



Returning to Work: A guide to looking after your mental wellbeing

Finally, after what has been the longest and strangest year of our lives, the time has come to start enjoying a little more freedom.

A chance to return to some sense of a normal life after being cooped up in our own homes will undoubtedly be very exciting for some, but the prospect of going back to work and engaging with colleagues may be daunting for others. In fact, a whopping 73% of working age adults have reported being worried or anxious about returning to the workplace when lockdown restrictions ease.

We all have mental health, every single one of us, yes even you! It's important to recognise that it's absolutely normal for our mental wellbeing to fluctuate between good and poor states during the day, week, month or year. Our mental state is influenced by the external world around us, the communities we live and work in, and our relationships. Often events that we have no control over impact our mental wellbeing. We all develop different coping strategies in our lifetime and there is no single, one size fits all solution when it comes to maintaining a positive state of mind.

73%

of working age adults have reported being worried or anxious about returning to the workplace¹

1 in 2

Adults will have a mental health challenge in 2021 due to Covid-19

(WHO 2020)

If you feel worried or nervous about moving out of lockdown and returning to the workplace, remember you are not alone. It's been a tough 15 months for everyone. By the end of this year it's predicted that 1 in 2 adults will have a mental health challenge and 1 in 3 will deal with an addiction globally. In the UK, 1 in 4 adults have experienced loneliness because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

When it comes to returning to work, research shows that we all respond differently. However, the struggle we face in dealing with this new transition is evident. As restrictions eased in the UK, the charity Anxiety UK shared that 46% of people interviewed cited the pressures of socialising generally as their biggest concern, 36% said they were quite happy to stay at home, 20% were anxious about returning to work, while 23% were anxious about using public transport.

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We understand the importance of maintaining a positive and balanced mindset and are here to help you achieve that.

In this Return to Work guide, we've put together all our best hints and tips to manage a positive transition back to the workplace. Pick and choose the elements that feel most appropriate for you, you don't need to adopt them all in order to gain benefit. We hope the guide is useful and helps you make the transition as smooth as possible.

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Dealing with stress and worry

Moving out of lockdown to a more social way of living and working, where we may need to come into closer proximity with other people, can be a daunting thought. It may trigger increased levels of stress and anxiety for many of us.

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In a recent study, 46% of employees stated they were worried about coming into close contact with other colleagues and 42% were concerned about keeping adequate social distance from other people¹.

After being advised that social isolation would help to keep us safe and having been able to control our surroundings and schedules, it's only normal to feel uneasy. The prospect of interacting with different people, managing new timetables and engaging in social settings may not feel comfortable. Many people are finding that they are experiencing 'post-lockdown anxiety'.



46%

of employees are worried about coming into close contact with colleagues¹

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Experiencing worry and anxiety at the prospect of returning to society and no longer being in control of your close environment is completely natural.



Here are our 5 top tips to help you manage your stress levels and combat those negative worries:

1 Practice mindfulness

2 Exercise regularly

3 Connect to nature

4 Use a mood tracker

5 Write your worries down

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Keeping a journal can also help to increase self-awareness and identify the main triggers that are causing your anxiety levels to increase. The act of writing worries down can help to unleash the emotion behind them, allowing you to feel more in control. Our worries are often based on what may happen and not what is happening. Being able to recognise and take into account the facts can help us to realise whether our fears are founded or not. You may also like to ask yourself if a specific thought helps you or is simply an obstacle preventing you from thriving at work and in your personal life.



Doing regular exercise or physical activity will help boost your mood and send those happy hormones rushing through your system. If you are able to exercise outdoors, even better! Being in nature helps to ground us. Connecting with nature, taking in the sights, sounds and smells helps to focus the mind on the present and slows down those thoughts that are racing around at 100mph! Try taking a few deep, slow breaths next time you are outdoors and notice how it makes you feel. Can you feel a wave of calm rolling over your body and mind?



Remember, humans weren't built to face this level of uncertainty, so if you're struggling to cope with the many things that feel out of your control, this is absolutely OK. It's OK to not be OK.



Feeling anxious from time to time is absolutely normal, but if your anxiety levels disrupt your day-to-day life for 14 days or more, you may be suffering from an anxiety disorder.



Talking to a coach or therapist can help you to learn new ways to better manage your stress and anxiety levels. If you feel it would be beneficial to speak to someone, the InsideOut team is on hand to help. For more information or to explore how we can help you, please contact support@lettheinsideout.com.

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Dealing with social anxiety

If lockdown felt like a relief and you enjoyed being cocooned at home, the thought of going back to the workplace and socialising may feel incredibly daunting and out of your comfort zone. You are certainly not alone if this is you.

38% of employees have stated that they are concerned about catching or spreading Covid-19 while commuting, 37% are concerned about catching Covid-19 in the workplace and 27% are worried about returning to work negatively impacting their current work-life balance¹.

If the above resonates with you, you may be experiencing social anxiety, or social phobia. Social anxiety is the term linked to feelings of fear induced by how we believe we are perceived by others, or our fear of being in close proximity to other people where we feel unsafe, e.g. where there may be a risk of catching an infectious disease. Social anxiety is a pervasive disorder and can cause anxiety and fear in most areas of a person's life.

The symptoms of social anxiety are noticeable both in our mind and body. The most common symptoms are racing heart beat, blushing, excessive sweat, dry throat and mouth, trembling, muscle twitching and faintness. These symptoms may also be accompanied with fear of rejection or humiliation, nervousness, negative emotional cycles, feelings of shame or discomfort and feelings of being overwhelmed.



37%

of employees are concerned
about catching COVID-19
in the Workplace¹

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If you are struggling to cope with social anxiety, here are our 10 top tips that are proven to help to reduce signs and symptoms:

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| 1 | Get enough sleep, aim for 7-9 hours a night | 6 | Practice mindfulness/relaxation techniques |
| 2 | Structure your day as much as possible | 7 | Exercise regularly, aiming for at least 30 minutes 5 times a week |
| 3 | Limit news intake and time on social media | 8 | Keep a gratitude journal |
| 4 | Eat a healthy and balanced diet and drink at least 2 litres of water a day | 9 | Foster positive self-talk |
| 5 | Establish self-care routines | 10 | Stay connected to your support group |



If you are struggling to cope, there is no shame in asking for help and getting the support you need. InsideOut's coaches and therapists help people with these symptoms every day. To find out more about how we can help you, please get in touch via support@lettheinsideout.com.

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Identifying your main concerns

Knowing what the main things are that worry you about returning to work is the first step to overcoming these negative thoughts and emotions. Whilst there may be common trends, we will all be worried about different things and to different extents. Your concerns are your concerns and they hold no less of a value that someone else's — please remember that!

Do any of these worries and concerns about returning to work resonate with you?

Interacting at work

You may be worried about how team meetings will take place and whether social distancing measures will be maintained in order to keep everyone safe.

Travelling to work

Not everyone has the option to walk or ride into the office. Getting on public transport during rush hour is not anyone's idea of a good time, let alone during a pandemic. You may be fearful of catching or spreading Covid-19.

Socialising outside of work

Returning to work will inevitably see an increase in team socials and team building activities. Whilst some may feel uncomfortable about spending additional time with colleagues and taking extra unnecessary risks, others may be wanting to get home to spend time with loved ones.

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Steps to overcome your main concerns:

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- 1** Identify and write down the factors that are causing you concern or heightened levels of worry or anxiety.

 - 2** List the triggers for each factor you have written down.

 - 3** Next, write down your list of worries in order of severity, with the ones that you feel are causing the highest level of anxiety first.

 - 4** Discuss the list you have made with a trusted colleague, Line Manager or a close friend or family member.

Identifying your main concerns can help you plan for certain circumstances and think in advance about what support you may need to feel more confident when the time comes. Make a realistic plan about how you can approach these situations and talk it through with your colleagues and Line Manager.

Think of how you dealt with challenges in the past. This will remind you of your strengths and give you reassurance that you can overcome this fear and anxiety.

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Validate your emotions

As we return to a faster pace with busier daily lives, we might feel concerned about maintaining good routines and protecting our personal space.

The uncertainty and change caused by the shift in routine and working patterns that the end of lockdown brings will negatively affect people in different ways.

It's important to remember that everyone has a different set of circumstances to navigate as restrictions start to ease. Showing empathy and support for those who are in need is crucial.

If you have secretly enjoyed the slower pace, spending more quality time with loved ones and occasionally working in your PJs (we have all been there!), but felt a sense of unease knowing there are people suffering at the same time, you may have a sense of guilt or shame. These emotions can make it seemingly harder to open up to others and you may feel like your emotions are invalid. A large proportion of us will have enjoyed some of the elements of lockdown life and that's OK. It's OK to recognise the positives and reflect on these.

Please remember that your emotions are valid and no less important than anyone else's. Try to open up, share how you are thinking and feeling and try to connect with like-minded people and avoid withdrawing yourself from others.

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Here are our five top tips:

- 1 Keep talking**

Talk to your Line Manager and colleagues about how you are feeling about returning to work. They can't support you if they don't know how you are feeling. Make a plan.

- 2 Be kind**

The return to work process will be a learning curve for everyone. Colleagues, Line Managers and even you may not get it right the first time. Be patient and don't be hard on anyone and more importantly yourself.

- 3 Make a plan**

Making a return to work plan and agreeing the days you will need to be in the office with your Line Manager ahead of time can help you to put a structure in place. Knowing where you need to be and when helps to mitigate any chance for last minute arrangements, which may cause anxiety.

- 4 One step at a time**

The return to work plan is likely to change over the coming weeks and months as the spread of Covid-19 evolves. Try to avoid putting unrealistic pressures on yourself. Instead, create small goals that are manageable and achievable.

- 5 Build awareness**

Create time for regular check-ins with your colleagues. Ask questions like 'how am I really doing? How are you really coping? What's working well versus not working? How can I support the transition back to work for my colleagues and for myself?'

Being emotionally open and honest with ourselves as well with others can be quite a daunting prospect, but the more we practice the easier it becomes. When feeling vulnerable it can be very easy to feel like we are the only ones struggling, but sharing our emotions allows us to connect to others and build our support network.

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Take small steps

Allow yourself to take the time you need to readjust to the “new normal”. Your self-confidence and self-esteem might have dropped during lockdown when it comes to getting on public transport, meeting and socialising with new colleagues or being in a public space.

We are all different and will therefore need more or less time to adapt. This is absolutely normal and remember that research shows that it takes anywhere from 18 to 254 days for a new behaviour to become habitual.

Try not to rush into adjusting back to the old way of working, we are in a phase of ‘new normal’. Break things down into small tasks and communicate regularly with your colleagues and Line Manager about how you are feeling. Focus on what you can control and what you can impact - this will help reinforce mental wellbeing.

If you find that you are being hard on yourself, remember that these are unprecedented times, characterised by huge changes and extremely high levels of uncertainty. Whatever you are feeling in the face of all this is valid and understandable.

This is the perfect time to be kind to yourself and not rush into thinking you should be feeling or behaving a certain way. Take it one day at a time.

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Here are our 5 top tips:

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- 1** Take your time to readjust

 - 2** Don't put pressure on yourself to feel or do something

 - 3** Make a list of the things you can control

 - 4** Accept and let go of the things out of your control

 - 5** Make time for self-care routines



If you notice that you're struggling to cope by yourself, consider engaging in regular therapy sessions. There is no shame in asking for help and getting the support you need. InsideOut is on hand to help support you and your colleagues. Get in touch to find out how we can help via support@lettheinsideout.com.

Regardless of how challenging you may find this new phase, remember you are not alone and that we have been through very tough times recently. It's in times of difficulty that we are forced to tap into our inner resources, learn new skills, transform and grow. If you feel you need to, don't be ashamed of asking for help and seeking support from friends, family and mental health professionals.

Take care, be well and remember to **let the inside out.**

It's time to let the InsideOut!

InsideOut is a mental fitness and wellbeing platform providing 360 degree mental wellbeing support in the palm of your hand.



Happy, healthy employees

Open up mental health issues that may be a blocker to individual performance and business profitability.



InsideOut Education

Our workshops and courses open up the mental health conversation and empower employees to take an active lead in supporting the mental wellbeing of colleagues.



InsideOut Mental Fitness Survey

Allows you to gain a greater understanding into the mental wellbeing and health of your organisation. Armed with these valuable data insights you can ensure your wellbeing strategy meets the needs of your organisation.



InsideOut Mental Fitness Platform

Offers early intervention and preventative mental healthcare. Supported by leading academics and clinicians our evidenced based mental fitness tools provide employees with 360 degree mental health and wellbeing support anywhere, anytime, anyplace. Data insights and analytics help you make informed organisational decisions.

Platform options



Bespoke Package

Whether you're looking for a preventative mental fitness programme or early intervention talking therapies and coaching, we've got your back. We can tailor our platform's features to meet your needs.



Holistic Care

Health is holistic. All elements are interlinked. By addressing physical, mental, nutritional and financial health we empower employees to take control of their holistic wellbeing.



Personalised

Integrated interactive tools and exercises, personalised to the employees' needs help to minimise symptoms and prevent chances of relapse.



Evidence Based

We work with leading industry experts. Using a unique range of evidenced based, clinically backed interactive tools we cater for anyone wanting to improve or maintain their mental well-being.



References

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Anxiety UK, 2021

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Mental Health Foundation, 2020.

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To find out more about how InsideOut can help support your organisation or book a demo email Support@lettheinsideout.com