

Wellbeing trends 2022

Exploring health and wellbeing hot topics and search trends to help businesses get a head start on workplace wellbeing in 2022.

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About this report

Health and wellbeing has been at the forefront of global change for almost two years now. As we look towards 2022, the nation is hopeful that the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic is behind us, but we've learnt that 'what comes next' is inevitably hard to predict.

In this report we explore the wellbeing trends that are emerging for the new year, including what Covid has taught us, the importance of values, approaches to hybrid working and a few challenges that may lie ahead.

This report uses data from sources including the Office for National Statistics, the NHS, Google search trends and Westfield Health's wellbeing surveys to investigate key wellbeing themes and help businesses get a head start on supporting their people as we enter 2022.



Chapter 1

A more health-conscious world



Health awareness continues to grow

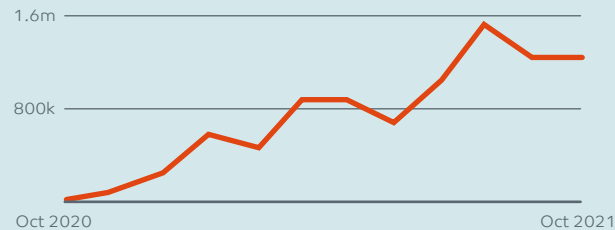
With seemingly endless healthcare stories hitting the headlines, it's not surprising that the nation has become more in touch with its wellbeing.

As we become more exposed to new terminology and concepts, public awareness of key healthcare issues continues to grow. In recent months we've become well acquainted with scientific terms including mRNA, lateral flow tests and booster jabs.

Our collective knowledge continues to expand, and this increased awareness of proactive healthcare is evident in Google search trends. Searches for 'lateral flow test' continue to rise, and over 350m Covid tests have been taken in the UK since the start of the pandemic.

Lateral flow test

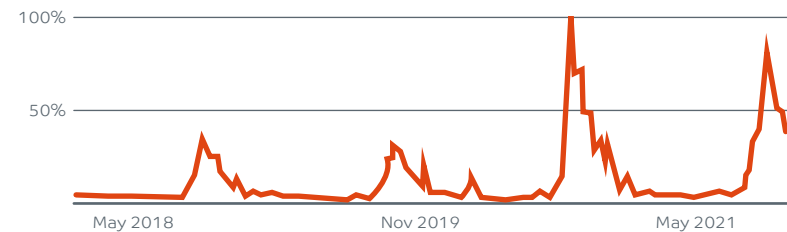
Google search trend over 12 months



Interest in the flu jab is three times higher than it was in 2019, suggesting that health-conscious decision making will remain important to much of the population even after the country learns to live with Covid-19.

Flu jab

Google search trend over four years



Taking charge of our wellbeing

With the nation more concerned with its health than ever before, 2022 will see a rise in individuals taking charge of their own wellbeing. Non-urgent care has taken a back seat to Covid, but people across the country are getting proactive about their healthcare.

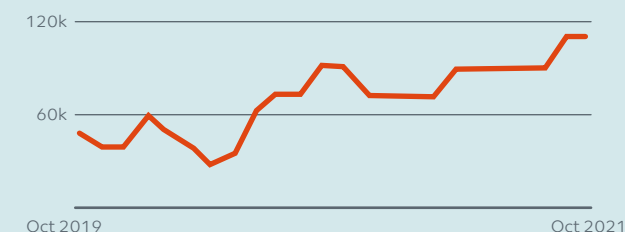
Google searches for local dentists and opticians are trending upwards, exceeding pre-pandemic levels and still rising. Searches for private healthcare are now growing again, rising 23% since August 2021. The NHS backlog is another hot topic, hitting its peak in mid-2021 but still a clear cause for concern for many.



23%
increase in Google searches for 'private healthcare' since August 21.

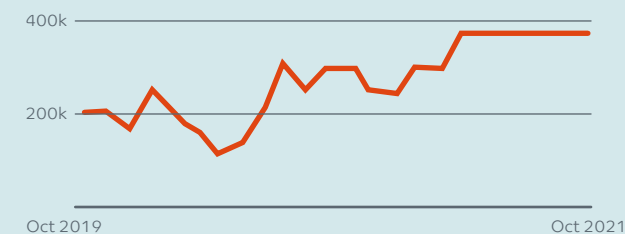
Opticians near me

Google search trend over 24 months



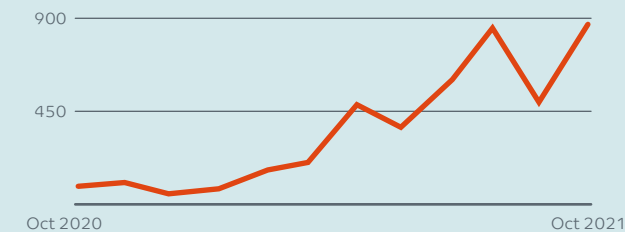
Dentists near me

Google search trend over 24 months



NHS backlog

Google search trend over 12 months



Helping people help themselves

A proactive approach to our own healthcare may prove to be a positive outcome of the past two years, but it also points to a potential gap in wellbeing support.

With NHS wait times in the spotlight, individuals who feel driven to seek their own treatment may experience a heightened sense of worry, especially if they're financing it themselves.

There's an opportunity here for employers to ask their people what support they need in this area. Policies such as mental health days and flexible leave for appointments are simple ways to empower your people to look after their health. A timely reminder of any health cash plan, wellbeing support or employee assistance programme (EAP) on offer may also help ease the burden.

Vax

was the Oxford English Dictionary Word of the Year for 2021. It was used 72 times more often than in 2020.

Despite seeming commonplace now, the terms 'socially distanced', 'long Covid' and 'anti-vax' only appeared in the OED for the first time in 2021.



40%

of people say the pandemic has made their wellbeing worse.



400%

increase in Google searches for 'anxiety disorder' in 2021.

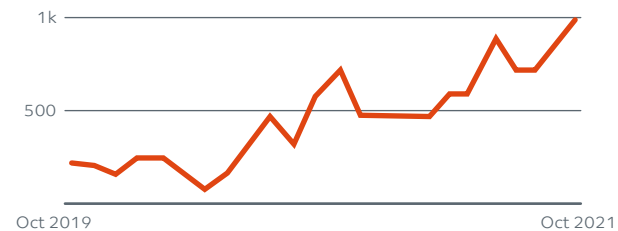
Mental health support is as important as ever

Just as the pandemic has increased awareness of wider healthcare issues, it's also made us more aware of our mental health.

While the topic has been rising up the agenda for a number of years, the collective struggle of lockdowns and social isolation has helped to further break down the stigma around mental health conversations. However, it would be misguided to assume that mental health struggles will resolve themselves as life returns to 'normal'. Recent data suggests that people are increasingly seeking help in this area.

Mental health therapist near me

Google search trend over 24 months



Following a sustained climb over the past two years, Google searches for 'mental health therapist near me' have jumped 39% since August 2021, suggesting that people are looking for ways to access support. Likewise, [NHS mental health contacts](#) are slowly rising, up 9.2% from September 2020 to September 2021.

While increased awareness is a positive step, on-going mental health needs will continue to require careful attention as we enter 2022.

Covid uncertainty continues

Almost two years on, the pandemic is still an ever-present influence on our daily lives.

While life is looking a little more normal, news of new variants, restrictions and travel list changes are an on-going source of anxiety for many.

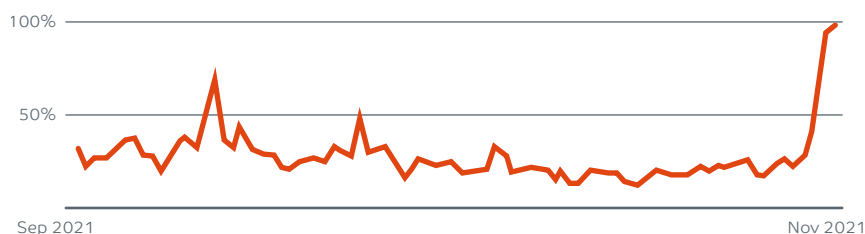
Unlike in 2020, employees will now expect their workplace to be prepared for any changes. To help people feel more at ease, employers should communicate any upcoming plans or policy changes, so employees are aware of what's expected of them in different scenarios.

When last-minute decisions are unavoidable, transparency and open communication can help regain trust.



Restrictions

Google search trend in autumn 2021



The long Covid conversation

Alongside wider societal changes, individuals report on-going challenges including heightened anxiety, demanding caregiving commitments and a post-viral syndrome known as 'long Covid'. Chief among the symptoms of long Covid for many is extreme fatigue.

In a world of constant uncertainty, it's not surprising that many people are feeling tired and emotionally exhausted, but for those struggling with the after-effects of Covid infection, fatigue symptoms can be debilitating.

Increased awareness of long-Covid has brought fatigue and other post-viral effects to the forefront of healthcare conversations. As research continues to shape our understanding of illness and recovery, including post-viral syndromes, employers will be expected to have clear systems in place to help their people cope.

Supporting employees with long Covid

Kate Platts, Research Associate at Sheffield Hallam University's Advanced Wellbeing Research Centre, explains how managers can offer practical support for those experiencing long-term fatigue.



“ Symptoms of post-Covid syndrome, or ‘long Covid’ will differ greatly from individual to individual, and may include tiredness, headaches, dizziness, trouble concentrating, muscle pain and even heart palpitations. The severity of these symptoms can vary from day to day, making it difficult to manage the condition.

What people need most is to be heard, and for their individual needs to be understood. This requires managers to build strong relationships and encourage employees to communicate openly about their health needs so they can better understand how to support them.

People experiencing fatigue may find their energy levels are different each day, and employers must remember that employees will have ‘energy needs’ at home as well as work. In practical terms this means that if an employee expends much of their energy on an intense work project, they may struggle to manage essential activities such as cooking healthy meals or tidying their home. This will inevitably impact their overall wellbeing, draining their energy levels further.

Rather than setting a target based on working hours or productivity, people managers should focus on realistic planning and pacing of activities. The NHS provides [guidance for Covid recovery](#) based around the 3 P’s Principle: Pace, Plan and Prioritise. Managers should familiarise themselves with this advice and proactively communicate with employees about their individual needs and experiences.

HR teams are well-acquainted with the phased return to work, but fatigue in this context requires a more adaptable approach. For many, living with fatigue is not a pathway to recovery, but rather an on-going process of managing symptoms and adapting daily tasks as best they can.

With an increased focus on communication and understanding, employers may find this flexible, employee-led approach to wellbeing support serves as a valuable blueprint for wider workplace culture change.

”



Chapter 2

The future workplace



Employee expectations are rising

Many developments in the world of work are already underway. Employees have been trickling back into their workplaces since the spring, but hybrid working looks set to stay in a number of sectors.

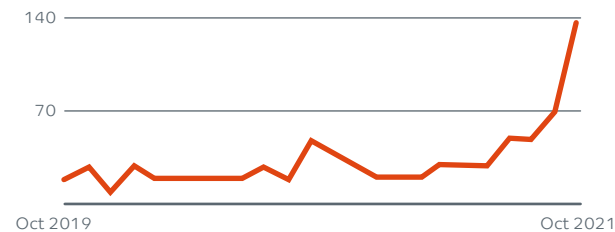
Workers are also looking for more stability, with 53% of those surveyed for our [Emergency Exit report](#) saying job security has become more important to them since the start of the pandemic.

What might be less predictable is how this new dynamic will impact the workforce as a whole. Having witnessed how their employer handled the pandemic compared to others, workers are more informed than ever about the typical policies and perks common to their sector. In the latter half of 2021, employees' new priorities have become apparent, with people searching for specific benefits and becoming more choosy about the job roles they apply for.



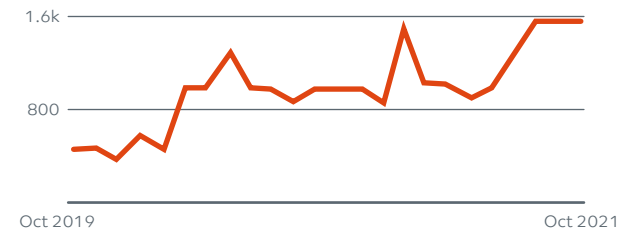
Hybrid jobs

Google search trend over 24 months



Indeed work from home

Google search trend over 24 months





Bringing WFH perks to the office

The past two years have seen our workplaces transformed. Policy changes around homeworking, flexible hours and work-life balance were accelerated and have quickly become the norm.

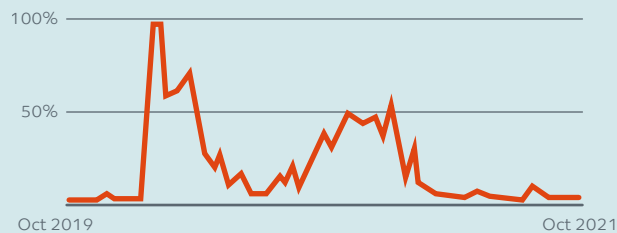
Employees' priorities have changed, and the data shows they're already keen to vote with their feet if their employer doesn't adapt.

On top of these major procedural changes, some smaller shifts in workplace culture are taking place.

Google searches for 'casual office dress' are on the rise — up 57% since August 2021 as employees look to balance their favourite aspects of homeworking with their return to the workplace. Loungewear sales look set to sustain their recent boom, with leggings and hoodies still at twice their pre-pandemic search volume. Even Savile Row's tailors turned their hands to luxury loungewear in 2021.

Zoom party

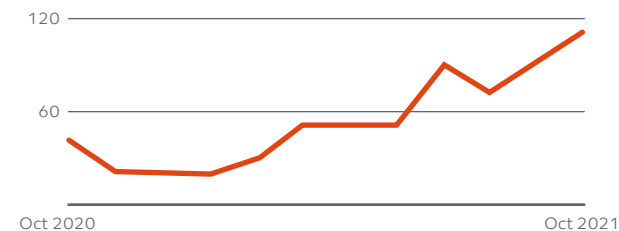
Google search trend over 24 months



One trend that will go down as a Covid-19 relic is the Zoom party. After a final flurry at the start of 2021, searches for virtual party ideas are now firmly back at pre-pandemic levels. With Zoom fatigue establishing itself as a common phenomenon, it's clear that the office party doesn't translate so well in the hybrid world.

Casual office dress

Google search trend over 12 months



52%

increase in
worldwide
loungewear sales
in last 10 years.

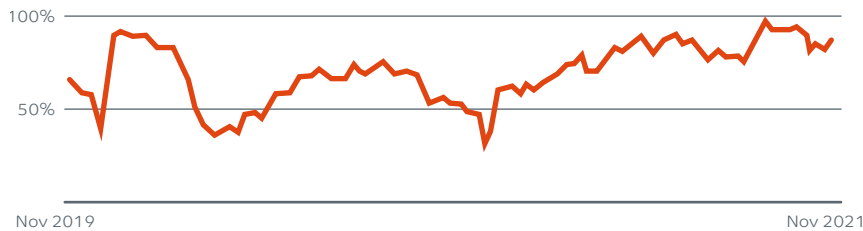
Recruitment bounces back

After a difficult 18 months, the job market is flourishing again. Searches for job sites and CV templates are rising and candidates are looking for specific benefits, with remote working being a priority for many.

By autumn 2021, searches for the Indeed website were above pre-pandemic levels. But with recruiters facing an on-going candidate shortage, employers who want to attract the top talent will need to find a way to stand out.

Indeed website

Google search trend over 24 months



400%

increase in searches for document templates, with CV templates topping the list.

354k

job postings on Reed in September following a record-breaking summer for vacancies.

16m

workers planning to change jobs between September 2021 and March 2022.

A candidate's market: why values matter

Vicky Walker, Director of People at Westfield Health, explains how job seekers are looking to connect with potential employers through shared values and how HR leaders can use this opportunity to improve company culture and build their brand.



“ Many of us are emerging from the pandemic with new priorities, and candidates are looking to find their own sense of purpose in the work they do.

On top of salary, pensions and other benefits, employees are increasingly asking “is this a good fit for me?”.

Employers can attract these values-driven candidates by putting their company vision front and centre. This may include core benefits such as hybrid and flexible working, but it's ultimately about culture.

The most engaged employees are those who are a good fit not only in terms of skills and experience, but also in their contribution to your wider purpose. With the candidate-driven market looking set to continue into 2022, now is a great time to fine tune your approach.

The first step is to revisit your company values and build your employer brand. Remember that while appealing to these new priorities is important, it must be done authentically. Flexing your values in an attempt to appeal to every candidate will dilute your message, making it more difficult to find the right people.

A well-written job advert will help you to find candidates whose priorities align with your own. A few points to consider might include:

- What do you expect of your employees?
- What can they expect from you?
- How are you prioritising diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace?
- How will their work contribute towards your wider purpose and long-term goals?
- How does your culture support them in this?
- How is corporate social responsibility reflected in your business?

In a fast-moving job market, clearly communicated values could be the deciding factor between two competing offers. In light of this shift in priorities, hiring managers must recognise that employees want to be appreciated for who they are as well as what they do.





Chapter 3

Whole-of-life wellbeing



Our social lives get healthier

Search trends from 2021 tell us that people are continuing to engage with fitness not only as a driver of good health but also as a means for socialisation.

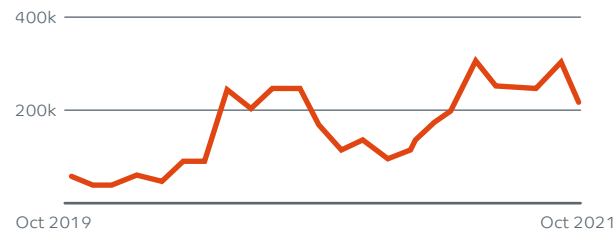
Restrictions on indoor gatherings have spiked interest in outdoor exercise as a way to reconnect with our loved ones, and the belated Euro 2020 tournament and Tokyo Olympics demonstrated how sports can bring us together in a social setting, despite the hardships of the previous 18 months.

Google searches for 'social sports' are on an upward trajectory and searches for 'loneliness' are trending down at last. Searches for 'parks near me' continue to grow, with summer 2021 outperforming the previous year despite the winding down of restrictions, suggesting countryside coffee dates and walk-and-talk meetings are here to stay.



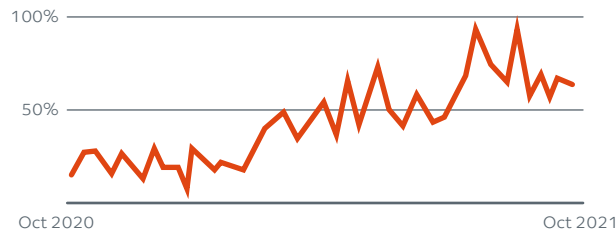
Parks near me

Google search trend over 24 months



Social sports

Google search trend over 12 months



Searches for 'loneliness' were down almost 50% in the past 12 months.

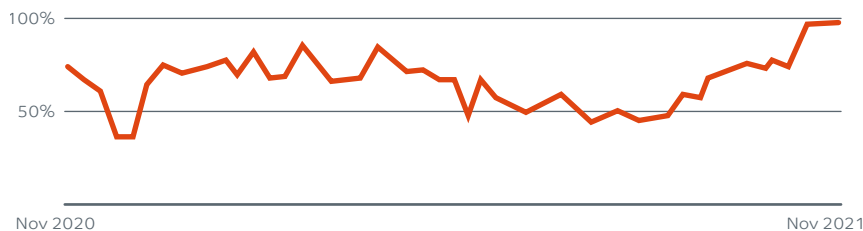
Protecting the planet (and the people on it)

Pandemic behaviours such as mask wearing, self-isolation and mass vaccination have made us all the more aware of how our behaviour impacts those around us. After two years of health-dominated headlines, our sense of social responsibility continues to develop.

This growing theme has many threads to explore, but key topics such as climate change and diversity, equity and inclusion look set to continue grabbing headlines into 2022.

Sustainability

Google search trend over 12 months



Nov 2020

Nov 2021

Sustainability has been a popular topic for a number of years, but searches have climbed steadily to a 12-month high towards the end of 2021.

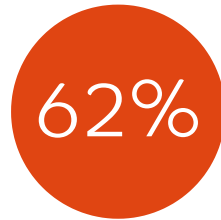
75%
of British
adults worry
about climate
change.

The COP26 conference, which brought the climate crisis to international attention, has reignited the public's concern for the future of the planet. This was reinforced in November 2021 data from the [Office of National Statistics](#), which found that three-quarters of adults in Great Britain worry about climate change.

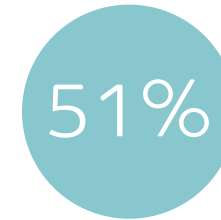
It's becoming clear that, on top of our personal challenges, a sense of social responsibility is driving us to look at the bigger picture and consider how we can help tackle global issues.

New normal, same money worries

Despite enormous societal change and a potentially permanent shift in attitudes towards health and wellbeing, many will find that 2022 brings some familiar challenges.



of adults reported that their cost of living had increased in the past month. (ONS, November 21)



of workers said they're less than a month away from burnout. (Westfield Health, September 21)

As we transition out of the pandemic mindset, wellbeing concerns surrounding finances, stress and burnout will return to the forefront. Interest in the on-going energy crisis surged 1,550% in the three months from September to December 2021, with bill payers investigating their rights around the price-cap regulation.

According to [ONS data](#) from November 2021, over 6 in 10 UK adults (62%) reported their cost of living had increased over the past month. Price increases were most noticeable in food shopping (86%), gas or electricity bills (78%) and fuel (76%).

1,550%

increase in searches for 'energy crisis' between September and November 2021.

With financial stability and wellbeing closely linked*, we're likely to see a significant mental health impact if households across the country find themselves struggling to make ends meet. And with 51% of the workforce saying they're [less than a month away from burnout](#), picking up some extra hours may not be a viable option.

Employers can support their people with common wellbeing concerns, including financial hardship, through clear signposting. Services such as [Citizens Advice](#) and [StepChange](#) can offer guidance on how to ease the pressure during difficult times.

*<https://www.moneyandmentalhealth.org>

Using whole-of-population wellbeing to create healthy habits

Richard Holmes, Director of Wellbeing at Westfield Health, explains how employers can help their people engage with wellbeing both in and outside the new-normal workplace.



“ Since the start of the pandemic our working habits have had to adapt to individual circumstances, so it makes sense that our wellbeing support should too. A whole-of-population approach means introducing flexible ways for employees to engage with their health and striving to provide equal access to support.

While health and fitness topics experience an inevitable boost each January thanks to New Year’s resolutions, long-term behaviour change is far more complex. The challenge for workplaces will be keeping their people engaged with wellbeing on a consistent basis — only then will it have a significant impact on employee happiness, productivity and absence rates.

Continued...

The stages of behaviour change



Consider

Behaviours at this stage

Gaining awareness of wellbeing initiatives that may suit their needs.

How to engage this group

Clear and consistent communication.

Example — hosting a webinar on coping with stress

Employees receive a series of messages about the upcoming webinar, including emails, posters in the canteen and a reminder in their 1:1s.



Prepare

Gathering details such as timings and locations. Asking colleagues about their experiences.

Regular prompts and social proof to help encourage action.

A calendar invite is shared, and managers use 1:1s to discuss their team's plans to attend. The webinar host shares an introductory video on the topic.



Take action

Attending their first session, booking a place on a webinar or calling the EAP helpline.

Ensure they receive a high quality, positive experience.

Over half the workforce attends the webinar, which is well-delivered by an industry expert and includes resources to take away.



Maintain

Forming a lasting habit and advocating to others.

Consistent delivery of activities. People encouraged to share their experience.

Follow up on how people are using their learning. Gather feedback on the session. Refresher training is planned in.

Continued...

It's important to remember that each employee will be at a different stage of the behaviour change process, but each is equally important.

A consistent approach will help to engage more of your workforce with wellbeing and maximise your return on investment. To encourage lasting behaviour change, make sure your wellbeing activities are **visible**, **varied** and **versatile**.



Visible

To maximise engagement, employers should ensure their wellbeing activities are consistently visible across the business. This could be a weekly email reminder, a post on your intranet platform or physical posters in the workplace.

The concept of social proof tells us that people use their peers' behaviour as a basis for their own: an update about the office rugby team or simply the sight of employees leaving work in their gym kit can act as gentle reminders which help foster a health-conscious culture.

Varied

Just as we all have our specialties in the workplace, employees will have their own strengths when it comes to their lifestyle too.

The aim shouldn't be to involve every single employee with workplace wellbeing activities, but rather to offer people the opportunity to tap into health and wellbeing in a way that suits them.

A variety of small initiatives across areas such as mental health, stress management, back care and physical fitness will better serve your workforce than a one-size-fits-all activity in a single field.

Versatile

Try to build some flexibility into how your wellbeing solutions are delivered. This could mean a class is held both in person and online, or gym vouchers are valid at a national chain rather than a local fitness club. Each solution doesn't have to be perfect but focusing on versatility will help you get the most value out of your investment in wellbeing.





Links and resources

Useful links

[NHS Live Well](#)

Advice, tips and tools to help you make the best choices about your health and wellbeing.

[Your Covid Recovery](#)

Support for those recovering from Covid-19.

[CIPD — Planning for hybrid working](#)

Advice for organisations planning a move to hybrid working.

[Money and Mental Health](#)

An independent charity partnering with numerous mental health and financial services providers.

Our resources

[HR health and wellbeing toolkit](#)

This free guide helps HR teams build or expand their wellbeing strategy.

[Workplace wellbeing resource centre](#)

A collection of our free downloads, including reports, guides and factsheets for employers and employees.

[Mental Health First Aid](#)

Certified training courses to help employees support each other with their mental health.

[Wellbeing webinars](#)

On topics including working from home, mental health awareness and thriving in the new normal.



Get in touch today

[westfieldhealth.com/business](https://www.westfieldhealth.com/business)

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[Request a call back](#)

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