

Wellbeing trends 2023

Exploring health and wellbeing hot topics and search trends to help businesses get a head start on workplace wellbeing in 2023.

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About this report

“There are years when nothing happens and years in which centuries happen.”
— Carlos Fuentes

The UK ends 2022 as a nation gripped by uncertainty. After another year defined by instability and constant change, we’re witnessing a level of anxiety around health and wellbeing not experienced for decades.

But it’s also a period of rapid development with opportunities to harness this change and increase support in the communities in which we live and work.

In this report we explore emerging workplace trends and topics, including inclusive wellbeing support, the cost-of-living crisis, preventative healthcare and digital detoxing.

This report uses data from sources including the Office for National Statistics, the NHS, Google search trends and Westfield Health’s wellbeing surveys to investigate key wellbeing themes and help businesses get a head start on supporting their people throughout 2023.

Permacrisis

was the Collins English Dictionary Word of the Year for 2022.

It means:

An extended period of instability and insecurity, esp one resulting from a series of catastrophic events.



Opening up
drives inclusivity



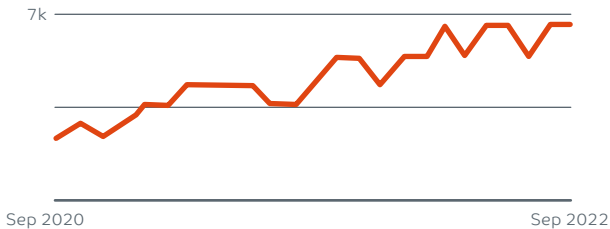
DEI takes centre stage

As searches for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) hit an all-time high, employees are looking for an authentic commitment to inclusive workplace support.

There's a growing understanding of what it means to be inclusive, as people seek to be recognised and supported for their differences. Topics in the spotlight include shared parental leave, the gender pay gap, disabled workers and religious practice. With DEI at the top of the agenda, HR teams across the country will be looking to reassess their workplace culture.

DEI

Google search trend over 24 months



Year-on-year search increases

- Paternity pay entitlement +127%
- Autism in the workplace +50%
- Unconscious bias in the workplace +50%

Removing the taboo around health conversations

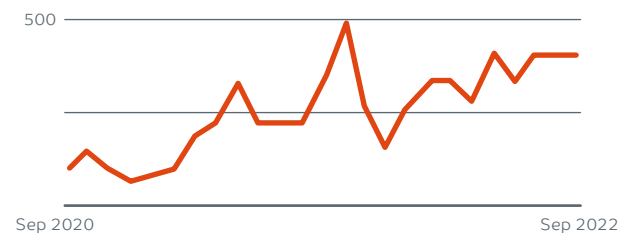
Topics such as gender identity, neurodiversity and the menopause have all hit the headlines in 2022. As awareness grows, workers are opening up about personal issues and asking for more support from their employer.

With our work and personal lives more blended than ever, managers will be expected to handle difficult conversations on topics that have previously been considered taboo.

And while these issues are often brought to our attention thanks to social media awareness days, employers need to be wary of virtue signalling and instead reflect on how they can foster genuine understanding and allyship at work.

Menopause in the workplace

Google search trend over 24 months



According to research by the [Fawcett Society](#), eight out of ten women say their employer hasn't shared information, trained staff or put in place a menopause absence policy. Search trends suggest a growing dialogue around this topic, putting pressure on businesses to take action and offer much-needed support.

39%

year-on-year increase in searches for 'neurodiversity in the workplace'.



Beyond awareness days: opening the dialogue around DEI

Vicky Walker, Group Director of People at Westfield Health, explains the importance of an open culture in improving inclusivity at work.



“ Inclusive workplaces help create an environment where individualism is celebrated and leaders value the unique experiences that each colleague brings to the team.

DEI policies should help people feel supported no matter who they are or how they work.

While unconscious bias training and social media awareness campaigns can educate employees on common DEI issues, it's important to look beyond the trends and find out what really matters to your people.

An inclusive workplace culture encourages open dialogue across the business, and managers provide an important link between colleagues and the boardroom. A coaching approach to management, including regular 1:1s, can help people feel comfortable speaking up so team leaders can act in the best interest of the individuals on their team.

This knowledge will allow decision makers to make changes that address the real challenges that colleagues are facing. Some first steps might include:

- Revisiting your company values and setting goals to help make DEI a core priority across the organisation.
- Creating a DEI working group so colleagues can get their voices heard and drive change in a safe space.
- Trialing a blind recruitment process with emphasis on matching candidates' values rather than specific qualifications or characteristics.
- Reviewing your flexible working policy to allow employees to work in a way that suits their individual needs, increasing equity in the workplace. This should also include a strategy to help remote workers feel included from afar.

”

Financial wellbeing



219%

increase in hot water bottle sales at John Lewis.



Financial crisis hits health and wellbeing hard

The cost-of-living crisis is now a key area of concern for the UK public having a significant impact on both mental and physical health. Last year's wellbeing trends report included [ONS data](#) showing a cost of living increase for 62% of UK adults — this year that figure has risen to 93%.

Research from the [BACP](#) found that two thirds (66%) of therapists say cost of living concerns are causing a decline in people's mental health, and 61% of therapists say their clients are anxious about whether they can afford to pay their household bills.

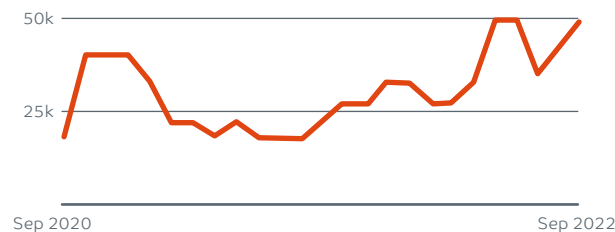
Behavioural trends also demonstrate the real-life impact of the cost-of-living crisis. Google searches for 'food bank' have more than doubled since last year, reaching their highest level since the first lockdown, and sales of hot water bottles and heated blankets have skyrocketed as people look for ways to save money by 'heating the human not the home'.

Year-on-year search increases

- Cost of living +4,555%
- Interest rates +1,010%
- Recession +511%

Food bank

Google search trend since September 2020



Businesses risk losing top talent

Workers are increasingly looking for financial support from their employer, but limited budget for salary reviews is driving talented workers to look for better pay elsewhere.

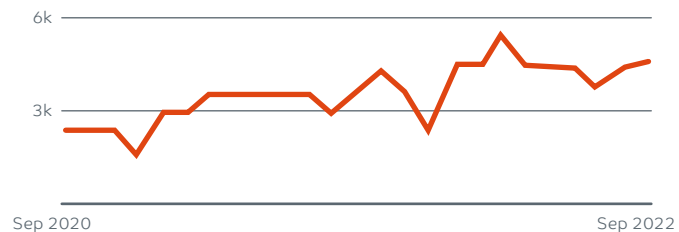
While some businesses are offering support in the form of cashback schemes, financial advice or one-off payments, workers are likely to lose patience as they face the reality of higher mortgage rates and increased energy bills.

If salaries don't keep up with inflation, the risk for employers is that their top talent will leave in search of better compensation elsewhere.

At a time when businesses are tightening the purse strings, the cost of recruitment — around £3,000 per hire — could pose a serious threat to the bottom line.

How to ask for a pay rise

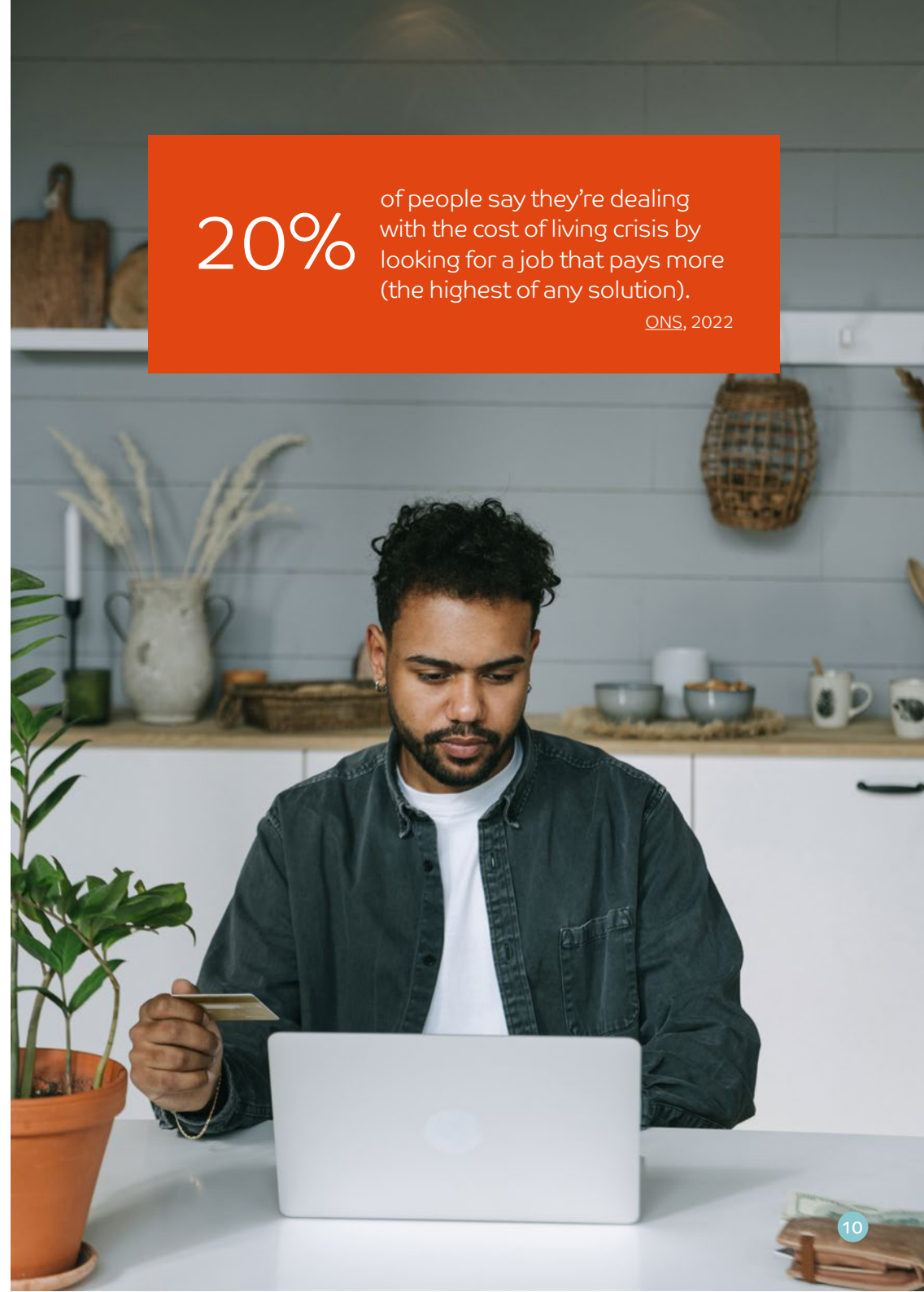
Google search trend over two years



20%

of people say they're dealing with the cost of living crisis by looking for a job that pays more (the highest of any solution).

ONS, 2022



Preventative health support



Ditching fitness fads

With health information at our fingertips, our focus is shifting away from quick fixes and towards a more holistic, whole-of-life approach.

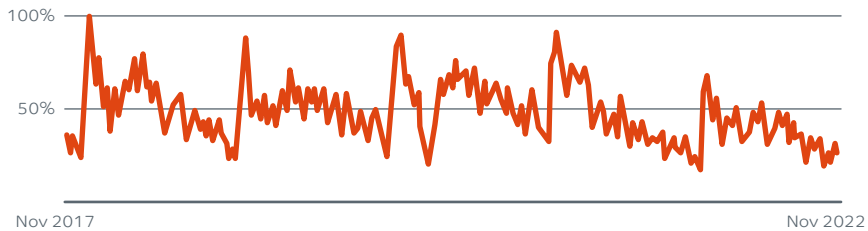
While the nation is moving on from Covid-19 and leaving many pandemic behaviours behind, our interest in health education shows no sign of slowing down.

Search trends suggest we're less interested in fad diets and get-fit-quick routines — instead choosing to focus on making meaningful, lasting lifestyle changes.

For employers, this attitude shift means workers are now expecting support for their health-conscious choices in the workplace. Whether it's lunchtime gym classes, healthy food options or a standing desk setup, our increased understanding of wellbeing means we want to be proactive about our health both in and outside of work.

Dieting

Google search trend over five years

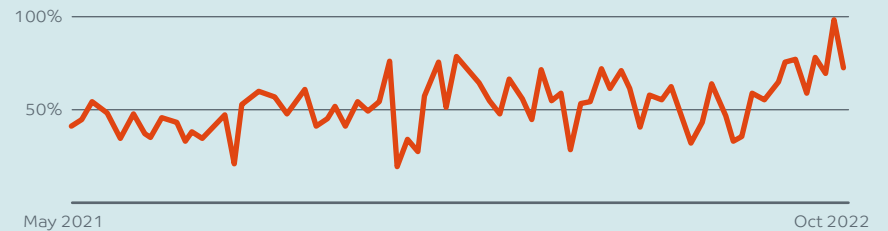


Searches for **functional fitness** hit an all-time high in September 22.



Health science

Google search trend over 18 months



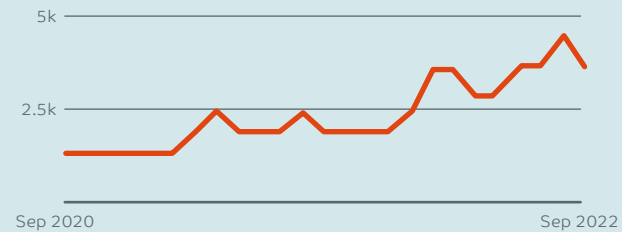


39%

of NHS patients referred by a consultant had not received treatment within 18 weeks. (August 2022)

NHS waiting times

Google search trend over 24 months



Prioritising peace of mind

With the aftermath of the pandemic comes an increased worry about how we can support our future health. Google searches for ‘NHS waiting times’ continue to rise, fuelling anxiety around access to healthcare in the UK.

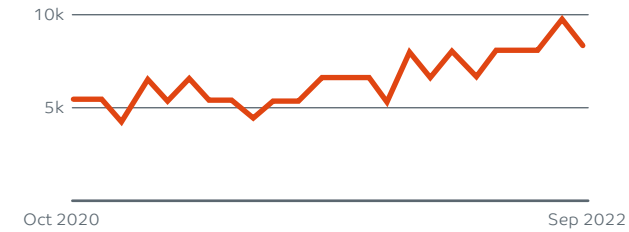
This lack of trust in the NHS is now driving people to put their own preventative measures in place.

Searches for private medical insurance have almost doubled since 2020, as people look for peace of mind in the face of uncertainty. In fact, the average age of new health insurance policyholders has decreased by 24% in the past five years, suggesting that we’re increasingly concerned about preventing poor health before it becomes a reality.

Sales of health cash plans are also on the up, as people look to save money on their routine healthcare and ease the cost of going private for dental, optical and therapy treatments.

Private medical insurance

Google search trend over 24 months



Combating long-term sickness

The number of people on long-term sick is on the rise, with long Covid, musculoskeletal issues and mental health proving particularly challenging.

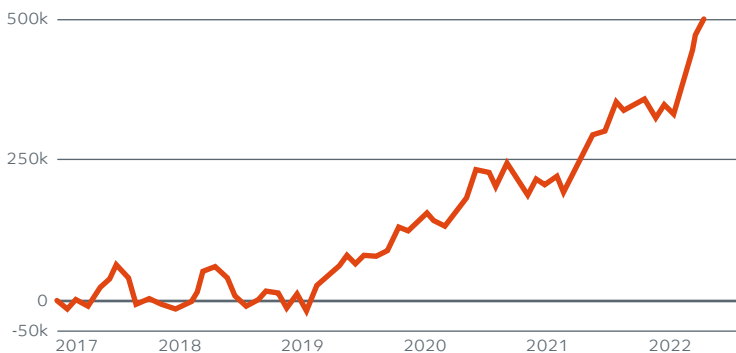
ONS results reveal that the number of people out of work and reporting problems with their back or neck rose by 31% between 2019 and 2022, while mental illness and nervous disorders rose by 22%.

These findings raise questions around the long-term impact of homeworking and the difficulty in providing remote support. But there's hope that increased awareness is starting to drive more proactive solutions, with **68%** of people saying the pandemic has made employers more aware of mental health.

'Human and ergonomic factors' has been a trending topic this year as we look beyond the standard DSE assessment towards a more effective, human-centred solution to chronic pain.

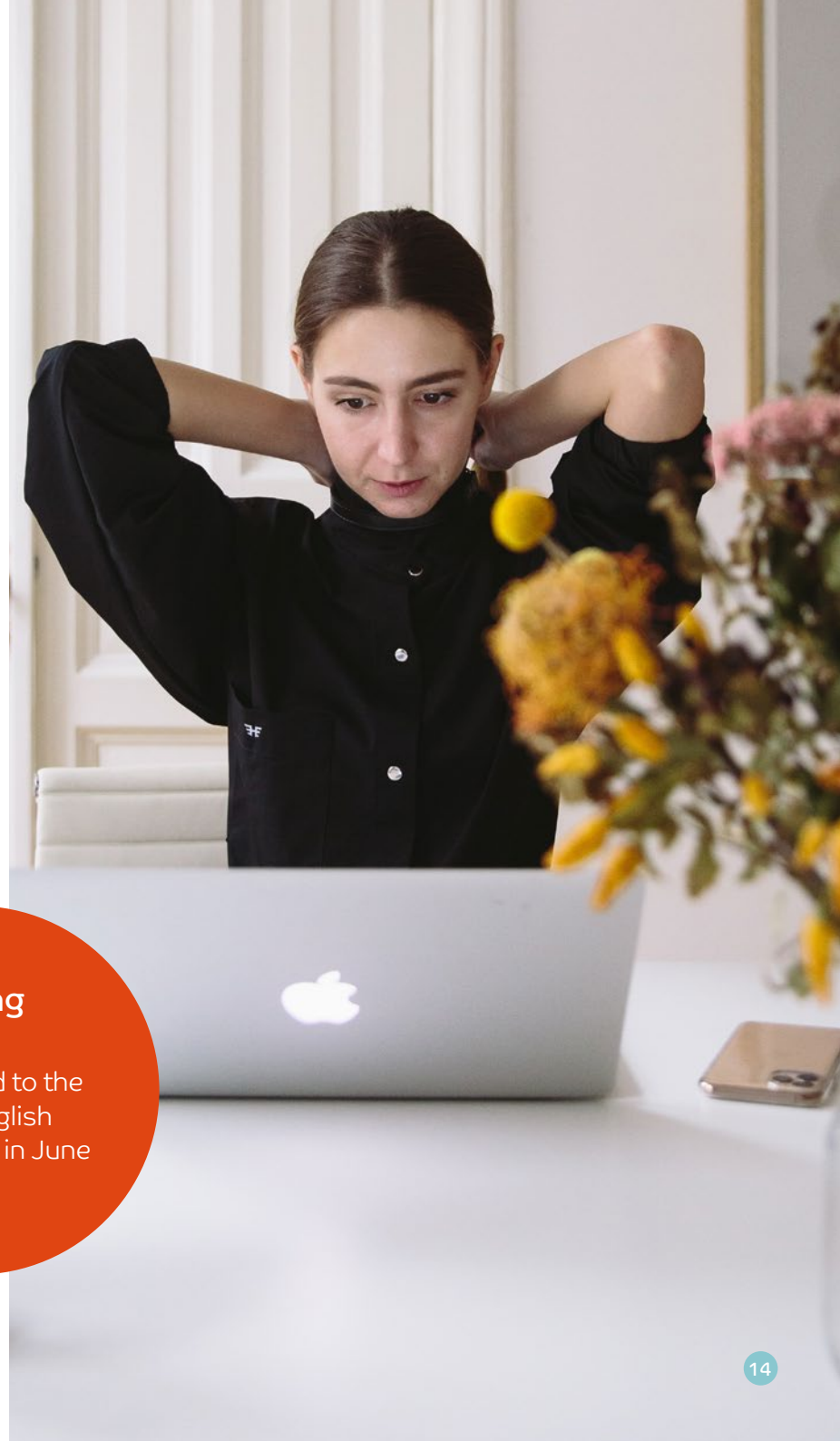
Long-term sickness

Cumulative change in number of people out of the labour market due to long-term sickness — ONS



'Standing desk'

was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in June 2022.





Embracing tech vs digital detox

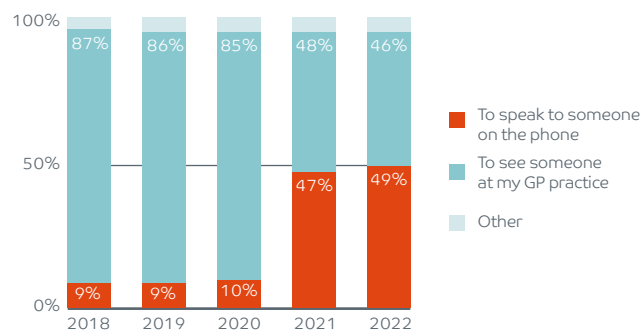
Telehealth is here to stay

The pandemic has sparked a healthcare renaissance, forcing existing services to go digital and accelerating the adoption of telephone GP appointments, virtual fitness classes and online counselling.

This behaviour change appears to be a lasting one — as we enter 2023, almost half (49%) of GP booking are [telephone appointments](#), suggesting a permanent shift in healthcare processes.

NHS appointment types

“What type of appointment did you get?”



While technology is making access to healthcare more convenient, the lasting impact on consumer behaviour is yet to be seen, as tech companies compete to carve out their space in this fast-changing market.



49% of GP bookings are telephone appointments.

49% of people are registered for an online service at their GP, up from 19% in 2017.

83% increase in searches for Boots online pharmacy.

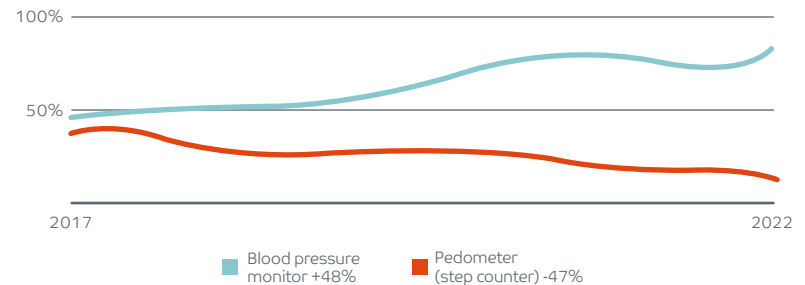


Digital goes deeper

Worldwide sales of Fitbits fell by around 50% between 2016 and 2022. But trends suggest that rather than ditching the digital tech, people are looking for a more in-depth view of their health than our current wearables can offer.

Health tracking products

Google search trend over five years

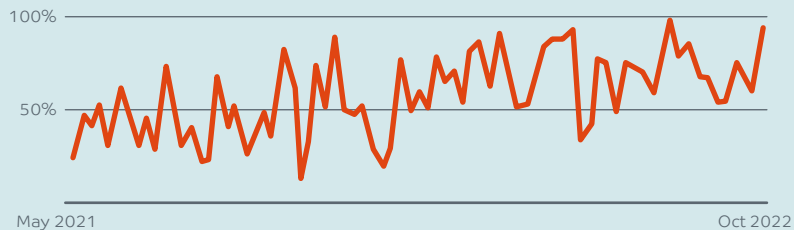


Google trends suggest that people are using personalised health tracking as a more meaningful way to monitor their wellbeing. This includes looking beyond step counters (-47%) towards more in-depth measures such as blood pressure (+48%), cholesterol (+21%) and glucose monitoring (+17%).

DNA genetic health testing service 23andMe saw a 174% increase in search volume in 2022, as people look for personalised data that helps them take charge of their health.

Digital health

Google search trend over 17 months



The future of remote work

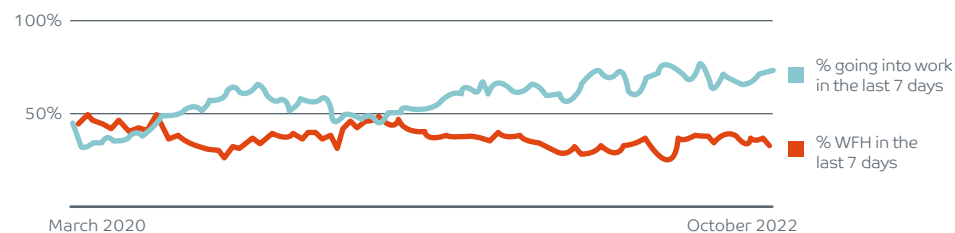
Almost three years since WFH went mainstream, the practicalities of home and hybrid working continue to evolve. While some organisations strive to make their virtual office visions a reality, others are calling for an end to the work from home ‘experiment’ and demanding employees work on site full time.

Even pre-pandemic, the tech sector had been driving innovation in remote working, as leaders looked for creative solutions to help employees work together even when they’re apart. In recent months we’ve seen everything from coffee break Slack channels to virtual offices built in the Metaverse.

25% increase in searches for ‘virtual office’ in 2022.

Working from home vs going in

Have you WFH or gone into work at some point in the last 7 days? (ONS)



Despite calls for a return to the office, our recent [research](#) found that flexible working remains the most coveted employee benefit, suggesting that remote opportunities are as appealing as ever.

With labour shortages plaguing the UK job market and many high-profile employers continuing with a remote-first approach, employees are likely to vote with their feet to find the working style that suits them best.

Time to switch off?

After two years of digital overload, the pandemic tech bubble is starting to deflate. In its place emerges a pushback against ‘always on’ culture, as people look to log off and take a more relaxed approach.



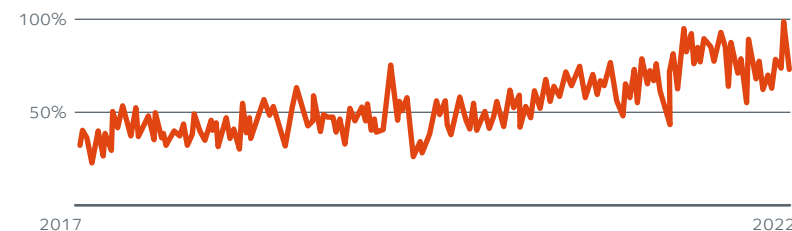
Google searches for the term ‘soft living’ saw a 600% year-on-year increase in 2022, with interest peaking in September.



The Oxford English Dictionary revised their [entry](#) on stress, adding new definitions for stress reliever, stress disorder and stress bunny.

Occupational burnout

Google search trend over five years



With Covid, the Russia-Ukraine war and the cost-of-living crisis dominating the headlines, the workforce is going through a period of shared cumulative stress. And it’s no surprise that people are looking for some respite in their daily routines.

[Quiet quitting](#) hit the headlines in September, highlighting the prevalence of disengaged employees who prefer to do the minimum required in their role. Around the same time we saw a social trend around ‘soft life’ — a lifestyle designed around minimal stress, self-care and easy living.

This need to disconnect found its way into our workplaces in the form of designated quiet hours, ‘no meeting’ days and the four-day working week. As we enter 2023, employers must monitor the impact of stress on their people with an awareness that online-only solutions might alienate those who are desperate to switch off.

Links and resources

[NHS Live Well](#)

Advice, tips and tools to help you make the best choices about your health and wellbeing.

[Money and Mental Health](#)

An independent charity partnering with numerous mental health and financial services providers.

[CIPD — Equity, diversity and inclusive at work advice](#)

Learn how to promote equal opportunities and manage equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

[ONS — Is hybrid working here to stay?](#)

How have our working styles changed since the pandemic, and what will business as usual look like in the future?

Our resources

[Workplace wellbeing resource centre](#)

A collection of our free downloads, including reports, guides and factsheets for employers and employees.

[Looking after your wellbeing in the cost-of-living crisis](#)

Our free guide explains how to make your wellbeing a priority while dealing with financial difficulty.

[Mental Health First Aider \(MHFAider®\) courses](#)

Certified training courses to help employees support each other with their mental health.

[Health Calendar](#)

Our ready-made wellbeing engagement programme helps employees stay healthy, feel fitter and work better.





Get in touch today

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[Request a call back](#)

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