



# Tackling presenteeism at work.

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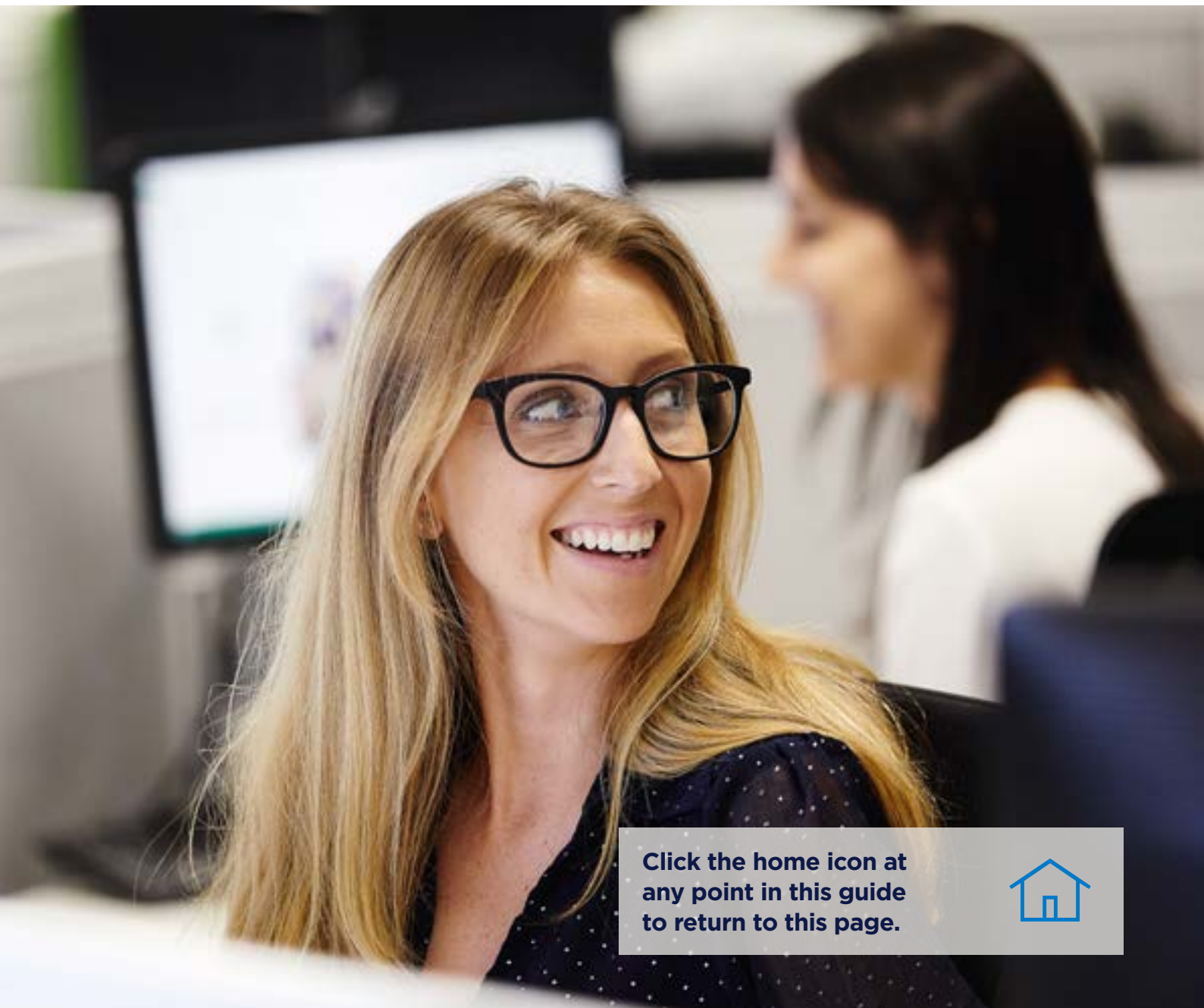
Workplace

Health and Wellbeing **Academy**

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# Introduction.

Here, we look at how productivity is affected if employees work when they're unwell or work longer hours than usual. We also give advice and tips about managing presenteeism and creating a healthy culture in the workplace.



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Is presenteeism on the rise?

Why does presenteeism happen?

Why is it a problem?

What can you do about it?



## Is presenteeism on the rise?

Presenteeism is when people continue to work despite being unwell or continue to work beyond their working hours. The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed how, where and when employees work, with more people working at home or different hours.

According to the latest health and wellbeing survey of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), presenteeism is widespread. Many employees feel that they can't switch off. This is likely to be due to a new era of home working, where work life and home life become blurred.

The key drivers of presenteeism have become more common during the pandemic. For example, recent surveys have found that:

- 1 in 6 adults have experienced depression since the start of the pandemic, compared with one in ten previously
- 1 in 8 adults developed moderate to severe depressive symptoms during the pandemic

The underlying causes of presenteeism are more prevalent, but also harder to monitor because many employees are now home-based.



**1 in 6 adults have experienced depression since the start of the pandemic, compared to 1 in 10 previously.**





## Why does presenteeism happen?

Most people take their jobs seriously. It's natural that we want to meet targets and give a good impression at work. Not being present or visible when others are working can feel like a threat to this.

Being off work may mean putting tasks on hold or adding to another person's workload. People also worry that not being present may affect their chances of a promotion. They may feel more at risk of losing their job. Being online or in the office, even if they're unwell, can seem like the 'safer' thing to do.



**People worry that not being present may affect their chances of promotion.**



## Why is it a problem?

### The spreading of illness

Contagious infections such as COVID-19, flu, or norovirus can pass easily between colleagues. It's much better for employees to stay away from the office when they're unwell, rather than come in.

### Productivity takes a hit

When people work too many hours, they're unlikely to be their usual, productive selves – especially when they're unwell. They may:

- find it difficult to concentrate
- have less patience with colleagues
- make mistakes or have accidents

### It can be expensive

Evidence suggests that presenteeism costs companies more than absenteeism (sickness absence). Researchers in the US found that when employees with depression or pain continued working, it cost employers more through lost hours of productivity than absence would have done.



**It's much better for employees to stay away from the office when they're unwell, rather than come in.**



## What can you do about it?



### Look at workplace pressures

Think about why people might feel pressure to work long hours or show up even when they're ill. Is this a cultural issue that management could address? Could workloads be better balanced?



### Rethink your policies

It's important to encourage healthy behaviours wherever you can. This needs a strategic approach to health and wellbeing. The focus should be on potential health issues both in the workplace and at home, and on those most at risk. Consider your overall policies around payment and absence. Could anything about these be contributing to presenteeism?



### Be more flexible

Take a flexible approach to sickness absence and time off. Encourage people not to come in if you know they're unwell or give them the option of working from home when they can. But remember, flexible working doesn't mean individuals should be switched on 24/7.



### Encourage openness

Try to create an open, honest culture where people feel able to say when they don't feel their best or need to leave work on time.



## Stay alert

New ways of working since the pandemic may make underlying causes of presenteeism harder to spot and deal with. The relationship between employee and manager has never been more important.

Presenteeism isn't as straightforward as measuring absenteeism. But there are ways to do this. For example, you could include a question about it in a regular team feedback survey. Have regular catch-ups with employees and take the time to ask how they are.



## Proactively manage employee mental health

People with mental health issues are particularly susceptible to presenteeism. So, a proactive approach to the management of stress and related conditions could be particularly important. This could include providing access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or another route to specialist support.



## Take a preventative approach

Encourage and support people to look after their health and wellbeing to help them stay well. Create a culture and environment where exercise, eating healthily and self-care are priorities. This could include simple things like:

- providing free fruit in the workplace
- hosting fitness, exercise, or mindfulness classes during lunchtime or after work
- encouraging walking meetings, especially if employees are at home – this will get them out of the house





# Resources.

- Get information and support on **mental health in the workplace**

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