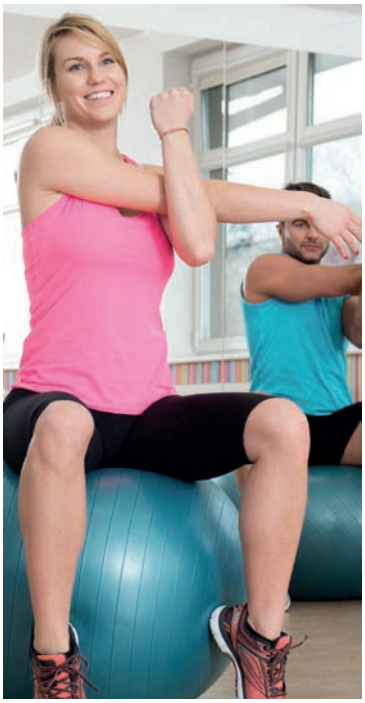
You and your health

A brief guide to help employees achieve a healthier lifestyle



Improve your chances of staying fit and healthy by following the recommendations in this booklet

mohs
workplace health

Bringing health to life

Good health cannot be taken for granted and if you are a wage earner, being fit and healthy is even more important.

By making small gradual changes to your everyday lifestyle, you can look forward to being more productive at work and reducing your chances of being off sick.

Today's employees also have to work to an older age (often through economic necessity) so it's never too early – or too late – to start making healthier choices.

Choices such as eating healthily, reducing alcohol, quitting smoking, avoiding recreational or street drugs, losing weight and exercising body and mind.

This guide will help kickstart your intention to achieve a healthier and fitter lifestyle.

Eat healthily

The food we eat provides energy and nourishment to live and enjoy life.

But too much of the wrong food (salt, sugar, saturated fats, processed, fried or fast food) and too much alcohol could result in health problems such as obesity, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers.

Eating healthily doesn't means giving up all the food we like – it's about making balanced choices and eating a variety of different foods.

Try the 80:20 rule, make 80 percent of your food choices healthy, and 20 percent a 'bit of what you fancy!'

GOOD FOOD CHOICES

Protein: opt for lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and pulses, lower fat soya products.

Fat: eat small quantities of unsaturated fat (olive oil, oily fish, nuts and seeds, avocado, peanut butter).

Carbohydrates (starches): choose potatoes, wholegrain bread, wholewheat pasta, basmati or brown rice, non sugary cereals, oats.

Fruit and vegetables: have at least five portions a day (one portion = 80g). Eating two bananas does not equal two of the five portions, it has to be different types of fruit and veg.

Dairy: choose lower fat versions of milk, yogurt and cheese.

POOR FOOD CHOICES

Refined carbohydrates: culprits include white bread, rice and pasta and sugary cereals.

Salt: having too much can raise blood pressure which is more likely to cause heart disease or a stroke.

Sugar: eat fewer sugary foods such as sweets and chocolates and reduce intake of high sugar soft drinks and alcohol.

Saturated fat: cut back on foods containing saturated fat including:

- desserts and baked goods, such as cakes, biscuits, donuts, pastries and croissants
- many cheeses and foods containing cheese, such as pizza
- whole milk and full fat dairy foods
- ice cream and other dairy desserts
- sausages, hot dogs, bacon, ribs
- fried food – if cooked in saturated fat or hydrogenated oil
- regular minced beef and cuts of meat with visible fat
- fried chicken or chicken skin

Tips for healthy eating

- ✓ **Grill food – don't fry it**
- ✓ **Cut fat off meat**
- ✓ **Use lower fat spreads and dairy products**
- ✓ **Reduce intake of fast food or ready meals**
- ✓ **Go easy on cakes, donuts and biscuits – try fruit instead**
- ✓ **Eat plenty of vegetables and salads**
- ✓ **Don't skip meals and watch portion sizes**
- ✓ **Cut down on alcohol – it's full of sugar!**
- ✓ **If you need to lose weight, consider joining a slimming club. Support from fellow dieters is invaluable and the weekly weigh in is very motivating.**

Drink sensibly

Many people enjoy a drink, either with friends, to celebrate a special occasion or when dining out. But if you care about your health, you need to care about how much you drink.

Alcohol is sometimes used wrongly to help cope with work related stress or overwork but heavy drinking during a working week can often lead to impaired judgement, a tendency towards violent or vulnerable behaviour, and short term memory loss.

It is only a short term solution – the problem will still be there in the morning and can seem much worse with a hangover.

And being at work with a hangover can create difficulty in concentrating and can lead to reduced productivity, tiredness and mistakes.

Find other ways of coping with stress, such as exercise, meditation, talking to a trusted friend or colleague or visiting your organisation's occupational health advisor or your GP.

Alcohol is also a major cause of accidents. Driving ability can be affected by just one drink. Don't drink before driving, using dangerous machinery or after taking medicine.

Facts about alcohol

- Alcohol can be highly addictive – around 3 million UK adults have evidence of mild alcohol dependency and should reduce their drinking before it progresses
- Alcohol is a poison and moderate to heavy drinking over many years can damage liver, brain, stomach, heart and pancreas, and may cause some cancers. It can even kill us.
- Alcohol is frequently associated with mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety
- Alcohol offers little nutritional value and is fattening as it contains high levels of sugar

Tips for drinking sensibly

- ✓ **Keep track of the units you drink a week (no more than 21 units for men, 14 units for women)**
- ✓ **Don't save up your units for the weekend and binge drink as this is potentially dangerous**
- ✓ **Have at least 2 – 3 AFDs (alcohol free days) a week**
- ✓ **Avoid drinking alone**
- ✓ **Don't drink on an empty stomach or if you feel angry, upset or unstable**
- ✓ **Pace yourself and have no more than one alcoholic drink an hour**
- ✓ **Replace some alcoholic drinks with soft or low alcohol drinks**
- ✓ **Tell others you are cutting down and avoid rounds or that 'quickie' at lunchtime or after work**
- ✓ **Take up a new interest or hobby if your social life revolves around the pub**
- ✓ **Practice saying 'no' to alcohol when it's offered to you**

Quit smoking

In a nutshell – don't smoke. And if you do smoke, whether it's cigarettes, cigars, or a pipe (shisha or handheld), quit now!

Why?

Tobacco smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals. Every time you smoke, these enter your lungs and go straight into your bloodstream and body tissues, increasing your risk of developing coronary heart disease, stroke and cancer*.

About half of all regular smokers will eventually be killed by their habit. In the UK, 22,000 smokers die from cardiovascular disease each year.

If you want to live a longer and healthier life, stopping smoking is the single most important thing you can do.

*Source: British Heat Foundation

Facts about smoking

- Smokers die, on average, about 10 years younger than non smokers
- Smokers have nearly twice the risk of a heart attack compared with people who have never smoked
- Stopping smoking after a heart attack reduces your risk of having another one and improves your chances of surviving a heart attack
- Stopping smoking before surgery, especially before heart surgery, reduces the risk of serious complications
- Smoking around family and friends can put them at risk too. Research shows exposure to second hand smoke can make asthma and allergies worse, and in the long term, can increase the risk of them developing lung cancer and coronary heart disease.

Other forms of smoking

Shisha smoking

Shisha smoking is harmful. Recent research shows that even after it has been passed through water, smoke from a water pipe contains high levels of chemicals including carbon monoxide. The average shisha smoking session lasts 1 hour and in this time you can inhale the same amount of smoke as from 100 cigarettes.

Cannabis

Smoking cannabis has been linked to lung diseases including lung cancer. Smoking cannabis can increase your heart rate and blood pressure, which can be harmful for people with heart disease. If you mix cannabis with tobacco you also take on all the risks associated with smoking tobacco.

As well as cannabis, avoid other street drugs such as heroin, cocaine or legal highs as the body gets used to repeated use, and higher and higher doses are needed to maintain the same effect. Frequent drug use may lead to serious health problems and long term use could cause mental health problems such as depression and schizophrenia. Seek help from your GP or related charities such as MIND (www.mind.org.uk) or FRANK (www.talktofrank.com).

Roll ups

Hand rolled tobacco is as bad as ordinary cigarettes and can result in the same health risks as commercial cigarettes – ie cancer, stroke, heart and lung disease.

Electronic cigarettes

E-cigarettes are battery powered vaporisers that enable you to inhale nicotine vapour. Unlike tobacco smoke, nicotine vapour does not contain tar, carbon monoxide, or cancer causing chemicals but electronic cigarettes are not currently regulated as quitting aids and the long term effects on health are not fully known.

Chewing tobacco (dry or moist) and nasal snuff

Smokeless tobacco increases risk of mouth or throat cancer and cancer of the oesophagus. Some studies suggest people who use smokeless tobacco have a higher risk of dying from cardiovascular diseases such as coronary heart disease or stroke.

Benefits of stopping smoking

It's never too late to stop smoking, no matter how long you have been smoking, and the benefits begin after:

- **20 minutes:** blood pressure and heart rate should return to normal and circulation improves
- **8 – 24 hours:** nicotine and carbon monoxide start to leave your body and oxygen levels return to normal. Your sense of taste and smell will improve, and breathing will start to get easier.
- **24 hours:** your lungs start to clear out mucus and other smoking debris
- **2 – 12 weeks:** exercise becomes easier and breathing improves
- **3 – 9 months:** coughs and wheezing will decline as lungs start to operate more efficiently
- **1 year:** risk of heart disease falls to half that of a smoker
- **10 – 15 years:** risk of heart disease is the same as someone who has never smoked and risk of lung cancer is halved compared to that of a smoker

And think of all the money saved by not buying tobacco products during those 15 years!

Withdrawal symptoms

Many smokers, even heavy ones, do not experience withdrawal symptoms when they stop. However, some may experience hunger, tiredness, irritability, dull headaches and poor concentration but these symptoms don't last.

How to stop smoking

There are many different ways to stop smoking. Some people try to cut down gradually before they stop, other people stop immediately. Some use willpower, medication or nicotine replacement therapy whiles others use e-cigarettes.

The key to quitting successfully is choosing a method that's right for you and planning in advance how you're going to deal with any 'triggers' or temptations to smoke.

Getting the right support can make a difference. British Heart Foundation has an excellent free 'Stop Smoking' booklet and supporting website (www.bhf.org.uk/smoking) while support is available from NHS Smokefree (www.nhs.uk/smokefree). Alternatively, your GP, practice nurse or local pharmacist will have advice and offer help on quitting.

Tips for stopping smoking

- ✓ **Think of the reasons why you want to stop – and keep reminding yourself of them**
- ✓ **Pick a day for giving up completely. On that day, just stop. Get rid of all cigarettes and ashtrays the night before.**
- ✓ **Don't be tempted to have a cigarette or cigar. Keep telling yourself you are a non smoker and when you stop, tell other people you don't smoke.**
- ✓ **Think positively and take one day at time. Every day without smoking is a success.**
- ✓ **Some people find it easier to give up with a friend, colleague or group at work. You can support each other via social media.**
- ✓ **Identify times when you particularly crave a cigarette e.g. after an evening meal or with an alcoholic drink, and distract yourself or do something else with your hands**
- ✓ **Temporarily avoid situations (or people) that normally prompt you to smoke and keep busy as boredom can make you smoke**
- ✓ **Think about the money you are saving – and treat yourself to something special**
- ✓ **Many smokers worry about weight gain when they quit – have healthy snacks like fresh or dried fruit, rice cakes, crab sticks, boiled eggs to hand, when cravings strike**
- ✓ **Don't tell yourself that 'one cigarette won't hurt' or 'I'll just have one to prove I have kicked it'. That's how you start again.**
- ✓ **Learn to relax and deal with stress. Have some quiet time each day to still the mind and breathe deeply.**

Get moving

Regular exercise can help control your weight, improve your blood circulation and help your heart work more efficiently.

And the more you move your muscles, the firmer they become, so you look better.

Another bonus is that the fitter your body is, the more reserves you have to draw on when you are under pressure.

The same applies to your mind. Studies have shown those who take regular exercise are less likely to suffer from depression and anxiety, and are better able to cope with stress.

Research also suggests exercise benefits workers. Not only do they have more energy, fitter employees have more effective cognitive functioning which means they are better at remembering things, planning, organising and juggling different tasks.

How to start

If you have never exercised or haven't exercised for a long time, are overweight or obese, or have a long term medical condition, check with your GP.

But whatever stage of fitness you want to be, the key is to start slowly and build up gradually. It takes time to get fit.

Most people who start a fitness campaign, give up within a matter of months, usually because they set too high goals or they have chosen activities that they either dislike or are unmanageable.

Choose something you enjoy. If you hate going to the gym, but love walking, then walk.

Don't put too much pressure or unrealistic expectations on yourself. If you decide to join a gym, don't join one miles away from your workplace or home, you won't be motivated to go, especially on cold, dark winter nights.

And exercise doesn't have to be hardcore. Daily walks, taking the stairs (rather than lift), dancing to a YouTube clip or favourite song, parking the car further away from your work, gardening, housework, all count. It's being consistent that is important.

Tips for exercising more

- ✓ **Get up earlier and go for a walk or early gym session – then your exercise is done for the day**
- ✓ **Walk more. If you take the car to local shops or hairdressers, walk instead. Or get off the train or bus a stop earlier and walk the last part of your journey.**
- ✓ **Chose an activity that will make you slightly out of breath – cycle, swim, jog, dance around the living room or bounce on a mini trampoline**
- ✓ **Play footie or rounders with the kids – they need exercise too!**
- ✓ **Join a local badminton, tennis, bowling or golf club – most accept all abilities and you will improve over time and make new friends**
- ✓ **Most leisure centres offer exercise classes with qualified instructors and at a reasonable cost. Find one that appeals to you or use the pool.**
- ✓ **Keep up your exercise regime. You cannot store fitness and if you don't use it, you lose it. Aim for 20 to 30 minutes, two or three times a week.**

Exercise Pyramid

Be more active during the working day by taking mini breaks. Visit colleagues instead of emailing them, take the stairs and walk during lunch hour

Reduce

Sitting
Watching TV
Working or playing on computer/laptop

Take up an active hobby like badminton or golf and improve your social life as well

2 – 3 times a week

Stretch and strengthen muscles

Do yoga, Pilates, T'ai Chi or stretching exercises

Lift weights or do resistance training

3 – 5 times a week

Exercise to work heart and lungs

Hike, jog, run
Play golf, badminton, tennis
Swim or water aerobics
Brisk walking
Play football or rugby
Ice skate or rollerblade
Go to gym or exercise classes
Cycle or bounce on mini trampoline

Keep active daily

Walk (with or without a dog!)
Do housework or gardening
Take the stairs instead of lift
Park car further away or leave it at home on short journeys
Get up to change TV channel instead of using remote

Build up your fitness gradually and always warm up with a few gentle stretches and cool down afterwards by walking slowly for a few minutes

If exercising aerobically, always wear appropriate footwear (e.g. good pair of running shoes) to protect joints and if female, a proper sports bra

Sleep better

Make sleep a priority

Getting enough quality sleep can lower the risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and mood disorders, and can help you recover from illness faster.

Sleep restores energy levels yet, by age 50, many of us find it harder to drop off and then wake in the early hours, only to find it very difficult to go back to sleep.

As well as disturbed sleep patterns, burning the midnight oil can also carry serious health risks as sleeping less than five hours a night may increase risk of premature death.

Too little sleep may also cause:

- memory problems
- weakening of the immune system, increasing your chances of becoming sick
- increase in perception of pain
- depression and anxiety

Sleep deprivation also magnifies alcohol's effects on the body, so a fatigued person who drinks will become more impaired than someone who is well rested.

(Studies show driver fatigue could be a factor in 10% of all road and workplace accidents).

Sleeping tablets are rarely the answer as they can be addictive and may make you clumsy or 'thick headed' the next day.

Tips for improving sleep

- ✓ **Try to go to bed at roughly the same time every night and get up at the same time. Adjust the time to give your body the amount of sleep it needs.**
- ✓ **Avoid heavy meals after 8pm and limit tea, coffee, cheese, excess alcohol and cigarettes before bedtime**
- ✓ **Eat healthily – snacking, irregular meals, restrictive diets, junk or processed food, can make tiredness worse**
- ✓ **Drink plenty of water during the day to avoid dehydration at night**
- ✓ **Exercise regularly but not in the hour before bedtime**
- ✓ **Switch off from work (resist checking work emails!) or doing chores at least an hour before bedtime**
- ✓ **Close all electronic devices such as smart phones, tablets, computers or laptops as they can stimulate brain activity and the 'blue light' they emit can promote wakefulness**
- ✓ **Have a milky drink and a biscuit or banana to boost brain levels of sleep inducing tryptophan (but skip the drink if it makes you need the loo in the middle of the night)**

- ✓ **Play music, watch TV or read a book – but nothing too scary or stimulating**
- ✓ **Have a warm bath before bedtime and make sure your bed, bedding and nightclothes are comfy**
- ✓ **Morning light activates the pineal gland – your brain's wake up centre – so hang thick curtains or wear an eye mask. If your partner snores, wear ear plugs or sleep in separate rooms, if possible.**
- ✓ **To help you relax before bed, do some yoga stretches, meditate or practice mindfulness – focus your mind on the gentle movement of your breath and when your mind wanders onto a thought, acknowledge it and then let it go before returning your attention back to your breath**
- ✓ **Wear bed socks or use a hot water bottle to keep feet warm. It's an age old belief that having warm feet may help speed up your trip to dreamland.**

Stress less

Stress is the response we feel when things that are happening exceed our ability to cope. Problems arise when the amount of normal everyday pressure – which we all experience – becomes too great.

This could be due to one major event such as bereavement or an accumulation of many smaller hassles, one after the other without allowing time to recover.

Stress is not a medical problem but if it's prolonged or not addressed, illness can arise, which is why it's important to take action before it gets too serious.

Reduce the effects of stress

- Identify the causes – only then can you tackle the issues. Keep a log for a couple of days to identify your major stressors and then take steps to reduce them.
- Change your behaviour i.e. avoid unnecessary conflict or stressful people; be more assertive, stop negative thinking, don't try to control the uncontrollable.
- Make positive lifestyle choices. (follow the advice in this booklet!)
- Discuss your problems with someone who's supportive and empathetic. Connecting with others has a positive effect on our emotions and helps reduce stress levels.

Work stress

We can allow work stress to affect us from external sources e.g. difficult boss, heavy workload, too many emails, angry customers, or we can cause our stress by our thoughts and fears e.g. thinking we are not good enough or fear of job security.

Tips for reducing work related stress

- ✓ **Resist perfectionism – trying to attain it in a project or situation or setting unrealistic goals will cause unnecessary stress. Just aim to do your best.**
- ✓ **Get organised – if you're always running late, set your watch 15 minutes fast to give you more time. Plan your day and stick to the schedule.**
- ✓ **Don't overcommit yourself – avoid scheduling things back to back and if you have too much on, eliminate tasks that aren't necessary**
- ✓ **Stop procrastinating – don't put off starting projects, and if a project seems too large, break it down into small manageable steps**
- ✓ **Take time to breathe properly. Most of us hold our breath when under pressure.**
- ✓ **Prioritise – make a 'to do' list and tackle it in order of importance. If you have something unpleasant to do, get it over with early and the rest of your day will be more pleasant.**
- ✓ **Take time out: when stress is mounting, take a quick break and move away from the situation. Physical movement or finding a quiet place to regain your equilibrium can quickly reduce stress.**
- ✓ **Get a work/life balance – spending too much time at work and neglecting other aspects of your life may increase your vulnerability to stress**
- ✓ **Learn to say 'no'. No one has an infinite capacity for work.**

Where to get help

Don't put off seeking help because you perceive stress to be a sign of weakness. Addressing your stress is a sign of strength – not weakness.

Employers have a legal duty of care to do what is reasonably practicable to ensure staff do not suffer from work related stress so:

- Develop a support network at work. Discuss any stress related issues with your line manager (if approachable and not the cause of the stress), HR or another senior manager.
- Visit your company's occupational health advisor (if they have one)
- Many organisations offer an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which provides a free confidential counselling service 24/7
- Contact your union rep, NHS Direct or the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

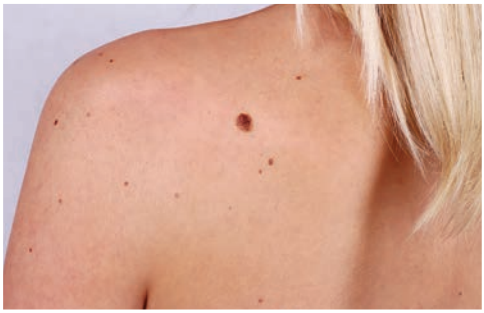
Keep brain active

Being more mentally alert can help offset some of the more negative effects that ageing can have on the brain, and can help keep you 'brain fit' as you get older.

As a result, you will perform better at work and enjoy life more fully.

Tips for keeping brain active

- ✓ **Keep learning – the more you study, the better mental functioning you will have. Learn a new language or musical instrument, take adult education classes or just broaden mental horizons by doing crosswords or Sudoku.**
- ✓ **Memory is our most vital mental faculty. Strengthen it by memorising poems or song lyrics, for example, or by learning a new word every day.**
- ✓ **Get to grips with modern technology e.g. computers, laptops or smart phones, and keep in contact with other people via social media**
- ✓ **Take up video gaming. Action video games improve eye/hand coordination, improve spatial visualisation skills, and increase the number of things that you can visually attend to simultaneously.**
- ✓ **Be more sociable – take up a hobby or social activity or travel to meet new people to develop friendships (or look up old friends to revive existing friendships)**
- ✓ **Be physically active to decrease the harmful effects of stress on your brain. Choose an exercise that appeals to you and won't be considered a chore. Studies show walking four miles per week can reduce the chances of developing dementia by 50 percent.**
- ✓ **Feed your brain. Eat a balanced diet to improve alertness by eating more fruit and vegetables and reducing foods high in sugar, salt and fat.**
- ✓ **Watch your drinking as frequent heavy alcoholic sessions can damage the brain and can have long term effects on memory**



Be responsible

Everyone is at risk of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes, kidney or liver disease, dementia, cancer or having a stroke.

Some of these conditions can be prevented if caught early enough or if you take steps to live a healthier and more active lifestyle.

Get to know your body by listening to it and checking it regularly, taking action if you (for example):

- develop a persistent cough
- find a lump
- notice blood in your stools or urine
- spot a mole that doesn't 'look right'
- experience pain in a particular part of the body
- lose weight unexpectedly or start suffering tiredness

And even if you feel well, it's worth taking advantage of health checks offered either by your employer (via the occupational health advisor) or via the NHS (available free to adults aged 40 – 74 every five years) to identify any potential risks.

Most of us could live to a ripe old age but we need to look after ourselves (and loved ones) by treating our bodies with love and respect and keeping as fit and healthy as we can possibly be.

MOHS Workplace Health Services

Occupational Health

Absence management / health surveillance / medical assessments
Travel health advice and vaccinations
Employee wellbeing and health promotion
Drug and alcohol screening
Counselling & CBT therapy
Physiotherapy
Employee assistance programmes

First Aid at Work Training

Anaphylaxis
Automated external defibrillator
Primary first aid at work / requalification / annual refresher
Emergency first aid at work
Paediatric first aid & emergency paediatric first aid
Professional driver CPC first aid at work

Health and Safety Training / Assessments

Assessments: ergonomic, noise & workplace
Fire safety award level 2
Food hygiene levels 1 & 2
IOSH workplace safety courses
Manual handling
Risk assessment guidance
Safety audits
Specific hazards including CoSHH regulations

Stress Management / Personal Resilience Training

Developing competencies to manage bullying and harassment
Managing stress at work
Personal resilience and wellbeing training
Resilience, leadership & performance

Mental Health Training

Applied suicide intervention skills training (ASIST)
Mental health awareness training for managers
Mental health first aid (MHFA) training & lite training

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