spend an average of 7 hours and 2 minutes sat down per day, with over a quarter (26%) sitting for 9 hours or more. The longer we sit, the more likely we are to develop diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Studies have found that even when exercising daily, we're still at risk of developing diabetes and other chronic conditions if we regularly sit for more than 6 hours a day[1].

Prolonged inactivity is responsible for one in six UK deaths and is estimated to cost the UK £7.4 billion annually, with £0.9 billion to the NHS alone[2]. Our survey found that 65% of us admit to quite or very often sitting continuously for one hour or more, putting a huge proportion of Brits at risk for sedentary lifestyle related diseases.

It's part of a worrying trend. The government states that people in the UK are less active now than during the 60s, and if this trend continues we will be 35% less active by 2020.

16%

of Brits achieve the NHS recommended exercise levels

7h2m

is the average time Brits spend sat down per day



Stats at a glance



60% of brits

are worried or very worried about the impact of a sedentary lifestyle on health

but just 12%

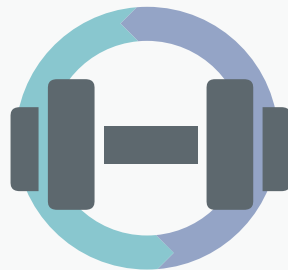
are proactively taking steps to reduce the amount of time they spend sat down



The NHS guidelines on physical activity:



Engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week



Carry out strengthening activities that work all major muscles at least 2 days a week



Reduce the amount of time spent sitting or down and break up long periods of inactivity

Catastrophic consequences

The impact on our health is clear. Further independent research says that if prolonged sedentary behaviour had been eliminated, almost 70,000 UK deaths might have been avoided in 2016[3]. There are catastrophic consequences of not taking action on inactivity.

The Wellbeing Index found that many of us are aware of these risks: over 60% of us are somewhat worried or very worried about the impact of a sedentary lifestyle on our health. However, that concern isn't translating into action: only 12% of Brits say they are proactively taking steps to reduce the amount of time they spend sedentary.

It's important to note that physical activity does little to combat prolonged sedentary time — exercise cannot undo damage caused by excess sitting. More needs to be done to get people moving more throughout the day, as almost two-thirds of us continuously sit for 1 hour or more on a regular basis.

How active are we?

Our Index found that over half of people living in the UK (55%) exercise at least 2-3 days a week. But when it comes to those who do exercise, a whopping 84% fail to always meet the NHS guidelines of 150 minutes per week. Almost one in five (18%) say they never exercise at all.

Of those who exercise, outdoor activities are the preferred method of staying active: nearly three in five (64%) say they take part in hiking and walking. Reconnecting with nature could be the answer to getting more sedentary Brits to stand up.

It's well known that spending time outdoors has many other added health benefits — we burn more calories due to wind resistance and temperature regulation, release more of the feel-good hormones dopamine and serotonin and get a healthy boost of vitamin D. The outdoors also has benefits for mental health that can last up to seven hours[4].

When looking at preferable times to exercise, our data shows that mornings are the most popular across all groups, providing an opportunity for employers to build exercise into the working day which we explore further in Chapter 4.

With 84% of us failing to meet the NHS guidelines of 150 minutes per week, we need to find ways to become a more active nation. In the next chapter, we'll look at the perceived barriers to physical activity and how we can become a happier, healthier, more active nation.

Stats at a glance

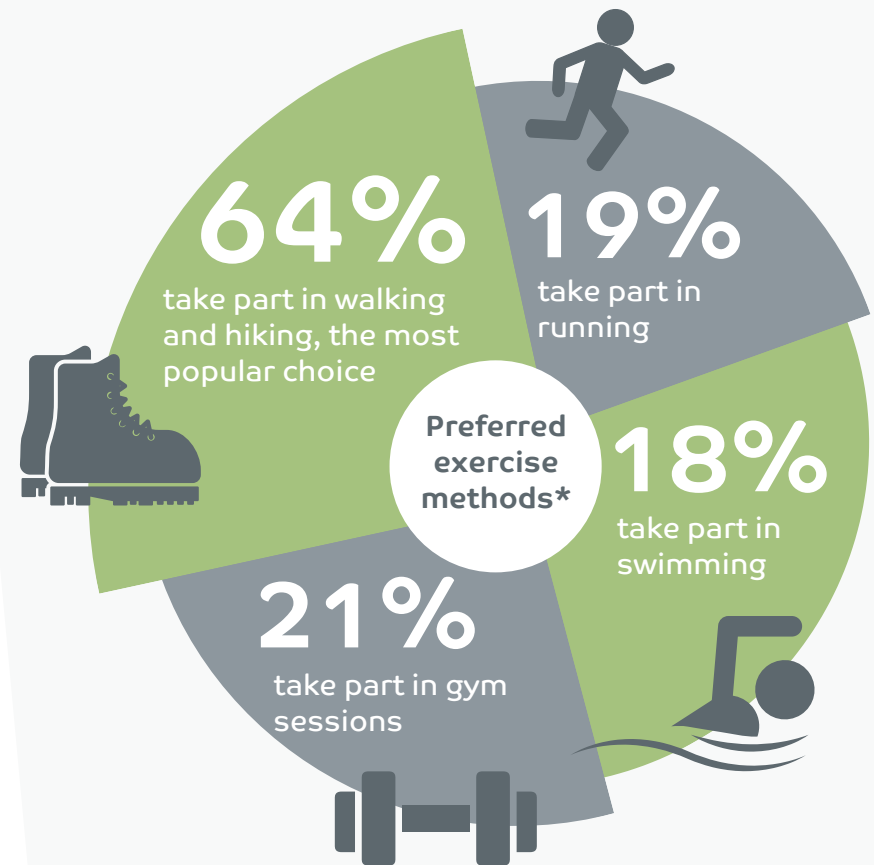
84%

of people fail to meet the NHS exercise guidelines



18%

of Brits say they never exercise at all



*of people who say they exercise at least once per week

Who's most active?

In this chapter, we break down the findings to take a closer look at various factors which may influence how active we are, such as where we live and work and whether age has an impact on physical activity.

Where we live

In England, people living in the North East (73%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (72%) regions are the most sedentary — almost three-quarters of people within these regions find themselves quite or very often continuously sitting for more than an hour. They may be amongst the most inactive, but they're also the most concerned: two-thirds of people in the Yorkshire region say they're either somewhat or very worried about the impact of a sedentary lifestyle on their health.

People living in Scotland spend the most time sitting down, at an average of 7 hours and 20 minutes per day — higher than the UK average (7 hours 2 minutes). Just 13% of people in Scotland said that they are proactively taking steps to reduce sedentary time and almost two in five (39%) say they're not at all or not really motivated to reduce the amount of time they spend sitting down.

The Welsh are the least motivated to reduce the amount of time spent sitting down with 55% saying they're not at all or not really motivated to start making any changes. Just 5% of people in Wales are proactively taking steps to reduce sedentary time.

However, in Northern Ireland people are highly engaged when it comes to exercise, spending an average of 3 hours and 52 minutes being active each week. They're also the most motivated to reduce sedentary time with 17% actively taking steps. But they're a nation divided, with the highest percentage of inactive individuals — over a quarter of people (27%) say they never exercise at all.



Stats at a glance



Healthcare workers are the least sedentary: 6h31m per day



Clerical workers are the most sedentary: 7h59m per day



Travel & transport workers are most active: 4h10m exercise per week

29%

of travel & transport industry workers exercise every day

29%

of the those who are unemployed say they never take part in any exercise

48%

of healthcare workers underestimate the NHS guidelines

The industry we work in

Our research found that it's clerical workers who experience the most sedentary hours, at an average of 7 hours and 59 minutes per day — almost a full hour above the UK average. They're closely followed by the financial sector at 7 hours and 35 minutes.

Healthcare workers spend the least time sitting at 6 hours and 31 minutes per day. Over a third of healthcare workers (36%) manage to achieve the NHS recommended amounts of exercise; but shockingly almost half (48%) underestimate the guidelines. The main barrier for people working in this industry is low mood, experienced by 32% of healthcare workers — unsurprising in an industry that is known for having high levels of burnout.

People working in the travel & transport industry are the most likely to exercise every day (29%). On average, workers in this industry who say they exercise at least once a week clock up 4 hours and 10 minutes of exercise per week — a full hour above the 3 hour 10 minute UK average across all industries.

When looking at people's positions within an organisation business owners are the most active, averaging 4 hours and 20 minutes of exercise per week. Two in five say they manage to get over the NHS recommended amounts. Just under a third (32%) of business owners say they exercise every day, the highest across all groups.

Directors are pretty active with over four in five (83%) saying they exercise at least once a week and for 1-2.5 hours a week. However, whilst many directors are active, they're not quite hitting the mark when it comes to the NHS guidelines.

On the other hand, those who are unemployed are the most inactive: almost a third (29%) say they never exercise. They're also at risk from prolonged sitting, with 67% saying they quite or very often sit for more than an hour — 30% admit to sitting for 9 hours or more per day.

Age

Of those who exercise at least once a week, the over 55s get the most exercise, clocking up 3 hours and 47 minutes per week on average. However, they're also the most divided: whilst 1 in 5 say they exercise every day, a quarter never exercise.

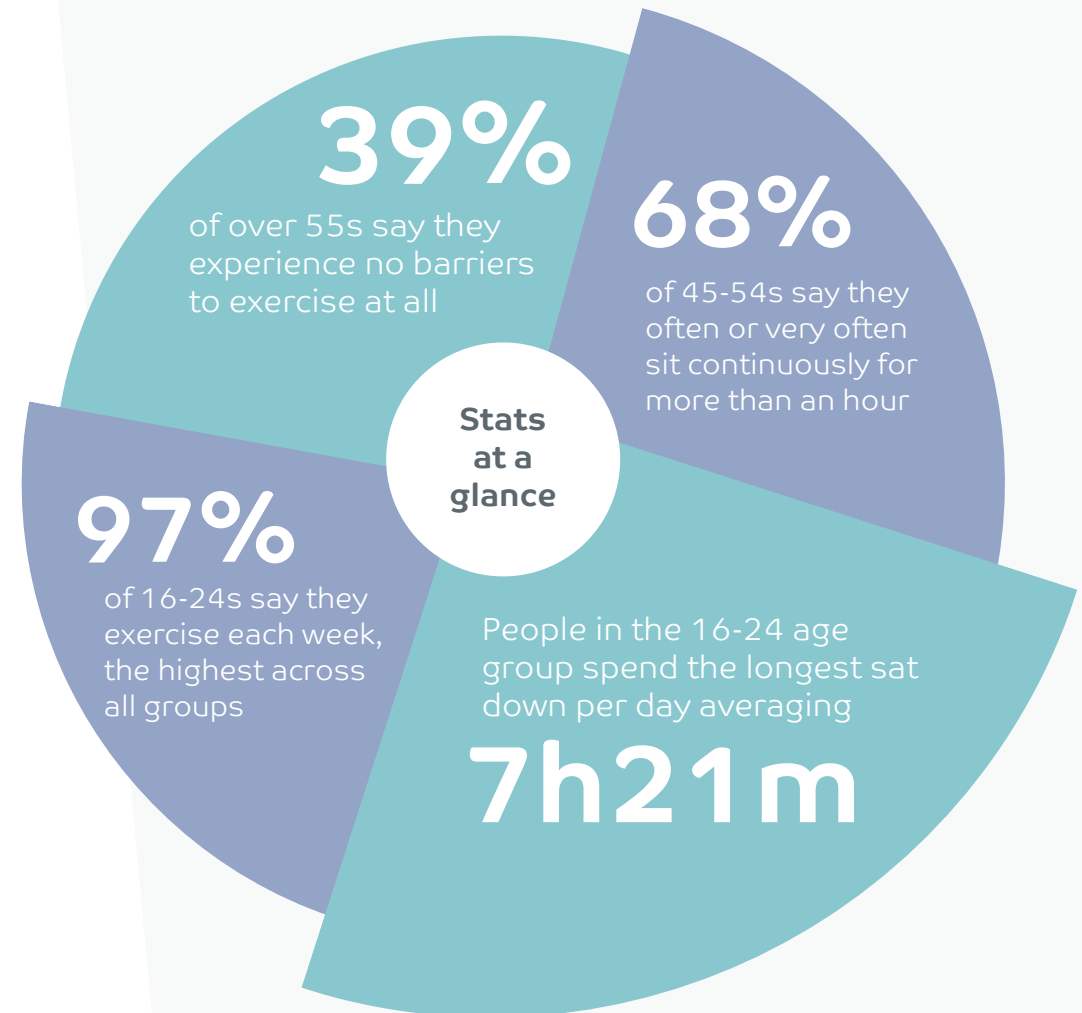
There are things we can learn from this age group. They are the least likely to be restricted by a lack of time and manage to clock up the most hours of exercise per week across all ages. In fact, 39% of the over 55s say they experience no barriers to exercise at all. With the majority of retired workers belonging to the over 55 age group, they're much more likely to have additional free time, allowing them to exercise more.

All other age groups say they'd rather exercise in the morning, so there's a massive opportunity here for employers to help people incorporate physical activity into the working day. We explore this in more detail in Chapter 4.

It's not just down to exercising more. Reducing prolonged inactivity is key to reducing the risks of a sedentary lifestyle. To avoid health complications, it's about getting people to be more active throughout the day, reducing the amount of time we spend continuously sat down.

Those in the 16-24 age group spend the longest amount of time sat down per day at 7 hours and 21 minutes. They also rank amongst the lowest when it comes to weekly hours of exercise making them one of the most sedentary groups. However, most 16-24s say they exercise to some extent, with just 9% saying they don't exercise at all.

The 45-54 year olds are the most at risk when it comes to sedentary behaviour: 68% often or very often find themselves sitting continuously for more than an hour. They are closely followed by the 35-44s, where two-thirds find themselves sitting for the same amount on a daily basis.



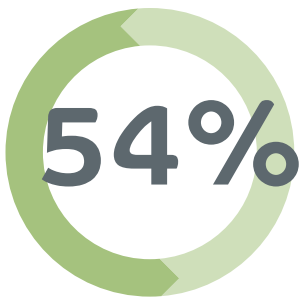
Barriers and motivations

Our findings paint a very clear picture — that more needs to be done, regardless of where we live and work and across all age groups, to reduce sedentary time.

A worried nation not taking action

It seems most people are aware of just how bad a sedentary lifestyle can be for our health. As many as 61% of us are worried or very worried about the physical effects of a sedentary lifestyle. Only 12% are proactively taking steps to reduce sedentary time and just 2 in 5 are 'somewhat motivated' to make a change, which poses the question, why aren't we doing more given we know the risks?

Our Index found that 54% of us understand how much weekly exercise the NHS recommends. But with just under 1 in 5 people (18%) saying they never do any exercise at all, we need to dig a bit deeper into the data to find out the perceived barriers and where the opportunities lie.



know the amount of weekly exercise recommended by the NHS



are worried or very worried about the impact of a sedentary lifestyle



Stats at a glance



Women are more likely to experience barriers to exercise:

16% vs 27%

of men say they experience no physical activity barriers



Almost half (48%) exercise to stay physically healthy



Just under one in five exercise to boost their mental health



Only 10% of people say they exercise to look good

The main barriers and motivations

Our Index found that the most common roadblock to exercise was lack of time, followed by energy levels and low mood. Some of it comes down to a need for education, with one in ten saying they don't know what type of exercise is best.

We found that women are more likely to experience barriers to exercise in general: 27% of men say they experience no barriers to exercising versus 16% of women. Women are also more likely to be affected by lack of time (36% vs 28% of men), low energy (36% vs 26% of men) and low mood (28% vs 21% of men).

When looking at the top motivators, almost half (48%) of people say the main reason they exercise is to stay physically healthy. Just under one in five (18%) exercise to boost their mental health. Our research suggests that it's not so much about exercising to look good, with just 10% saying this is their main motivation, but more about a real concern for personal health and wellbeing.

Barriers and motivations differ by age

Our survey shows that the barriers and motivations to physical activity differ considerably across age groups.

Lack of time might be the main concern for the average Brit, but just 18% of the over 55s find time to be a barrier. In fact, almost two in five (39%) belonging to this age group say they experience no barriers at all. Low mood is also significantly lower in this age group, being a concern for just 13%.

Low energy is the most common barrier to exercise within the 16-24 age group with 40% saying they experience this, followed by 36% saying lack of time and a third (34%) who state low mood.

As regular gym goers, the 16-24s are the most concerned about the distance (15%) to the gym. They're the most likely to attend the gym across all age groups: 40% are members and a third say that gym sessions are their most preferred method of exercise.

The cost of gym membership and classes is a concern across all age groups: 25-34s are the most concerned about cost (23%) and one in five 16-24s and 35-44s found costs to be a concern. This is reflected in the fact that just 22% of people say they are currently members of a gym.

When it comes to motivation, 16-24 year-olds are the most likely to exercise to look good. One in five cite it as their main motivator versus a one in ten UK average. They're also most likely to exercise to feel stronger compared to other age groups.

There's clearly no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to motivating Britain to be more active. With lack of time being a barrier for most and low energy levels and mood affecting many, there's a huge opportunity for employers to support people by placing a focus on their wellbeing.

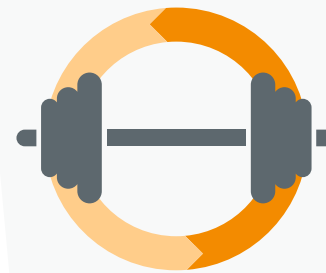
With lack of time being the biggest barrier to exercise, providing people with a range of fitness options means employers can break down the main barrier and help people build exercise into their working day.

Stats at a glance

32% of people say lack of time is their biggest exercise barrier

40% of 16-24s say their biggest exercise barrier is low mood

23% of 25-34s are put off by the cost of gym memberships



Almost two in five (39%) over 55s experience no barriers to exercise



Low energy is the biggest barrier in the 16-24 age group (40%)



16-24 year olds are most likely to exercise to look good and feel stronger

Physical activity in the workplace

Employees in the UK are feeling unsupported when it comes to physical activity: one in five say that support for their physical wellbeing is below average or very poor, and a further 43% say the support they receive is just 'average'.

Responsibility to reduce sitting

With many of us spending hours sat at our desks once we get to work, employers can support people by focusing on reducing prolonged periods of sitting.

When it comes to lunch breaks, our survey found that half of working Brits only take a 15-30 minute break, and whilst 15% of us always go outside for lunch, the same amount say they never do.

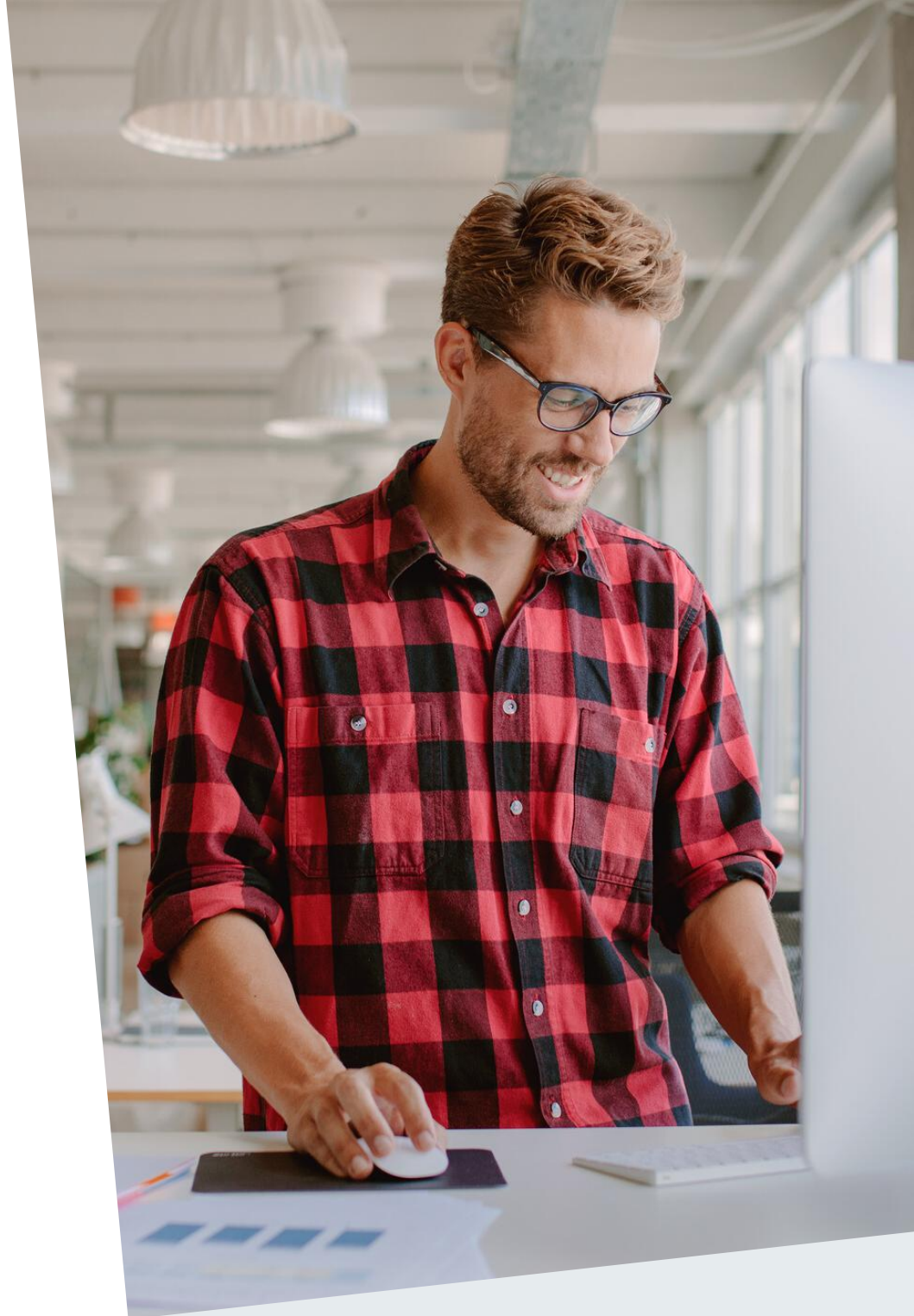
Encouraging employees to take shorter, more regular breaks is key to reducing sedentary time. A recent study found that taking short breaks (one to two minutes every half hour) can reduce time spent sitting at work by 15 to 66 minutes per day more than taking long breaks (two 15-minute breaks per workday)[5]. These valuable extra minutes of physical activity mean healthier employees and great organisational benefits.

50%

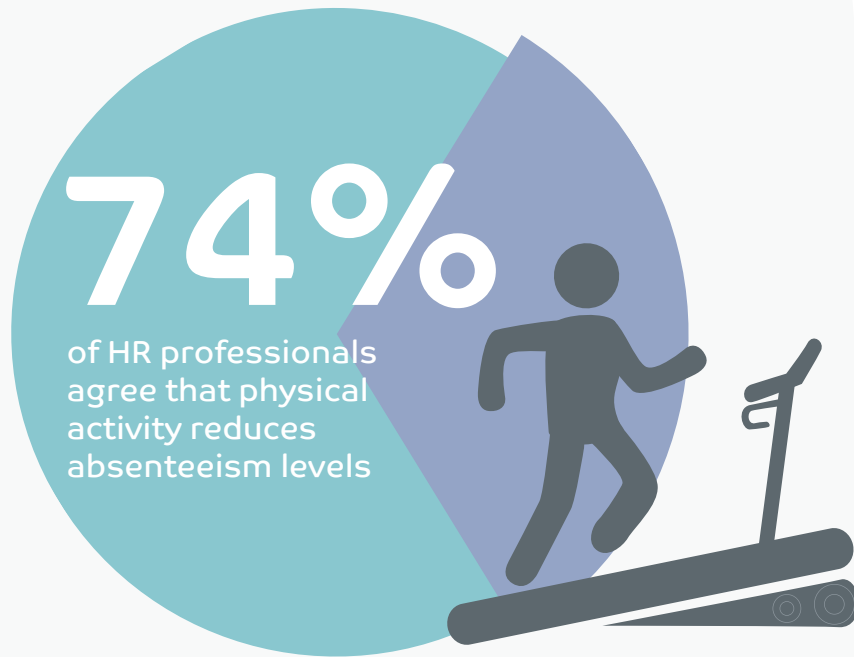
of working Brits only take a 15-30 minute lunch break

15%

of employees say they never go outside at lunch



Stats at a glance



23% say providing physical wellbeing support isn't a top priority

34% say their main driver for investing is to be seen as a responsible employer

Benefits for business

One study found that physical activity programmes at work reduce absenteeism by up to 20% and physically active workers take 27% fewer sick days[6]. HR professionals know this: almost three quarters (74%) agree that physical activity reduces absenteeism.

They clearly see the benefits, but many are restricted in what they can offer to their people. Just under a quarter (23%) say that providing physical wellbeing support isn't a top priority within their organisation and three in five experience money barriers.

There's plenty of reasons why businesses should be making physical fitness a priority. Fit and healthy employees are productive employees, less likely to suffer from chronic stress that often leads to burnout. Our previous Wellbeing Index found that 56% of HR professionals noticed colleagues suffering from burnout. Fitness also lowers healthcare costs and reduces absenteeism.

Fitness is a valuable perk

On-site fitness facilities are popular perks when it comes to what employees want. This is reflected in an increase in on-site services provided by businesses across the UK: Employee Benefits recently identified that almost half of HR professionals (49%) say their business provides fitness classes or facilities and 48% say they offer mindfulness, yoga or meditation[7].

HR professionals are beginning to recognise the importance of taking a more preventative, proactive approach to employee wellbeing. Our research found that of those who do currently invest in fitness facilities, the main driver is to be seen as a responsible employer.

However, employees will see through a lack of authenticity when it comes to rolling out wellbeing initiatives, including physical fitness. Employers must invest with a genuine concern for employee wellbeing — not just as a box-ticking exercise — to create a culture of fitness that drives engagement.

Opportunity to improve fitness

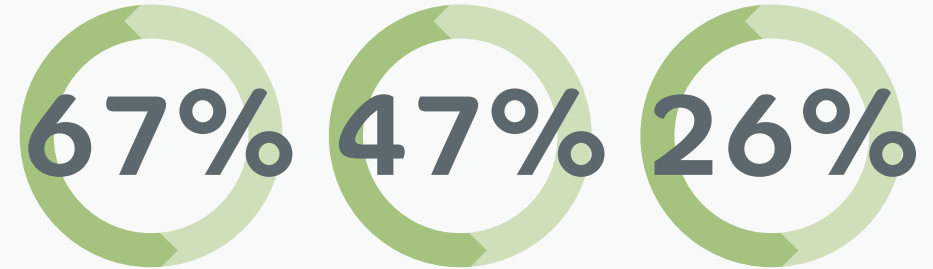
From an employee's perspective, it goes beyond offering fitness as a perk: almost seven in ten respondents believe it's an employer's responsibility to support staff with their physical wellbeing and fitness, but just under half (47%) don't currently have access to any form of physical activity provision at work.

Incorporating physical activity into commutes is also an issue for many employees — currently, just under a quarter of employees (23%) say they walk to work and just 7% cycle. A lack of changing facilities could be discouraging people from taking a more active approach to their commute, as only a quarter (26%) have access to changing facilities at work.

With lack of time being the biggest barrier to exercise, there's a perfect opportunity for employers to help people build it into their working day through giving access to fitness options. Providing fitness options can also help break down other identified barriers: 17% of people say they are put off exercising by the cost of classes and another 8% are put off by distance to the facility.

It doesn't have to be a full-scale gym — those who are pioneering workplace fitness are coming up with creative solutions, such as turning meeting rooms and unused office space into transformable exercise areas which host regular fitness classes and house dynamic gym equipment.

Stats at a glance



believe it's an employer's responsibility to support their physical wellbeing

of employees don't have access to any physical activity provision

just over a quarter say they have access to changing facilities at work

23%

of employees say they walk to work



7%

of employees say they cycle to work



The bigger picture

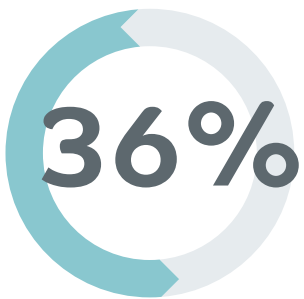
Our Wellbeing Index also features a benchmark of wellbeing at home, as we know that the always-on culture means that lines between home and work are increasingly blurred.

Wellbeing at home

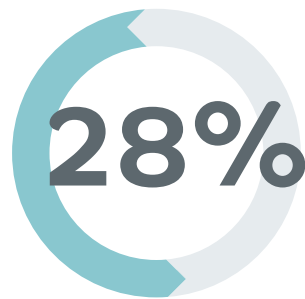
Four fifths (80%) of Brits say they are happy or very happy with their home life.

The biggest worry continues to be money, causing concern for over a third (36%), closely followed by a lack of sleep (28%). As found in our last Index, physical ill health and mental ill health continue to rank amongst top concerns for people in the UK.

Based on the NHS wellbeing guidelines, 16% of people say they haven't done anything in relation to their wellbeing over the last three months. Just under half (48%) managed to spend satisfactory time with their family and 40% say they have been physically active. Just above a third (35%) of people said they spent satisfactory time with their friends.



of people are concerned about their financial situation and level of disposable income



of people say their main worry over the last three months was lack of sleep



The UK's overall wellbeing league table:

	New	Previous	
London	01	01	◀
Nottingham	02	02	◀
Plymouth	03	09	▲
Birmingham	04	06	▲
Bristol	05	08	▲
Norwich	06	05	▼
Southampton	07	03	▼
Newcastle	08	04	▼
Liverpool	09	07	▼
Glasgow	10	13	▲
Leeds	11	14	▲
Manchester	12	12	◀
Belfast	13	11	▲
Edinburgh	14	10	▼
Cardiff	15	15	◀
Brighton	16	16	◀
Sheffield	17	17	◀

Temperatures across the country

Since our last Index, we've seen some shifts in the city league table, our benchmark for wellbeing across the UK which takes into account physical, financial, social and mental wellbeing.

We've taken each city's scores in our previous reports to give a cumulative city ranking.

Financial wellbeing

Over three in five (61%) people living in Bristol are quite or very happy with their finances and disposable income. Over half of people in Plymouth (55%) are quite or very happy with their financial situation, boosting their overall ranking up six places from last quarter's index.

On the other hand, almost half (46%) of people in Brighton are not happy or very unhappy with their financial situation. Other cities slipping down the league table due to scoring poorly across financial wellbeing include Norwich (41%), Southampton (41%) and Liverpool (39%).

Mental and social wellbeing

Plymouth scores highly again when it comes to support from friends and family — 73% of people say they feel fairly or very supported within their social circles, contributing towards their climb of six places in the league table.

Over a quarter (28%) of people in Birmingham and Cardiff say they feel great about their mental health, followed by almost a quarter (23%) of people in Plymouth.



Over a third of people in Belfast (35%) and Newcastle (35%) say their mental health is poor or quite poor. They are closely followed by Cardiff (29%) and Edinburgh (29%).

In Newcastle, over one in ten (14%) people say their mental health is very poor. People in Belfast, Liverpool and Cardiff also score lowest — 13% of people in each city say their mental health is very poor.

Physical wellbeing

As explored in previous chapters, most Brits are failing to hit the mark when it comes to physical activity levels. Just 16% of us manage the 150 minutes per week recommended by NHS.

Birmingham is the most active city, with 46% saying they achieve 150 minutes or more of exercise per week. Belfast is the most inactive — almost half (48%) say they rarely or never meet the NHS guidelines for exercise.

When looking at who goes above and beyond Leeds comes out on top: 22% of people say they get more than the recommended weekly amount, helping the city to climb three places up the league table. Over one-in-five people (21%) in Birmingham, Bristol, and Cardiff also say they achieve over 150 minutes per week.

Almost a third (30%) of people in Belfast say they never get the recommended amount of exercise, closely followed by one-in-five people in Brighton, Norwich and Manchester.



67% of people believe that it's an employer's responsibility to support employees with their physical wellbeing and fitness

We believe in **well beings**

Start your health and wellbeing journey today:



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0345 602 1629



businessenquiries@westfieldhealth.com

[1] Start Standing, Diabetes and Sitting, 2017

[2] Public Health England, Physical activity: applying All Our Health, 2019

[3] BMJ, Direct healthcare costs of sedentary behaviour in the UK, 2019

[4] Country Living, Mental Health Benefits of Nature study, 2018

[5] IHES, Workplace interventions for reducing sitting at work, 2018

[6] DNAfit, The true cost of absenteeism for your business, 2019

[7] Employee Benefits, Benefits research 2019 report, 2019

 **Westfield**
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