



Burnout

Guidance and support for employees

Why should you think about burnout?

Burnout negatively impacts physical and mental health, potentially leading to increased stress, anxiety and other long-term health issues, which can affect you, your family and your ability to function effectively.

Burnout can have implications across many areas, including:

- Physical health issues such as headaches, gastrointestinal problems, sleep disturbances, and a weakened immune system: Prolonged stress and exhaustion can contribute to the development, or exacerbation of, chronic health conditions.
- Mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression: The constant strain and feelings of overwhelm can lead to emotional exhaustion and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment.
- Reduced productivity and job performance: With individuals finding it challenging to stay focused, make decisions, and meet deadlines, which can have negative consequences both personally and professionally.
- Strained relationships with family and friends: Individuals may become irritable, withdrawn, or emotionally distant, making it challenging to maintain healthy connections.
- Job Satisfaction can be eroded and contribute to feelings of disillusionment and detachment from work: The enthusiasm and passion for your job may diminish, leading to a negative spiral that affects overall career fulfilment.
- Increased absenteeism: as you may need time away from work to recover. This can disrupt workflow and place additional stress on both the affected individual and their colleagues.
- Risk of substance abuse: as an unhealthy coping mechanism.

Changes at the individual/ employee level

Achieving the balance of individual responsibility vs employer responsibility is a fraught area. The evidence clearly states that change at an organisational level is needed to reduce the risk of burnout becoming an increasing phenomena. The reality is that negative cultures do exist, at an organisational and a team level. So, can change at an individual level also make a difference?



“ If left unaddressed, burnout can have long-term consequences, contributing to chronic health issues, prolonged mental health struggles, and a diminished quality of life. ”

Adaptability and resilience skill building

Research indicates that employees who are more adaptable tend to have an edge in managing change and adversity. How do you access such training? Is it right for you? Does this just mean you're able to work within a negative environment for a bit longer before burning out?

Resilience refers to the ability to bounce back or adapt positively in the face of challenges, adversity, or stressful situations. It involves coping with difficulties, overcoming obstacles, and maintaining mental fortitude and flexibility amidst hardships. The use of language and how this is perceived by individuals is important, the word resilience or lack of resilience seems to feed into the narrative that it is the individual's fault, if they are not resilient enough to cope. If we replace resilience with the phrases 'building overall wellbeing' or 'building healthy habits at work' this may help. Perhaps this is just semantics, but words do matter.

Whatever words we use, it would seem reasonable to suggest that individuals can reduce the risk of burnout by recognising and responding to the warning signs, and building helpful skills and strategies. There are a lot of resources available. It can be difficult to both find information that makes sense to you, and then implement the suggested strategies. At times, it can feel like trying to find the time to do things that are good for you simply add to the pressure you feel.

Don't be afraid to seek professional help if needed

- Consider consulting a therapist or counsellor who specialises in stress, burnout, or mental health.
- Ask your employer if they have access to specialist support.
- Ask your GP for a referral to local services.
- Consider a referral to Access to Work <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>.

Talk to your employer

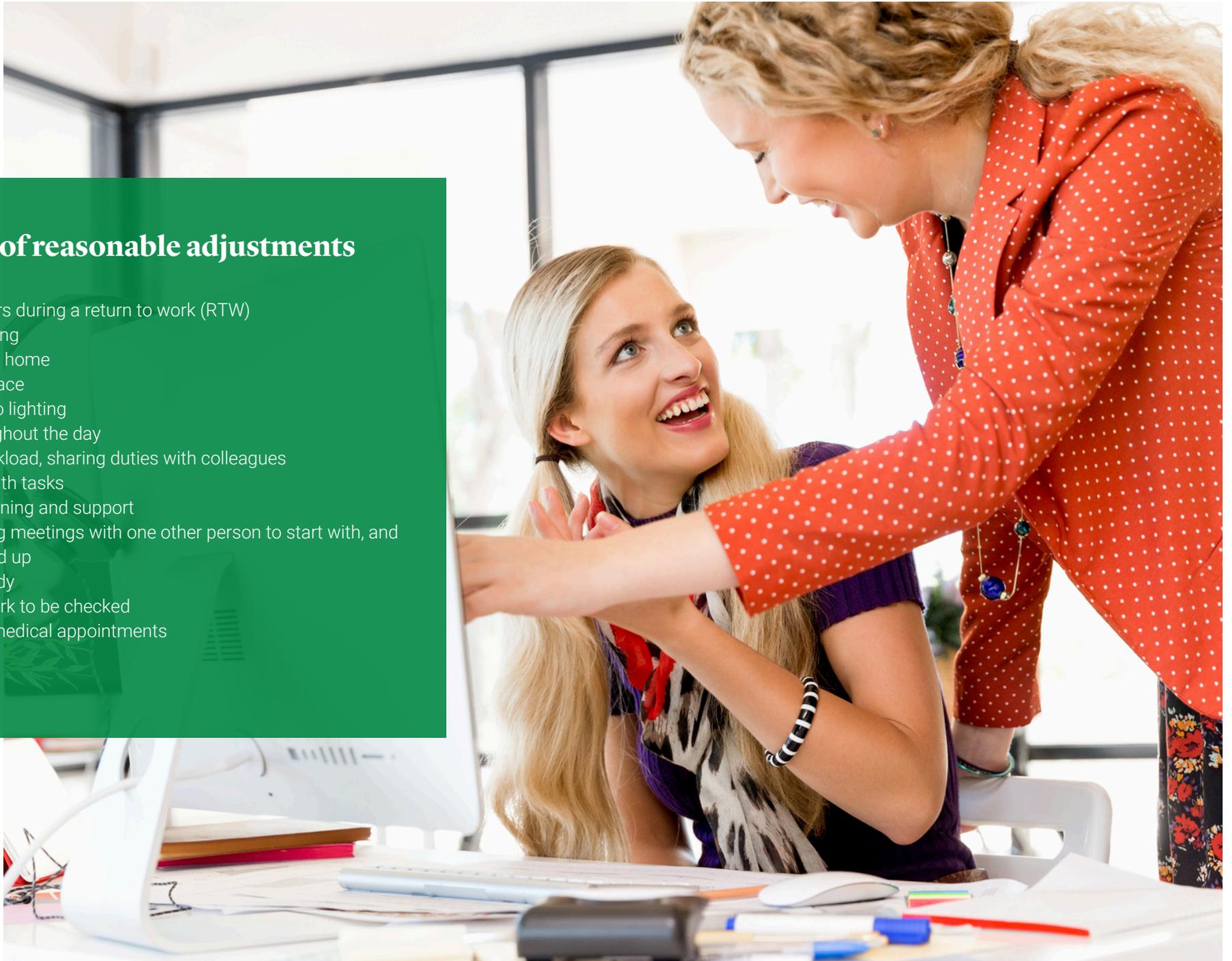
Opening up to your employer may feel really difficult, if you're not working within a supportive culture. Consider who you would feel most comfortable talking to, is there somebody you can trust to listen to you without judgement, and to support you in speaking to your manager. Could colleagues help?

- Discuss your roles and responsibilities at work.
- Discuss job crafting. Job crafting involves an employee shaping the way they do their work, in a way that makes their job more meaningful and engaging. See <https://www.thriveatwork.org.au/resources/job-crafting/> for more information on this.
- Discuss realistic expectations regarding sustaining a return to work.
- Discuss reasonable adjustments. Examples are on the next page.



Examples of reasonable adjustments

- Reduced hours during a return to work (RTW)
- Flexible working
- Working from home
- Quiet workspace
- Adjustment to lighting
- Breaks throughout the day
- Reduced workload, sharing duties with colleagues
- Assistance with tasks
- Access to training and support
- Only attending meetings with one other person to start with, and gradually build up
- Having a buddy
- Asking for work to be checked
- Time off for medical appointments



A wellbeing partnership

Lets take care of each other



“ Creating a successful and lasting work environment requires a real partnership between both your employer, and yourself as the employee. This partnership resets the relationship across both sides with the need of each to take care of each other to make sure everyone can do well with more sustainable outcomes for all. The partnership means sharing the responsibility for wellbeing going beyond traditional roles, allowing for parties to benefit from healthier rights, while holding each other’s responsibilities to account. ”

Louise Aston,
Wellbeing Advisory Board Member and Mental
health and wellbeing campaign consultant

A true partnership between employers and employees creates a culture that prevents burn out, by creating a safe and fulfilling environment that protects physical, emotional, psychological, economic and social aspects equally. For you as an employee, it’s about taking personal responsibility for bringing your best self to work, by taking care of your health and wellbeing, staying positive, and contributing to a positive workplace culture. This partnership with everyone having rights and responsibilities, is crucial for tackling negative behaviour.

We’ve provided some hints and tips on the next page around how to prevent burnout, to help support you in bringing your best self to work. Your best self might be different each and every day, so remember, it’s important not to put pressure on yourself to strive for ‘perfection’ every day.



Hints and tips that might be useful to you



1. Be self-aware

Recognise the signs of burnout early. Understanding your own limits and stress triggers. What situations or tasks tend to drain your energy?



2. Set boundaries

Establish clear boundaries between work, personal life, and self-care. Turn your computer off at a pre agreed time, and don't turn it on again. Don't feel you have to respond to emails that appear in your inbox out of hours, turn notifications off.



3. Practice stress reduction techniques

Many people find mindfulness practises, deep breathing, meditation, or yoga helpful. Experiment with some different techniques to find the things that work for you.



4. Social support

Maintain strong connections with friends, family, and colleagues. Sharing your feelings and experiences with others can be therapeutic. Or, simply just spend time with others doing pleasurable activities.

- Social connection has substantial impacts in many categories of health. Some psychiatrists go so far as comparing social connection to vitamins: "just as we need vitamin C each day, we also need a dose of the 'vitamin H' human moments—positive contact with other people.



5. Time management

- Develop healthy work habits, for example leave work on time, don't take on more than is realistically achievable and take a lunchbreak.
- Don't book too much into your diary. Leave gaps between meetings and let people know you will be leaving meetings at the agreed time, particularly if they are via video link.



6. Balance rest and activity

Identify your triggers, such as pushing ahead with work when you might be too tired, and set yourself ground rules. Implement new routines that include effective rest, such as a 5-minute break every hour or so, and ensure you have time for something that isn't work related.





7. Goal setting

Set achievable goals and celebrate your accomplishments, no matter how small. Avoid perfectionism and understand that it's okay to make mistakes.



8. Work-life balance

Take time for hobbies, relaxation, and activities that bring you joy. A balanced life is key to good wellbeing. Plan regular holidays or time off to recharge. Disconnect from work during these times.



9. Develop problem-solving skills

Break challenges into smaller components and tackle them one step at a time. Seek out resources and support to help you address the specific issues causing burnout.



10. Adapt to change

Embrace change as a part of life and work. Being flexible and adaptable can reduce the impact of stressors. Develop a growth mindset, which focuses on learning and improvement rather than perfection.



11. Self-care

- Prioritise self-care as a non-negotiable part of your routine. This includes adequate sleep, a healthy diet, and regular exercise.
- Ensure good, well-balanced, nutrition and hydration - <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/>.
- Sleep Management - ensure good sleep habits: have a wind-down routine before bed; dark room; no evening caffeine, alcohol or exercise; minimise technology in the evening; minimise naps and lie-ins. <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-habits>.
- Regular physical activity can help reduce stress and increase your resilience. Exercise Include physical activity which can boost mood; improve sleep, concentration, positive wellbeing, immune system and disease risk. Make a plan to ensure it's easy to fit physical activity into life (however small) and keep it consistent. UK physical activity guidelines were revised by the Department of Health and Social Care in 2022, and as well as the usual 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity exercise, there's now more emphasis on strength training as part of the weekly routine, along with breaking up periods of inactivity.



12. Find meaning

Reflect on your values and purpose. Align your work and daily activities with what you find meaningful and fulfilling. Remember building resilience/ developing healthy work habits/ wellbeing practices is an ongoing process, and it may take time to see significant changes. It's important to be patient and make these strategies a part of your daily life and build yourself up slowly. Proactively take steps to manage stress, set boundaries, and prioritise self-care and you will have the best chance of reducing the risk of burnout.

About us

We're a leading provider of Group Protection cover in the UK with over 90 years of expertise and knowledge. We looked after almost 7,200 group protection policies and provided protection to almost 2 million employees at the end of 2023.

If you'd like to know more about our support material for burnout or our Wellbeing Advisory Board please contact your line manager, who will be able to assist you. If you are struggling with your wellbeing, make sure you reach out for support.

Useful resources

<https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>
<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-burnout>
<https://www.mckinsey.com/mhi/our-insights/beyond-burnout-what-helps-and-what-doesnt>
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jul/23/people-at-increased-risk-of-burnout-due-to-more-demanding-workdays-tuc-says>
<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx#ite-506900>
<https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2Fh0086411>
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng13/chapter/Recommendations#mental-wellbeing-at-work>
<https://www.verywellmind.com/stress-and-burnout-symptoms-and-causes-3144516>
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/risk-assessment.htm>
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/assets/docs/indicatortool.pdf>
https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Original-SPS-6-developed-by-Koopman-et-al-11_fig1_250920339
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5773035/>
<https://www.mckinsey.com/mhi/our-insights/reframing-employee-health-moving-beyond-burnout-to-holistic-health>

