

For your team's wellbeing.
For Living



Tackling presenteeism at work.

Here, we'll look at how employees coming to work unwell or staying late because 'it's the done thing' can affect productivity and how you can turn it around.



Is presenteeism on the rise?

Research by the Chartered Institute for Professional Development (CIPD) suggests that presenteeism might have tripled between 2010 and 2018. Many organisations are yet to take proactive steps to address the issue, but those that have done report benefits for productivity and engagement.

Why does presenteeism happen?

Most people take their jobs seriously. They want to perform well and give a good impression. Not being present when others are working can feel like a threat to both of these things. Staying away from the office may mean putting certain tasks on hold and not being 'visible'. Showing your face and being seen to chip in can seem like the safer thing to do. Sometimes, employees may feel as though their job stability depends on it.

In other cases, people may just feel that being seen to work extra hard will give them an advantage in terms of career progression.

6 in 10 people have gone to work despite being unwell.

Bupa survey – 2,000 UK employees were independently surveyed in September 2017 by Opinium Research.

Why is it a problem?

The spreading of illness

Contagious infections such as flu can pass easily between colleagues. It's much better all-round for people to stay away from the office when they're unwell, rather than coming in.

Productivity takes a hit

When people work too many hours, they're unlikely to be their normal, productive selves – especially when they're unwell. They may find it difficult to concentrate, have less patience with colleagues, or even make mistakes. There can also be the 'domino effect' of additional workload caused by one team member not being at their best.

It can be expensive

Evidence suggests that people working while ill costs companies more than 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.



1 in 5 people went to work when unwell to stay on top of their workload.

Bupa survey – 2,000 UK employees were independently surveyed in September 2017 by Opinium Research.

What can you do about it?

Look at workplace pressures

Think about why people might be feeling 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

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.

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 on time.

Stay alert

Be aware of presenteeism and track it if possible. This isn't as straightforward as measuring absenteeism, but you could include a question about it in a regular team feedback survey, for example.

Proactively manage employee mental health

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

Take a preventative approach

Encouraging people to look after their wellbeing can help them stay well. This could include simple things like providing free fruit to staff or hosting fitness, exercise or mindfulness classes during lunchtime or after work.

Find out more

Get information and support on mental health in the workplace
[bupa.co.uk/workplace-mental-health](https://www.bupa.co.uk/workplace-mental-health)

Sources

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