



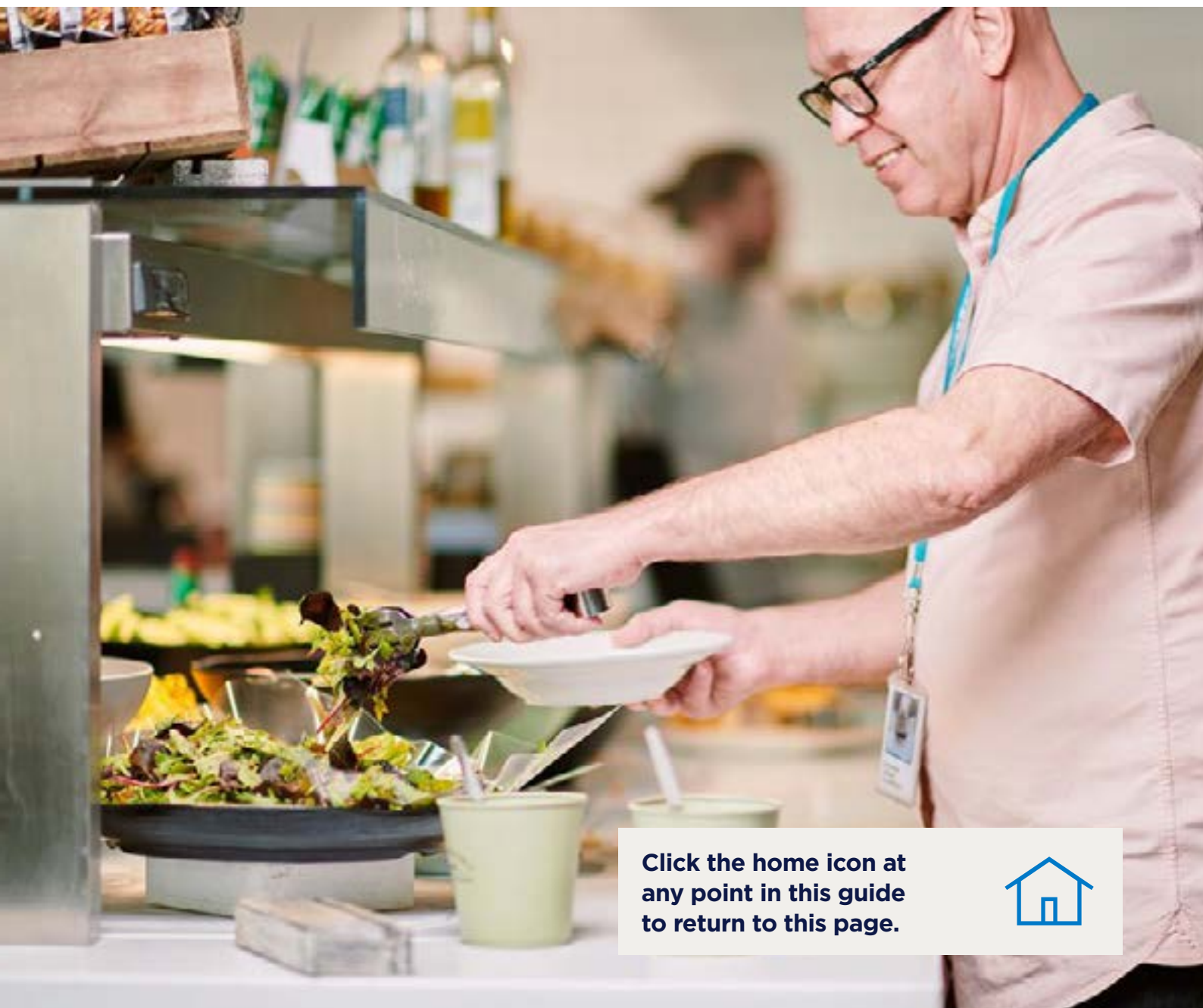
Gut health and the workplace.

Bupa. Better for business

Workplace
Health and Wellbeing **Academy**

Introduction.

Here, we take a look at how gut health could affect your business and how to make the workplace a healthy place for everybody.



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Business success
and gut health

Gut health affects
on business

Four workplace
adjustments



Can business eat its way to success?

There's no denying that gut health is a hot topic. From books to online articles, people are paying more and more attention to the role our gastrointestinal system plays in our overall health. Gut health refers to how well your digestive system is working. It can affect everything from mental wellbeing to your risk of long-term conditions.¹

One of the best things you can do to look after your gut is to eat a balanced and varied diet, that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables and wholegrains.^{5,6} In the workplace, employers and managers can take steps to encourage and facilitate a healthy diet.

It's also important to support colleagues who already have gut health issues, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis). These conditions are more common than you might think.

¹Integrative Environmental Medicine. Diet, Environmental Chemicals, and the Gut Microbiome. Oxford Medicines Online. [oxfordmedicine.com](https://www.oxfordmedicine.com), published March 2017.

⁵Give your friendly gut bacteria a helping hand. British Dietetic Association. [www.bda.uk.com https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/give-your-friendly-gut-bacteria-a-helping-hand.html](https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/give-your-friendly-gut-bacteria-a-helping-hand.html), published 5 September 2019.

⁶Healthy Eating: Food Fact Sheet. British Dietetic Association. [www.bda.uk.com. https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/healthy-eating.html](https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/healthy-eating.html), published 29 January 2021.

IBS alone affects up to 2 in 10 people in the UK⁷

This represents a significant number of workers.²

² Managing IBS at work. The IBS Network, accessed August 2022.

⁷ Irritable bowel syndrome. Prognosis, last revised April 2022.





How could gut health affect business?



It can be connected to employee mental health

You may have heard of the 'mind-gut connection'. There are many ways that our minds and our guts influence one another.³ Gut health problems can both cause, and be caused by, changes in mental health.⁴ If you're struggling with your mental health it's important to speak to a GP for advice and support.



It can affect concentration

Gut problems such as bloating, indigestion, constipation and diarrhoea are naturally likely to make it harder to focus at work.



It may cause embarrassment

Employees may be worried about how to manage their symptoms. This could affect their interactions with colleagues, or how willing they are to participate in certain activities. They might avoid travelling to a meeting, for example, if they're worried about suddenly needing the loo on the way.



It causes sickness absence

Research by the IBS Network estimates £3 billion is lost each year through sick days related to gut health.²

²Managing IBS at work. The IBS Network. www.theibsnetwork.org, accessed August 2022.

³Rogers GB, Keating DJ, Young RL et al. From gut dysbiosis to altered brain function and mental illness: mechanisms and pathways. *Molecular Psychiatry* 2016; 21, 738–748. doi:10.1038/mp.2016.50.

⁴Harvard Health Publishing. The gut-brain connection. www.health.harvard.edu.

Four ways to make adjustments in your workplace.

1 Promote healthy food and drink

Make sure healthy snacks are available. Encourage colleagues to take their full lunch break, so they have time to eat a nutritious meal. Remember some people might need to avoid certain foods. This could mean leaving the office to find something they can eat. You could help them by providing a fridge so they can bring food from home.

When it comes to work events and parties, go easy on supplying free alcohol and heavy meals, both of which can cause issues for our digestive systems. Provide free fruit to distract people from the cake tray.



Provide free fruit to distract people from the cake tray.



For work events and parties, go easy on free alcohol and heavy meals.



Encourage colleagues to take their full lunch break.



2 Encourage open conversations

Talking to your line-manager about a gut health problem can be really difficult. Build a good rapport with your direct reports, and signal to them that you're open to talk about any problems they want to discuss. This can help to give them the confidence to talk about their needs.

Give them the confidence to talk about their needs



3 Offer steps that could help

If an office-based team member does disclose a gut health problem to you, find out what would help them to work comfortably. It might be working from home more often, or all the time, where there is easier access to toilets. You might also want to consider a workload that takes into account their need to take breaks more regularly than other employees.

Working from home might make working more comfortable



4 Know your legal obligations

If your employee has a gut health problem that affects their day-to-day abilities, it may be classed as a disability under the Equality Act 2010. This means your organisation may have a duty to make certain workplace adjustments (also known as reasonable adjustments) to help them work as normally as possible.²

A gut health problem that affects your day-to-day abilities may be classed as a disability under the Equality Act 2010



Find out more

Discover more on healthy eating and various gut conditions
www.bupa.co.uk/health-information/digestive-gut-health

Get information and support for a range of gut health conditions
www.gutscharity.org.uk

Learn more about the link between healthy eating and mental health
www.mind.org.uk



²Managing IBS at work. The IBS Network. www.theibsnetwork.org, accessed August 2022.

Resources.

Sources

1. **Integrative Environmental Medicine. Diet, Environmental Chemicals, and the Gut Microbiome.** Oxford Medicines Online. www.oxfordmedicine.com, published March 2017.
2. **Managing IBS at work.** The IBS Network. www.theibsnetwork.org, accessed August 2022.
3. **Rogers GB, Keating DJ, Young RL et al. From gut dysbiosis to altered brain function and mental illness: mechanisms and pathways.** *Molecular Psychiatry* 2016; 21, 738–748. doi:10.1038/mp.2016.50.
4. **Harvard Health Publishing. The gut-brain connection.** www.health.harvard.edu, published April 2021.
5. **Give your friendly gut bacteria a helping hand.** British Dietetic Association, published 5 September 2019.
6. **Healthy Eating: Food Fact Sheet.** British Dietetic Association. www.bda.uk.com, published 29 January 2021.
7. **Irritable bowel syndrome. Prognosis.** NICE Clinical Knowledge Summaries, last revised April 2022.
8. **Irritable bowel syndrome. Epidemiology.** BMJ Best Practice, last updated 12 April 2022.



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