



Mental Wellbeing

We continue our series of articles by Dr Libby Artingstall and Dr Sile McDaid, Co-Founders and Directors of Team Mental Health.

This month we've decided to take some time to think about our working environments and consider how different aspects of these can positively influence our mental health. When it comes to developing healthy workplaces, some simple steps can be really effective. Here are a few ideas.

Water

Dehydration can negatively impact our mood, energy levels and how alert we feel.¹ One of the earliest signs of dehydration is fatigue. A simple way to support people in the workplace look after their mental health and wellbeing is to introduce water stations or encourage people to bring their water bottles to work.

Water can also be incorporated into building design through imagery. In part, it's thought that the benefit of doing this may be connected to something called fractals. Fractals are repeating patterns that are similar or identical. Studies have found that exposure to fractals can be associated with a reduction in stress and a sense of relaxation.² Simply adding some fractal artwork to the workspace can make a positive difference.

Greenery

Contact with green space has been associated with benefits to our mental health, particularly in terms of reducing our stress levels.³ There's an evidence base to suggest that having plants inside the workplace can significantly increase workplace satisfaction and productivity.⁴ Looking at images of nature can also help reduce stress levels.⁵

Lighting

Lighting is really important. A study conducted at the University of Illinois found there to be a relationship between exposure to natural light and quality of life. There was also a positive association with improved sleep.⁶ If there's limited or no access to windows in your workplace, a simple step to take is to encourage people to spend some time outdoors on their breaks.

Physical activity

Physical activity enhances our mental health.⁷ It can be helpful to think about ways in which physical activity can be encouraged within buildings and between buildings. For example, could people be encouraged to use the stairs rather than the lift? Are pathways between buildings well lit so that people feel safe? Encouraging people to take a walk at lunch time, cycle to work or join a gym can have a positive impact.

Diet

Having access to healthy food options is really important, as is providing information which helps people to make healthy choices. A healthy, balanced diet can support good physical and mental

health. It's also important to try to limit the intake of highly processed foods and sugary soft drinks.^{8,9} Healthy diet, healthy body, healthy mind!

Control

Having a sense of control and predictability at work is important. Perception of control is closely linked to happiness and wellbeing.¹⁰ Give people a voice and ask them how they would like things to be. Allow personalisation of spaces where appropriate. A study found that the more control people had over their workplace, the happier they felt and the more productive they were.¹¹

When it comes to looking after our mental health and wellbeing at work, small things really can make a big difference.

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