

Sharing the benefits
of healthy living



7 ways

to help your employees
avoid burnout at work.

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Starts with a spark.

Are you finding that when you ask your employees 'how they are?' their go-to answers are: 'busy', 'stressed' or 'I'm sooo tired'? That's not surprising, as stress and anxiety seems to be on the increase.

Findings made by MetLife UK indicate that more than 10 million Brits took time off work due to burnout at the start of 2022, costing UK businesses more than £700m a year. And the results of **Britain's Healthiest Workplace 2022 survey** revealed one in five UK employees have experienced burnout.

That's why, as a small business owner, it's now more important than ever that you learn how to help your employees avoid everyday stresses from leading to burnout.

To help you get started, we spoke to Belinda Sidhu, Head of Mental Health and Wellbeing at Vitality, and Selina Barker, Life Design and Career Change Coach and Author of **Burnt Out**, on how to spot the signs of burnout and share their positive steps for keeping work-life balance in check.



What is burnout?

'Many people don't know this, but burnout is not yet a recognised medical condition,' says Belinda Sidhu, Head of Mental Health and Wellbeing at Vitality.

'While a lot of us use the phrase and are familiar with what it means, it's described by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a syndrome resulting in "chronic workplace stress that's not been successfully managed",' she adds.

There are three aspects to burnout:

- 1 Feeling a lack of energy or exhaustion
- 2 Increased mental distance or feelings of negativity or cynicism relating to work
- 3 Reduced efficiency at work

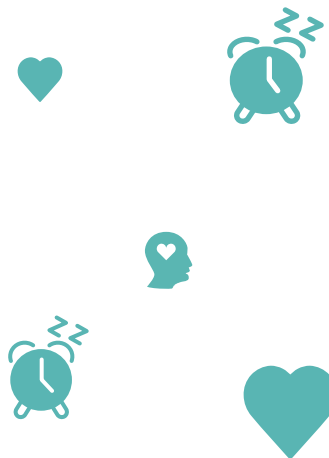
The signs of stress that could lead to burnout?

While we all manage stress very differently, Sidhu explains that there are some universal signs to look out for. 'I normally split stress into three categories: physical, emotional, and behavioural. The thing that's important to notice is any behaviour or symptoms that are outside the norm for you,' she explains.

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Physical signs of stress:

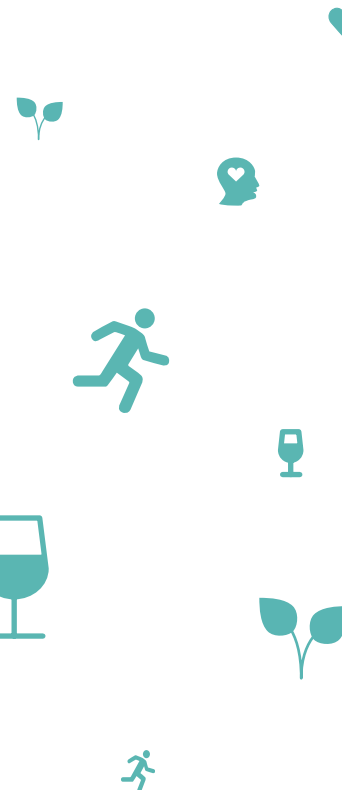
This could mean aches and pains such as headaches or joint pain. You might experience trouble sleeping, muscle tension, jaw clenching or teeth grinding at night. Some people are affected with digestive problems such as bloating, or their breath is very much in the upper part of the body, so they're in fight-or-flight mode rather than rest-and-digest, which is what we want.



2

Emotional signs of stress:

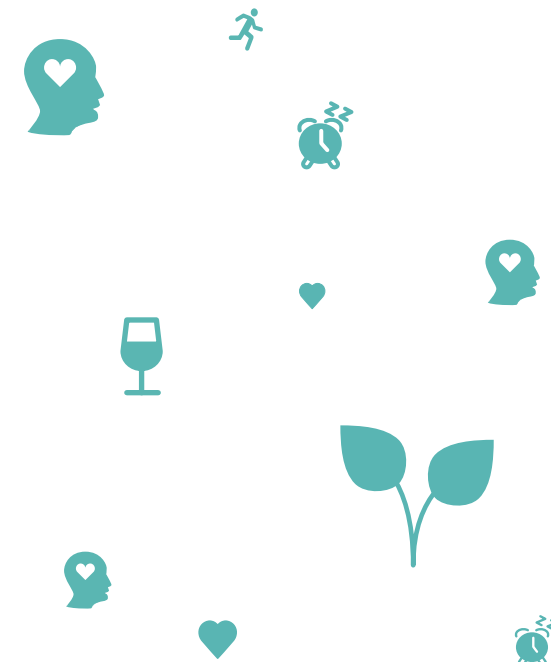
You might be more emotional than usual. So maybe feeling more irritable than usual or getting more angry or frustrated with things that wouldn't normally phase you.



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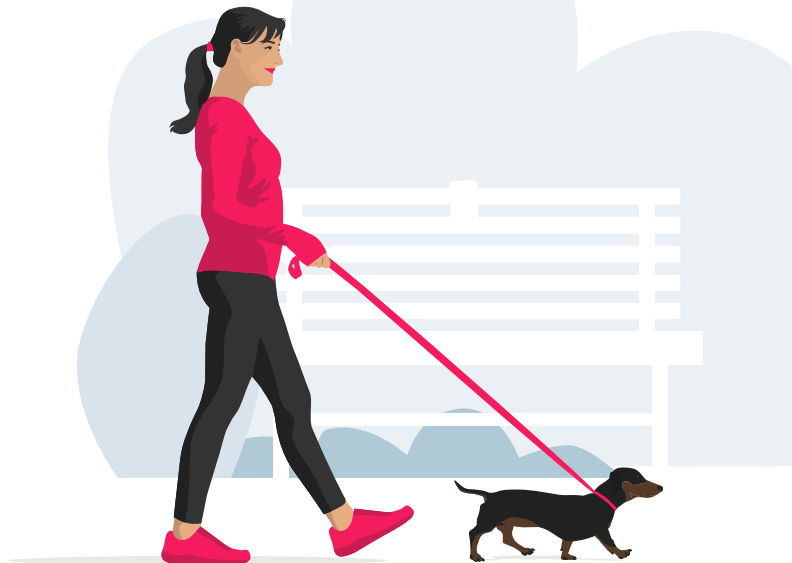
Behavioural signs of stress:

For instance, are you sleeping less than what was previously normal for you? Has your diet changed? Perhaps you're drinking more alcohol than what you'd classify as normal for you. These could all be signs that you're experiencing chronic stress.



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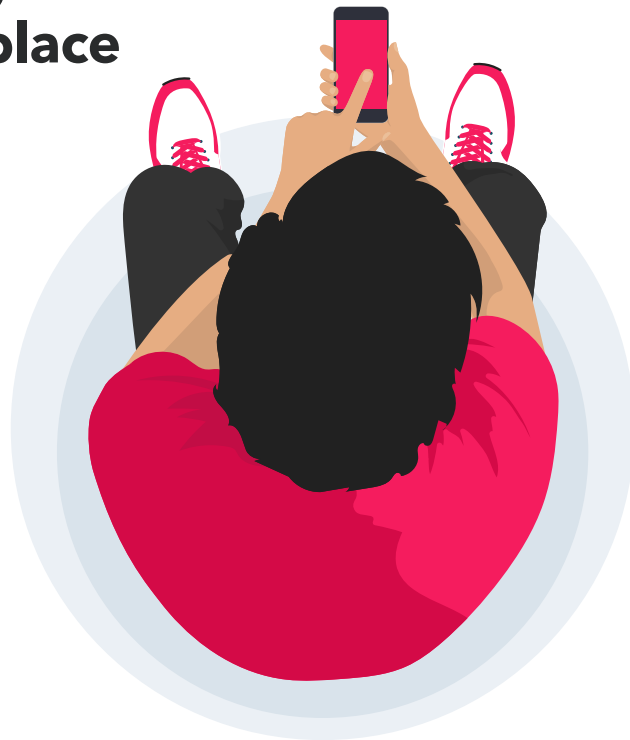
Promote healthy habits.

If like most businesses, you've taken up hybrid working, then it's important to let your employees keep hold of positive behaviours they adopted during lockdown. For many, one such healthy habit, was to get out into their garden or nearby green spaces at lunchtime.

So, to keep this going why not schedule walking meetings? Or organise lunchtime walks or runs? This gives your employees a scheduled time slot in their working day when they can head out and move around guilt-free.

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Switch off at the end of the day.

Lockdown saw many employees clocking up an additional **two hours a day at their desks**, contributing to feelings of overwhelm, stress and fatigue. It's this always-on culture that has been driven, to a degree, by working from home where the work-life lines are blurred. 'For that person who's always online or emails at two in the morning and never switches off - this way of working is not sustainable, and they will burn out,' Barker says.

A way to stop this is to encourage your employees to turn off and put away their work phone and laptop at the end of the working day, instead of leaving them in sleep mode. This helps them to separate themselves mentally and physically from work, so they can clear their mind and recharge - ready and refreshed for the next day. In her opinion, for an employee to bring their best self to work, it's key that they learn to not focus every aspect of their lives around work, in order to look after their energy and wellbeing. That way they'll find that they will actually produce better work.

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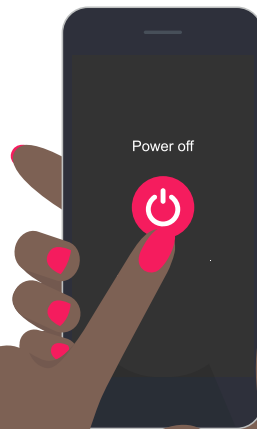
Learn to conserve energy.

'The most important thing workers can do to keep burnout at bay and to really thrive is to learn how to manage their physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and motivational energy,' says **Selina Barker**, Life Design and Career Change Coach and Author of **Burnt Out**. She goes on to explain that it's important for employees to 'recognise how their energy works and understand what helps them to rest and really switch off.'

Encourage employees to book holiday throughout the year, so they can enjoy regular breaks. If you let them flex their hours, then they'll be able to attend after-work exercise classes, dash off for a weekend away and avoid the rush hour for a more relaxed commute home.

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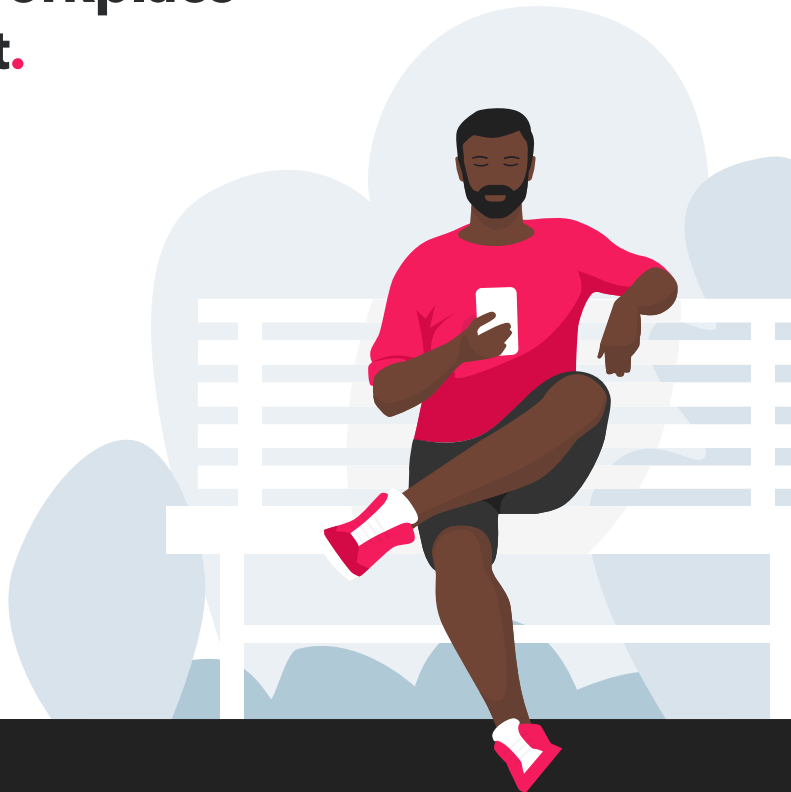
Be the positive example.

It's useful as an employer to take a moment to consider what unhealthy work habits you might want to reset. 'For example, it could be "checking my work emails at 10 o'clock at night when I don't really need to", suggests Sidhu. If you're emailing your team outside of working hours, then they'll feel pressure to respond in their free time - adding unnecessary stress to both of you.

So, take steps to switch off yourself.
It's not only important for your own wellbeing,
but it'll make your staff feel empowered to
do the same.

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Take (guilt-free) breaks.

‘Taking breaks is one of the most powerful things you can do to calm your nervous system and top up your energy levels throughout the day,’ says Barker. ‘We have this idea that we can operate like machines, and so if we work as fast as possible and squeeze as many hours into our day as we can, we will produce the most - but humans don’t work like robots. When you’re in that place of stress, what happens is your IQ drops, you get tunnel vision, you can’t access the higher powers of intuition, creativity and problem-solving.’

The solution is to take regular breaks. As Baker explains: ‘Research has shown that our brain activity naturally lulls every hour-and-a-half to two hours and that people who take a break in line with this will have done more work by the end of the day and produce better-quality work than their colleagues who have valiantly kept going.’

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Range of support.

While we've been doing the dance between remote and hybrid working, remembering that we have a team who is there to support us has often fallen by the wayside. Sidhu explains that although line managers have a duty of care towards their team members, not all employees will feel comfortable reaching out to them for help. That's why it's important to have other support systems in place for staff to get the support they need.

Does your business have an intranet page with useful resources, for instance? Have you incorporated mental-health champions or mental-health first-aiders? Is there an EAP [employee assistance programme] that they can access?

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Consider the bigger picture.

While the average UK employee clocks up an average of 36.5 hours of work per week there are other aspects to consider when it comes to burnout. 'Is something underlying, other than work, going on? If the stress your employees are experiencing is impacting them to a point where it's affecting their day-to-day life, then go to your GP or a mental-health professional where you can seek that support,' advises Sidhu.

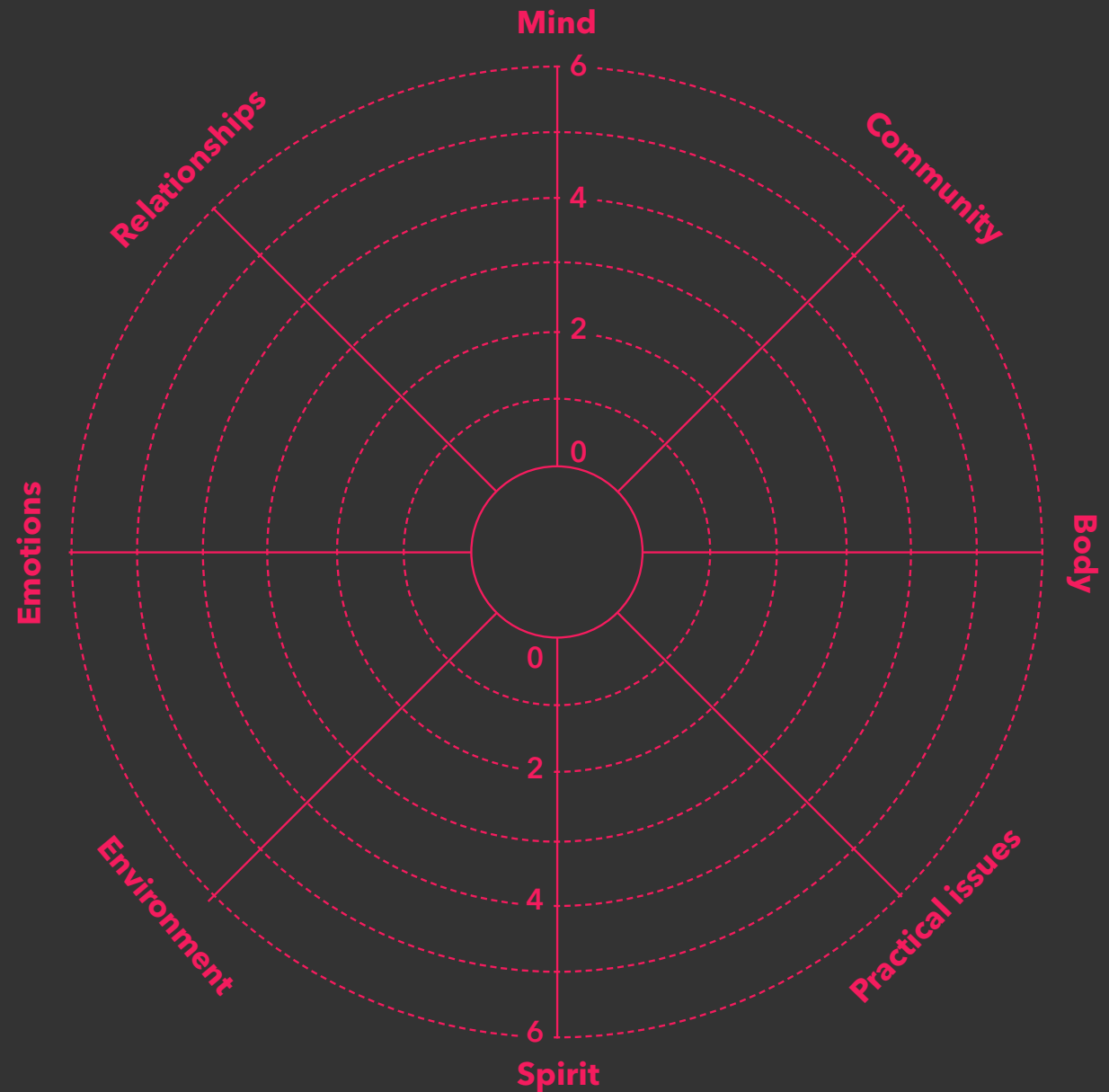
It could be a useful exercise for your employees to review everything that's going on in different areas of their life. To help them do this they could use [The Wellbeing Wheel](#) (see next page). It's a circle that's split into different sections such as relationships, practical issues like finances, and so on.

The Wellbeing Wheel.

Please mark your scores to help you track your overall health and wellbeing and identify the areas where you need more support.

6 = maximum wellbeing

0 = minimum wellbeing



Learn more about Life Design and Career Coach and Author Selina Barker at selinabarker.com and her book Burnt Out at theburntoutbook.com.

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