



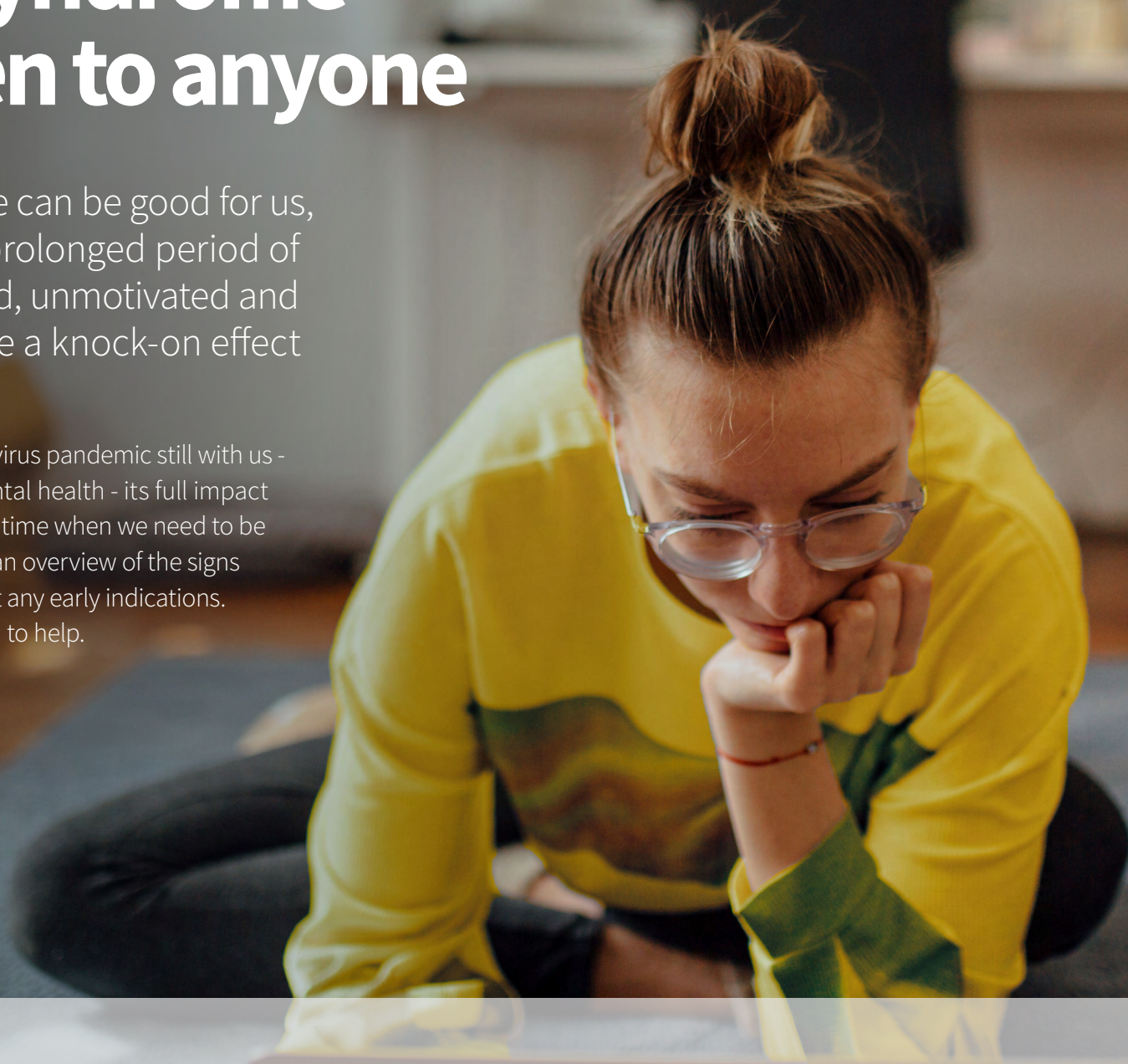
Employers' Guide to Burnout



Burnout syndrome can happen to anyone

Whilst short-term pressure can be good for us, employees faced with a prolonged period of stress risk being exhausted, unmotivated and ineffective which can have a knock-on effect on the whole workforce.

With many of the effects of the coronavirus pandemic still with us - especially in terms of its effect on mental health - its full impact on burnout has yet to be revealed. At a time when we need to be especially vigilant, this guide provides an overview of the signs and effects of burnout to help you spot any early indications. We've identified four key areas in which to help.



Burnout is now officially an ‘occupational phenomenon’

To make sense of burnout, the first step is to identify and define it. **Burnout was first identified in 1974¹** and in the following years research primarily focused on burnout associated with doctors, broadening the scope to teachers, the armed forces and managers as the decades rolled by.

However, many of these studies rarely sought to define a precise mental state that **differentiates burnout from work-related stress, anxiety, or chronic fatigue syndrome**. In short, ‘burnout’ became a ‘contested’ diagnosis, the subject of a wide range of causal explanations and medical speculation.

In 2019 burnout was added to the World Health Organization’s 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases as an ‘occupational phenomenon’². Like a ball thrown from clinical psychologists for employers to catch, it’s now officially defined as **‘a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.’**

¹ Journal of Social Issues, Winter 1974. ‘Staff burn-out’ Herbert Freudenberger

² World Health Organization 28 May 2019 International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD)

Aviva's research reveals high levels of employee stress

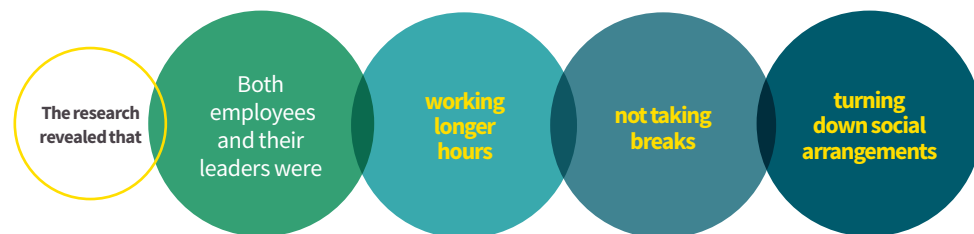
Aviva's Thriving in the Age of Ambiguity report³ highlights how changing experiences of working life are affecting employee wellbeing - and financial wellbeing in particular. It revealed that a high proportion of employees thought their financial situation was affecting their mental health

39%

of employees say they're experiencing a negative effect on their mental health

Our ongoing studies have consistently shown that the working environment is a key driver of mental health conditions. Even before the pandemic began, more than 90% of employers and employees told us they'd experienced a symptom associated with mental health.

It also showed a worrying disconnect between employers acknowledging that they have a responsibility to manage mental wellbeing in the workplace with their behaviours.



³ Research among 2,000 employees working in organisations with over 1,000 employees; conducted independently on behalf of Aviva by Quadrangle in February 2020, August 2020 and March 2021.

The great workplace exchange: good or bad?

Technology has enabled more flexible working, both in where we work and the hours we work.

69% of employees say flexible working will play a more important part in future job or career choices.

two in three (64%) think complete flexibility of working hours would make them more productive.

But remote working doesn't suit all the people, all of the time. One reason is that when the line between work and home life becomes blurred, it can make it difficult for employees to switch off.

Today's increasing reliance on email and more flexible working practices, including the move towards home working, have also changed the way employees interact with their colleagues.

Hybrid working - a mixed bag of positives and negatives³:



³ Research among 2,000 employees working in organisations with over 1,000 employees; conducted independently on behalf of Aviva by Quadrangle in February 2020, August 2020 and March 2021.



Prevention is key

Prevention is one of the most effective strategies in managing burnout and being aware of changes in attitudes and motivation can help with early identification.

This is particularly important as many employees experiencing burnout remain in work. They often put the situation down to a stressful period – convincing themselves that they're 'just tired', that they're 'happy to take on more' or feeling that 'their company is depending on them' and 'no one else can do the job.'

However, burnout is **different** from stress.

While stress is often experienced as feeling anxious and having a sense of urgency, burnout is more commonly experienced as helplessness, hopelessness, or apathy.

Line managers have a key role to play in influencing and addressing the factors that contribute to burnout. We explain more about the condition and offer guidance on the support line managers can offer their employees to help prevent burnout in the next section of this guide. We hope you find the content useful.

8 key things to know about the causes of burnout

While not considered a mental illness, burnout can be considered a mental health issue. If not managed effectively, it can become chronic in nature, affecting both the health and performance of employees at all levels. Moreover, if it isn't addressed, burnout can increase the chance of employees developing mental health conditions such as clinical depression.

Burnout is likely to happen when employees:

- ✓ Have unreasonable demands placed upon them.
- ✓ Have unclear expectations.
- ✓ Expect too much of themselves.
- ✓ Feel inadequate or incompetent.
- ✓ Feel unsupported and unappreciated.
- ✓ Never switch off as work and homelife become blurred.
- ✓ Work long hours without breaks.



8 key things to know about the causes of burnout

continued

- 1 **Physical symptoms** such as headaches, exhaustion, problems sleeping
- 2 **Lower motivation/increased mental distance** from one's job and relationships
- 3 **Increased frustration, negativism** or **cynicism**
- 4 **Irritability and resentment**
- 5 **Lower levels of concentration**
- 6 **Increased working hours** with less being achieved
- 7 **Increased errors**
- 8 **Obsession over problems** at home and work

Left unaddressed, burnout may result in:

- ✓ Physical, mental and emotional exhaustion
- ✓ Lower resistance to illness
- ✓ Poor physical and/or mental health
- ✓ Increased sickness absence
- ✓ Decreased productivity
- ✓ Low morale
- ✓ Increased staff attrition rates
- ✓ Workplace accidents

Six ways employers can tackle burnout

Both employers and employees have a role to play in preventing burnout. It's essential to identify the stress factors and then be proactive, because burnout won't fix itself.

1 Identify the stress factors

In order to understand any situation, it is essential that employers look out for and capture any stress or burnout signs. Look out for changes in their behaviours, attitude and different working patterns. Be aware of workloads and deadlines for team members – make sure workloads are manageable and notice when employees are asking for help with their work.

When you're able to identify trends, you'll be in a better position to address any underlying problems directly and quickly.

Typical
work-related
stressors

Unclear
objectives
and goals

Unrealistic
deadlines

Extra
responsibilities

these can be on top
of the employee's
current role.

Organisational
procedures and
work processes

they need to get up to speed
on, but haven't found the
time to do so

Scheduling issues

workflow interruptions
and timing conflicts

Each of these stressors might not be such a big deal if they occur every now and again, but added together, over a long period of time, can take their toll.



How employers can tackle burnout continued

2 Encourage open and honest conversations

The pandemic brought home to many of us just how important it is to find out how employees are feeling. Ensure you have regular conversations, encourage open conversations, canvass opinion and act on any concerns. Regular communication will help create a sense of belonging and build a strong social purpose.

It's likely that you'll need to consider **different strategies** for employees who have returned to the office versus those continuing to work from home.

Employees working from home may begin to feel they need to prove their worth by working harder, particularly if they see colleagues returning to work.

3 Practice what you preach – and if you don't, make it clear why!

Workplace culture is a really important factor in the prevention of burnout. Unless you demonstrate the values, you want to see from your employees, you risk continuing to drive the unhealthy practices. There will be times where it's appropriate for someone in a senior leadership position to work long hours outside of the normal working day. However, you need to be clear to employees what is expected of them. Communication is key.

How employers can tackle burnout

continued

4 Make work-life balance a priority

Our research has consistently shown many employees struggling to juggle work and home life. Many people will continue to work from home, and this can bring particular complexity for those who also have family or caring responsibilities.

Encourage your employees to balance their home and work life and take time to look after themselves. Where an employee has had a significant workload for a period of time, try to give them back some time with leave, or by working fewer hours.

If you have a wellbeing programme, now's the time to promote it!

Even if you don't already have a solution in place, consider introducing additional wellbeing support to encourage your employees to take time out to lead a healthier lifestyle.

The first step could be...

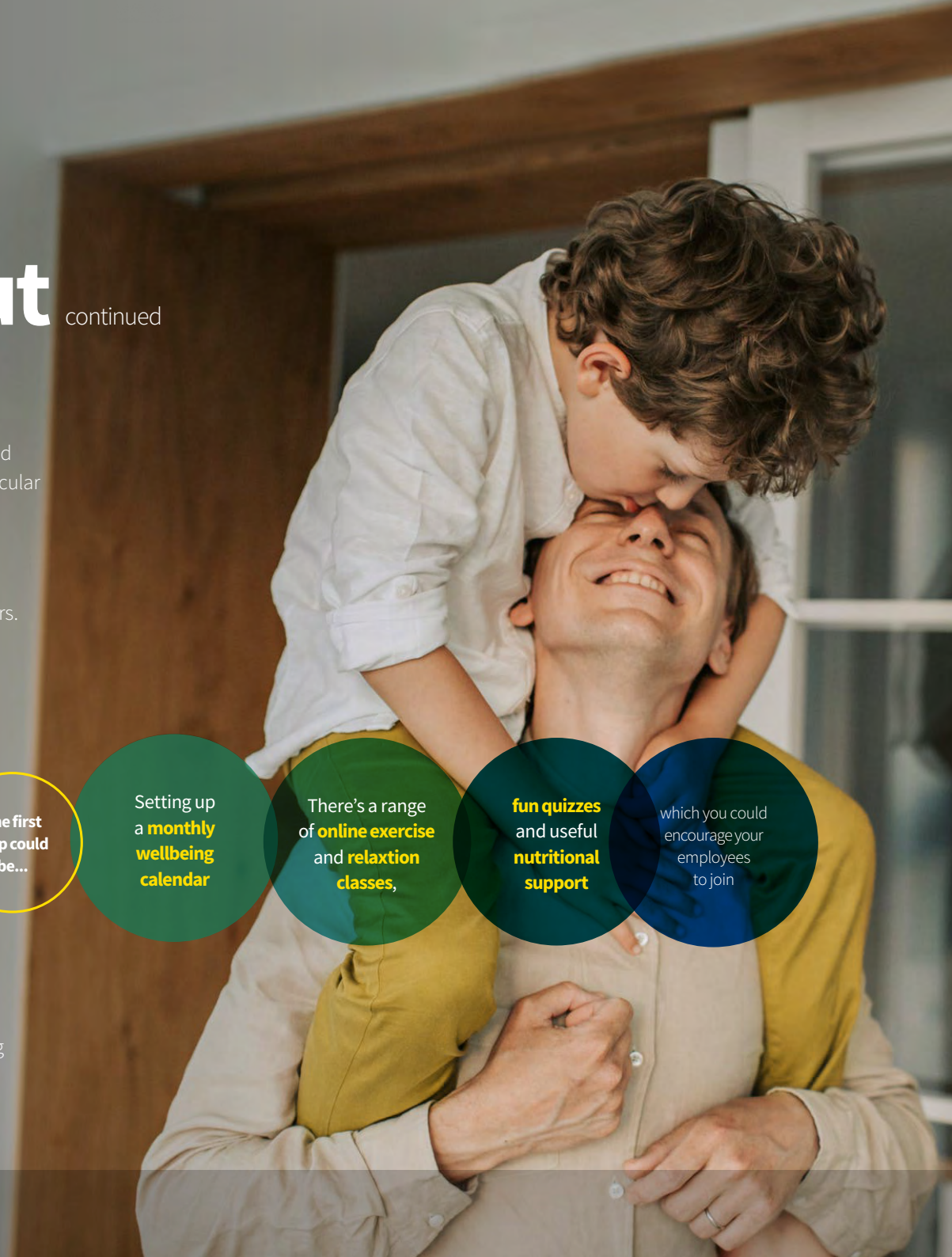
Setting up a **monthly wellbeing calendar**

There's a range of **online exercise** and **relaxation classes**,

fun quizzes and useful **nutritional support**

which you could encourage your employees to join

And, **don't forget** to look after your own wellbeing – following on from practicing what you preach, if you remember to look after your own wellbeing, your team members are likely to follow your example.



How employers can tackle burnout continued

5 Review your HR policy

Put specific HR policies in place – make sure you manage workloads to a sustainable level and your employees have enough time to relax and recuperate after a busy, stressful day at work.

Consider policies that help employees better manage the multiple demands on their time.

Time to move to flexible working? In our latest research, **68%** of employees said they felt entitled to reclaim 'me time' during working hours.

You can also empower line managers and staff with the tools and skills to identify the signs of burnout, adopt coping mechanisms and encourage a healthy, happy working environment, whether that's in the home or in an office, workshop or warehouse.

6 Signpost to support

Don't forget to remind your employees of the support available to them, whether it's online training courses to help them better manage their time, help to improve their wellbeing or access to medical expertise like CBT and counselling services, if they need it.

Don't forget — we're all in this together

Of course, it's not all one-sided. Your employees can take steps to look after their own wellbeing and prevent burnout too.

Here are nine top tips for you to share with your employees:

- 1 Be conscious of your working pattern** - notice if it changes, if you're working longer or not taking breaks.
- 2 Talk to your manager** - let them know if you feel unable to cope with or keep up your workload.
- 3 Talk to your colleagues** - don't be afraid to ask for a helping hand if you need it.
- 4 Take back time** if you've worked beyond your normal working hours, think about how you can take some of that time back for yourself.
- 5 Take note of your moods** - recognise changes to your mood and behaviour.
- 6 Do something to help you switch off** - do an activity you have to focus your attention on, for example, cooking, exercising, reading, drawing, making something.
- 7 Use the wellbeing support available to you** - check what your employer offers to help you manage your stress levels.
- 8 Take your own advice** - think about what you would say to someone else in your position and act on that advice.
- 9 Take time away** - your mind and body can't run on full power all the time, so being able to rest and recharge is one of the best ways to prevent burnout, including getting good quality sleep.

“ Despite the many challenges brought by the pandemic, we should continue the positive changes we've made while adapting to our new circumstances. We should then be better equipped to cope with the 'normal' pressures of everyday life. ”

Dr Doug Wright, Medical Director, Aviva UK, Health and Protection.



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