

**Work for yourself? Look after yourself!**

**A self employed and small business owner’s guide to health and wellbeing**

Logo, Medway Healthy Workplaces

 

## **Introduction**

Government figures estimate that as many as 3 in 10 people are self-employed. Many people who are employed get help and support for their health and wellbeing through their workplace but those who are self-employed may not have access to similar support. This guide has been put together by the Kent and Medway Healthy Workplaces Team to support and guide our self-employed residents and businesses with their health and wellbeing.

We all know that health is important. The sayings “Health is wealth,” and “You are what you eat” are familiar to us all. Evidence shows that being healthy in our 40s and 50s makes us twice as likely to enter retirement in good health. We all work for many years, and none of us want to finally reach retirement in poor health. However, health is not just for the future, but for now too. Every part of your life relies on you having good health and wellbeing, your ability to live, work and support your family.

Source: One You campaign (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities)

**Have an NHS Health Check**

The NHS Health Check is a health check-up for adults in England aged 40 to 74. It's designed to spot early signs of stroke, kidney disease, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, or dementia. As we get older, the risk of developing one of these conditions increases. An NHS Health Check helps find ways to lower this risk. Checking your heart health, high blood pressure and cholesterol can help you to make lifestyle changes and keep on track with your health. Find out if you are eligible for a health check at <https://www.healthcheck.nhs.uk/>

**Heart Health**

Think of your heart as your engine. Just as your car needs the right fuel, your heart needs the right things to work well. Maintaining a healthy weight, eating a balanced diet, keeping active, managing stress, and getting fresh air will all help to keep your heart healthy.

Heart disease is caused when the arteries (blood vessels) that carry the blood around your body get blocked with plaque. Plaque is caused by a build-up of saturated fat, cholesterol, calcium, and cellular waste. Lifestyle habits such as smoking weaken the arteries and high blood pressure can then damage them making it easier for the plaque to build up. Aside from smoking, high blood pressure and high cholesterol other factors that make heart disease more likely include having diabetes, being overweight, lack of exercise and family history.

Source: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) Accessed July 2022

**How can I help my heart health?**

**Check your blood pressure**

Around one third of adults have high blood pressure. High blood pressure rarely has any symptoms which is why it is called the ‘silent killer.’

Blood pressure is measured in millimetres of mercury (mmHg) using a simple machine. When you have it measured it will be written as two numbers, a top number (systolic), and a bottom number (diastolic). For example, if your reading is 120/80mmHg, your blood pressure is 120 over 80.

Ideally, we should all have a blood pressure reading between 90/60mmHg and 120/80mmHg. You are likely to be diagnosed with high blood pressure (hypertension) if your readings are consistently 140/90mmHg or higher over a number of weeks. This is the cut-off point many GPs use for diagnosing high blood pressure. You might also have high blood pressure if just one of the numbers is higher than it should be – so if the top number is over 140mmHg or the bottom number is over 90mmHg.

A single high reading doesn’t necessarily mean you have high blood pressure, as many things can affect your blood pressure throughout the day, and it could just be a one-off. If you have a high reading, your doctor or nurse will want to see if it stays high over time before diagnosing high blood pressure. The only way to know you have the condition is to get your blood pressure measured. Many pharmacies will do this for you, or you can ask at your GP surgery. You can also buy blood pressure monitors to use at home if you prefer. If you are aged between 40 and 74 years old and have not had an NHS Health Check in the last five years, and do not have certain pre-existing medical conditions such as heart disease, kidney disease or type 2 diabetes, an NHS Health Check will also include a blood pressure check for you.

Source: <https://www.bloodpressureuk.org/your-blood-pressure/understanding-your-blood-pressure/> Accessed August 2022

**Moving More for Better Health- Physical Activity**

Being active is good for your body and mind. We can all find enjoyable ways to move more which easily fit into our daily routine. Whatever your age, shape, or size, being physically active can help you lead a healthier and happier life.

The benefits to becoming more active are endless. Some benefits include:

* Improved mood
* Improved sleep
* Improved weight management
* Improved energy levels
* Improved fitness, strengthen and stamina
* Improved self confidence
* Reduced risk of long-term conditions such as diabetes and heart disease

**Top Tips for Becoming More Active!**

It's easy to move more and doing something is better than nothing. Start small and build up gradually – just 10 minutes at a time can be good for you! Just a few small changes can make a big difference to your life and how you feel. Why not make a start today? It's never too late.

* Use the stairs instead of a lift or escalator
* Get off the bus one stop earlier
* Park further away from your destination
* Aim to get up from your desk every hour at work
* Ask a friend to do a weekly walk with you
* Walk while you are talking on your mobile
* Change the channel on your TV without the remote
* Do extra housework or gardening

There are so many opportunities to become more active in Kent and Medway. For a full list of everything on offer please visit the Everyday Active Website:

<https://www.everydayactivekent.org.uk/>

**Sitting is the new smoking- ‘standing up to our sedentary culture’**

In the UK, the average person spends about 70% of their day seated. Recent research shows that sitting as little as 2 hours continuously can increase the risk of various health issues such as heart disease, diabetes, muscle, and joint pain and even some cancers.

Even if you exercise every day, you are still at risk of various health complications if you spend the majority of your waking hours seated. When we sit all day, we simply don’t move enough for good health. Try reducing your sedentary behaviour by moving more at home and at work. Try creating a workstation that encourages movement and changes in position throughout the day and try to find other activities to do at home in the evenings rather than watching TV.

**Top tips to reduce sedentary behaviour**

* Stand during phone calls/video calls at work
* Stand and take a break from your computer every 30 mins
* Use the stairs rather than escalator or lift
* Have standing or walking meetings at work
* Try to reduce screen time at home
* Stand at the back of the room during presentations/conferences
* Get into the habit of going for a short walk after work in the evenings.

For more tips on how to reduce sedentary behaviour and increase your activity levels offer please visit the Everyday Active Website:

<https://www.everydayactivekent.org.uk/>

**Healthy Diet**

Nutrition can have a positive impact on your physical and mental health – from supporting your immune system and helping you to manage stress, to aiding sleep and concentration. Eating the right amount of a wide variety of foods will support us to maintain a healthy body weight. Maintaining a healthy weight and making the right choices in what we eat can reduce the risk of common diseases and disorders such as obesity, coronary heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis, diabetes, dental disease, and certain types of cancer.

As adults we spend at least a third of our time at work, meaning we consume one or more meals and snacks during the working day. As a self-employed person this can be even more. Creating a healthier food environment can make an important contribution to the reduction of many diseases and maintaining a healthy body and mind.

Self-employed individuals often work from home or are out and about during the day, which can contribute to additional nutrition related challenges, including:

* Mindless eating – struggling to separate work and home life, or eating on the go
* Emotional eating – due to boredom, isolation, and stress when lone working
* Visual triggers causing overeating – being closer to food and having it more easily accessible

**Top Tips for Eating Well whilst Self Employed**

Some healthy eating tips to cover the basics of healthy eating and healthier choices are:

1. Base your meals on high fibre starchy carbohydrates – these should make up 1/3 of your plate
2. Eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day
3. Eat at least 2 portions of fish per week, including 1 portion of oily fish
4. Cut down on foods high in saturated fat and sugar
5. Aim for no more than 6g per day of salt
6. Try to maintain a healthy weight by not consuming more calories than you expend
7. Drink at least 6-8 glasses of water per day to stay hydrated
8. Try not to skip meals unless you have a medical reason for doing so
9. Cut down on red and processed meats, try to eat one portion per week maximum
10. Be sensible with alcohol and do not consume more than 14 units per week

Top tips to eat well as a self-employed individual/ home worker:

1. Prepare your meals in advance, even if working from home, and stick to a routine
2. Start the day with a breakfast that is high in protein and fibre to keep you full for longer
3. Before snacking, question whether you are *hungry* or if you are using food as a distraction
4. Try to choose healthy snacks such as pre-prepared vegetable sticks to nourish your body
5. Schedule breaks to eat meals away from your desk rather than when working
6. If possible, try to avoid working in the kitchen or places where food is visible
7. Manage your stress and try mindfulness activities such as walking or calling a friend
8. Eat a varied, balanced diet to ensure you are getting sufficient nutrients

**Diabetes Risk Management**

Currently, 13.6 million people in the UK are at risk of developing type 2-diabetes. Being overweight, having an unhealthy diet and being physically inactive are the most significant risk factors for developing type-2-diabetes. However certain lifestyle interventions such as sustaining weight loss and eating healthily can reduce the risk of developing type-2-diabetes by up to 50%. You could be more at risk of developing diabetes if your waist size is too large. As an indication of risk, for a healthy waist size, your measurement should be less than:

* 80cm (31.5in) for all women
* 94cm (37in) for most men
* 90cm (35in) for South Asian men

In addition, some top tips to reduce the risk of developing type-2-diabetes, includes:

* Choosing drinks without added sugar
* Choosing unsweetened yoghurt and cheese
* Getting vitamins and minerals from foods instead of tablets (unless you have specifically been told to take them)

**Signposting/ further information:**

* [A Better Medway](https://www.medway.gov.uk/homepage/48/a_better_medway)
* [One You Kent](https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/health/one-you-kent/healthy-weight)
* [The Eatwell Guide - GOV.UK](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide)
* [Eatwell Guide - NHS Live Well](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/)
* [BNF - Healthy Eating Workshops](https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/publications/health-at-work/health-at-work-healthy-eating-workshops)
* [Diabetes UK](https://www.diabetes.org.uk/)

Sources:

AXA Health. 2022 Accessed 8 August 2022

Medway.gov.uk. 2022. Accessed 8 August 2022

Nhs.uk. 2022. Eat well. Accessed 8 August 2022

Diabetes.org.uk. Accessed 8 August 2022

**Smoking**

It’s common knowledge that smoking is not good for us. Smoking causes almost 75,000 deaths a year and is the leading preventable cause of premature death. It’s also an expensive habit, so quitting is good for your health and your bank balance. Estimates show that quitting smoking would save the average smoker almost £2000 a year.

The local Stop Smoking Services are here to help when you are ready to quit and offer FREE information and advice. You are up to four times more likely to quit with support from a local stop smoking service than going it alone. You can even access help through your GP or local pharmacy. Even if you have tried before, why not give it another go!

Medway Stop Smoking Service: <https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200233/stop_smoking_support>

Call 01634 334800, or 0800 2346805 during office hours or text QUIT to 81025

**Checking your self**

Whilst prevention is better than cure, it’s also important to check ourselves over occasionally. Just as you would get your cars or van serviced regularly – your body should be no different! If we notice anything we aren’t sure about we can then get this checked. Early detection of health problems makes conditions easier to treat and more receptive to treatment.

**Skin Health**

Did you know that your skin is your largest organ? Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the UK. People who work outside, drive, have red or blonde hair and are fair skinned are more at risk of developing skin cancer.

Melanomas are less common than non-melanoma skin cancers but are one of the most dangerous types of skin cancer. They can develop from existing moles or appear as new marks on the skin. Follow the ABCDE of skin health and regularly check your skin and any moles you might have:

**A**symmetry – the two halves of the mole area have a different shape

**B**order – the edges of the area may be irregular or blurred, and sometimes show notches

**C**olour – this may be uneven and different shades of black, brown, and pink may be seen

**D**iameter – most melanomas are over 6mm in diameter

**E**volving – the mole or legion is new or growing.

Remember if in doubt, get it checked out.

You should also get any of the following checked:

* Scabs and sores that won’t heal
* A scaly or crusty patch of skin that is red or inflamed
* A flesh-coloured bump that won’t go away and grows in size
* A volcano like growth with a rim and central crater

These could be signs of non-melanoma skin cancer.

For more information visit <https://www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk>

Source: <https://www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk> and <https://screencancer.com/how-to-check-your-moles/> (Accessed August 2022)

**Self-Checking Guide for Men:**

Checking your testicles:

* Get to know how your testicles look and feel normally.
* Once a month, take a few minutes to check for any changes:
* The best time to check them is after a bath or shower
* Rest them in the palm of your hand, and gently roll each one between finger and thumb

It’s normal to have one testicle slightly bigger or hanging slightly lower than the other. Changes you might notice are a lump, increased size, hardness or pain and heaviness. If you notice something unusual don’t stew on it, contact your GP for advice. Problems are usually caused by something less serious that cancer but don’t leave it to chance.

Get more help from <https://www.testicularcanceruk.com/>

Prostate:

1 in 8 men will get prostate cancer. If you are over 50, black or have it in your family history you are at a higher risk. It’s not always life threatening but if it is, you are more likely to be cured when it is caught early. See you GP if you notice any of the following:

* difficulty starting to urinate or emptying your bladder
* a weak flow when you urinate
* a feeling that your bladder hasn’t emptied properly
* dribbling urine after you finish urinating
* needing to urinate more often than usual, especially at night
* a sudden need to urinate – you may sometimes leak urine before you get to the toilet.
* back pain, hip pain or pain in the pelvis
* problems getting or keeping an erection
* blood in urine or semen
* unexplained weight loss

Complete Prostate Cancer UK’s Risk Checker: <https://prostatecanceruk.org/risk-checker> or visit their website for more info: <https://prostatecanceruk.org/>

Source:

<https://prostatecanceruk.org/prostate-information/about-prostate-cancer/prostate-cancer-symptoms> (accessed August 2022)

<https://itsinthebag.org.uk/> (accessed August 2022)

**Self-Checking Guide for Women:**

Breasts:

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK and around two thirds of cases are preventable. Leading a healthy lifestyle can dramatically reduce your risks. It’s also important to check your breasts regularly so you can recognise when something is different and get any worries checked out.

* Check your breasts at the same time each month as hormones can change how they feel during the monthly cycle.
* Checking in the bath or shower can help
* Check your breast area starting from the nipple and working out in a spiral around the whole breast and under your armpits
* If you notice any swellings, dimples, inflamed areas, rashes, discharge from the nipple, lumps (moving or fixed) or changes in the nipple shape and size seek advice from your GP.

If you are aged over 50 and registered with a GP, you will be invited for an NHS Breast Screening every 3 years until the age of 71. You should get your first invite between the age of 50 and 53. This routine appointment will use X-rays to look for cancers that are too small to see or feel.

Cervical screening:

A cervical screen, sometimes called a smear test checks the health of your cervix (the opening of your womb). It’s not a test for cancer. It is a test to help prevent cancer. All women and people with a cervix will be invited between the ages of 25 and 64. The test is simple and easy and usually carried out by a nurse at your GP or sexual health clinic. Taking up your screening appointment can detect for the presence of a virus that is linked to cervical cancer and abnormal cells. Early detection can be treated and prevent cancer from occurring at a later date.

Other women’s health issues

Women’s health topics can be seen as taboo – even though half the population are female! Menstrual problems and gynaecological issues can cause both physical and mental health symptoms or add to existing conditions. Again, it’s always worth getting things checked and getting advice. Here are some useful links:

Period problems: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/periods/period-problems/>

PMDD: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/premenstrual-dysphoric-disorder-pmdd/about-pmdd/>

**Are you Menopause ready?**

Menopause is a complex stage of life. You might be thinking the menopause does not apply to me because you are too young or that you’ve already gone through the menopause.

Every woman and everyone with a female reproductive system who identifies as a man but hasn’t undergone any medical interventions will go through menopause eventually. This equates to 50% of the population. For too long the menopause has been a taboo subject and surrounded by myth and metaphor, and this needs to change.

So, what is the menopause?

The menopause is a biological change with health associated risks, where your periods stop due to lower hormones.  The average age in the UK for menopause is 51. You are considered post menopause when you have gone 12 months period free (over 50) or 2 years period free (under 50)

The menopause transition can happen between ages 45-55 but can happen before this. This is called premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency.

The years leading up to the menopause are called perimenopause and this transitional phase can last for up to ten years.

It’s during this time people can become confused about what is happening within their own bodies. As hormones start to fluctuate a variety of different symptoms can occur which you might not associate with the menopause transition. Menopause is not just about hot flushes!

These symptoms can include:

* insomnia
* fatigue
* brain fog
* increased anxiety and depression
* weight gain/inability to lose weight
* aches and pains including joint pain

Menopause can make people more at risk of osteoporosis, heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and dementia due to reduced levels of oestrogen and other hormone levels fluctuating.

Keeping active and fit at this point in life helps with dealing with symptoms and managing overall wellbeing.

Being physically active has so many other benefits during this transition:

* gives you time to make you a priority
* helps remove external distractions
* allows you to ne in the present moment/mindfulness
* improved sense of self-worth and confidence.
* greater health, happiness, and wellbeing from the physical, psychological, and social benefits that an active life brings.

Being physically active does not have to be boring! It’s not just about the gym. Find something that you enjoy and that brings you joy:

* a walk-in nature- forest bathing has been proven to reduce stress and anxiety
* nordic walking- tones your muscles and helps keep your bones strong
* pilates-improves posture and pelvic floor function
* yoga-promotes relaxation and aids sleep
* dance-improves co-ordination and agility

Check out the rest of the [Everyday active](https://www.everydayactivekent.org.uk/) website for some more ideas on physical activity options in your area or refer to the Move More section of this guide.

Useful links for menopause information:

* British Menopause Society: <https://thebms.org.uk>
* NICE Guidelines for Menopause: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>
* Menopause Support: <https://menopausesupport.co.uk>
* Menopause Matters: <https://www.menopausematters.co.uk>
* Nuffield Health: <https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/search?q=menopause>
* Menopause Doctor: <https://www.menopausedoctor.co.uk>
* Balance: <https://www.balance-menopause.com/>

**Alcohol**

Alcohol affects every organ in the body and cutting back can help improve your health, boost your energy, help you manage your weight and save money. Even a small reduction in the amount you drink will be beneficial.

It’s recommended to drink no more than 14 units a week. That’s around 6 pints of beer, or 6 glasses of wine. You should have at least 2 days a week where you don’t drink at all. There’s no completely safe level of drinking but following these guidelines lowers your risk of damage to your health.

The following tips can help you to cut down:

* Switch to lower level alcohol varieties or alcohol free versions
* Use an app, such as the [NHS Drink Free Days](https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/drink-less/) or [Try Dry](https://alcoholchange.org.uk/help-and-support/managing-your-drinking/dry-january/get-involved/the-dry-january-app) to monitor your drinking
* Try different social activities that don’t involve drinking alcohol
* Set a budget for alcohol and stick to it
* Say no occasionally
* Avoid rounds, they quickly mount up and you can end up drinking more than you planned
* Find other ways to relieve stress or boredom such as exercise or a new hobby
* Switch to soft drinks sometimes, or vary between soft and alcoholic

Source: NHS Better Health (accessed August 2022)

**Eye Health**

Half of sight loss cases are avoidable. Having regular eye tests can detect early signs of conditions such as glaucoma, as well as other health conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure. The Eye Care Trust give ten steps to healthy eyes:

1. Eat right for good sight

Eating a healthy balanced diet can reduce your risk of developing common eye conditions. Include lots of eye friendly nutrients found in many fruits and vegetables including spinach, red peppers, kale, leeks, avocado, peaches, and blueberries. Cold water fish such as sardines, mackerel and tuna are all excellent sources of DHA and Omega-3 fatty acids, which provide structural support to cell membranes in the eye and are recommended for dry eye, the treatment of macular degeneration and general sight preservation.

2. Exercise regularly

The eyes need oxygen to stay healthy and comfortable. Aerobic exercise can improve oxygen supply to the optic nerve and lower pressure in the eye. Exercise also helps to prevent the progression of diabetes, which in severe cases can affect eye health.

3. Get a good night’s sleep

A good night’s sleep can help keep your eyes feeling bright and refreshed. Lack of sleep and fatigue can lead to your eyes becoming sore, irritated, puffy, red, and bloodshot. If you have had a bad night, placing a cold compress over your eyes for 10 minutes can help to refresh them.

4. Don’t smoke

Smokers have a significantly higher risk of eye disease than non-smokers. According to research published by the RNIB smokers are twice as likely to lose their sight in later life than non-smokers.

Tobacco chemicals damage the blood vessels behind your eyes and increase your risk of developing age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

5. Use goggles to protect your eyes

According to the British Safety Council, nearly a quarter of a million of us will injure our eyes every year. Make sure you wear your protective eye wear at work, and at home when undertaking DIY and certain tasks. If you drive, make sure you have regular eye tests and wear any glasses needed for driving. It can also help to wear sunglasses if you spend large amounts of time driving in bright weather.

6. Limit the amount of alcohol that you drink

Drinking too much alcohol interferes with your liver functions reducing the levels of glutathione, which is an efficient antioxidant that can help protect against common eye disease.

7. Protect your eyes against the damaging effects of UV light

Excessive exposure to the sun’s UV rays can lead to a sunburn-like condition called photokeratitis. This can be extremely painful and make your eyes red, swollen, and watery. The symptoms of photokeratitis (an inflammation of the outer layer of the cornea), typically occur after 6 – 12 hours exposure and will normally clear up quickly causing no permanent damage to the eye.

However, the damaging effects of ultraviolet (UV) are cumulative and over a long period your risk of developing cataracts and other age-related conditions increases significantly. Ensure that your sunglasses filter AT LEAST 99 per cent of UVA and UVB light and look out for the CE or BS EN 1836:1997 marks when choosing your sunglasses.

8. Watch your weight

Maintaining a healthy weight helps to preserve macular pigment density which, protects the retina against the breakdown of cells and the onset of age-related macular degeneration (AMD). Damage to blood vessels in the eye caused by excess body weight has also been linked to the onset of glaucoma and diabetes.

9. Drink plenty of water

The human body is made up of 70 per cent water. Water is essential to the normal working of the body and for keeping your eyes healthy. Dehydration can lead to dry, sore, and irritated eyes. The Food Standards Agency recommends that you drink approximately 1.2 litres (6-8 glasses) of water every day and more when you exercise or if the weather is hot.

10. Have regular eye examinations

It is recommended that you have an eye examination once every two years unless advised otherwise by your optometrist. An eye examination will not only detect problems with your vision, but it can also uncover other underlying health problems.

An eye examination really is an essential health check and helps to keep you and your eyes healthy. Find an optician near you by visiting the NHS [website.](https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-an-optician)

This information has been provided by the [Eye Care Trust](http://www.eyecaretrust.org.uk). The Eyecare Trust is a registered charity that exists to raise awareness of all aspects of ocular health, the importance of regular eye care and good eye wear.

**Mental Wellbeing and Stress**

What’s going on in our mind has a huge impact on our health and wellbeing. The stresses and strains of modern life, financial pressures, business issues, relationship breakdown, family situations and house moves can take their toll, and not just on our mental health too. Our mental and physical health are linked so looking after our minds is good for our bodies and vice versa.

Excess stress can damage our immune systems, affect our heart health, increase our risk of serious health problems, and reduce life expectancy. Managing our stress can alleviate these risks and help us better navigate challenging times. The Five Ways to Wellbeingare an evidence-based set of principles used to manage stress. Adding as many of these into our weekly activities can help boost our mood, our self-esteem and capacity in dealing with challenges, helping us to manage stress better:

**Be Active** – keeping physically active releases endorphins (feel good hormones) which alleviate stress

**Connect** – a problem shared is a problem halved, as the saying goes. Connecting with friends and family gives us a sense of social value and belonging.

**Give** – giving of ourselves to each other, the wider community, looking after our environment, getting involved in community causes all gives us a sense of wellbeing and purpose

**Keep Learning** –learning is good for the mind. It switches our mind from our stresses and stops us ruminating over the same thoughts. Giving a mind a break help manage stresses and learning a new skill or hobby provides a great sense of achievement.

**Take Notice** – this involves notice of the small details around you, the changes in the seasons, nature, activities in the here and now. Mindfulness based practices are proven to help manage stress, for example doing something with your hands and concentrating on it such as a craft or DIY activity.

In addition to the Five Ways to Wellbeing, eating well and giving ourselves time to rest and get enough sleep also benefit our mental wellbeing.

**Stress**

You, or those close to you might notice your stress signature. We all have particular ways that stress affects us. Think of it as your body’s warning lights letting you know things are getting too much. You might notice some of the following:

Feelings:

* irritable or impatient
* overwhelmed/thoughts racing
* nervous, anxious, or afraid
* lack of interest in things you enjoy
* cynical
* depressed
* self-doubt
* feeling helpless, trapped and/or defeated
* neglected, lonely or detached

Physically:

* difficulty sleeping and fatigue
* muscle tension and headaches
* blurred eyesight or sore eyes
* grinding your teeth or clenching your jaw
* shallow breathing, hyperventilating or panic attacks
* chest pains
* high blood pressure
* indigestion or heartburn
* constipation or diarrhoea

Behaviour:

* difficulty making decisions and concentrating
* constantly worrying
* procrastination or avoiding situations
* snapping at people
* biting your nails, picking at your skin
* eating too much or too little
* smoking or drinking alcohol more than usual
* restless, and being unable to sit still
* being tearful or crying

If you notice these things in others regularly, check in with them. If you notice them in yourself, it’s an indication that things are getting too much, and you need to look after yourself or seek some support.

Find out more about managing your stress at [NHS Every Mind Matters](https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/).

If you need support and live or work in Kent and Medway, you can contact the Release the Pressure helpline, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year: 0800 107 0160, text the word **Kent** or **Medway** to 85258 or visit www.[releasethepressure.uk](http://www.releasethepressure.uk)

If you or someone you know is in crisis and in need of urgent help, contact 0800 783 9111.

**Sleep**

Many of us will have the odd bad night’s sleep from time to time. However, when this happens regularly it can have a detrimental impact on our physical and mental wellbeing. Signs of sleep deprivation include irritability, fatigue, depression, moodiness, forgetfulness, trouble concentrating, either poor or increased appetite, becoming more accident prone and experiencing reduced motivation levels.

In the longer-term poor sleep can also increase the risk of osteoporosis, lower our immune systems, interrupt hormone levels, and impair our cognitive functioning. It can also increase the risk of developing conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and dementia.

Following some top tips can help us to improve our sleep, and in turn look after our wellbeing:

1. Have a routine – just like babies and small children sticking to a regular pattern especially on working days will give your body cues that it’s time for sleep
2. Exercise – regular moderate exercise is the most effective treatment for disturbed sleep without using medication
3. Environment – make sure your bedroom is dark enough and aim for a room temperature of 18 to 24C. Making the room quiet and checking the age of your mattress and pillows will also help
4. Caffeine and Alcohol – cut down on caffeine, especially in the evening. It can take up to six hours to wear off. Alcohol might help you to feel sleepy, but it can prevent you from getting enough deep sleep. We need deep sleep to restore our minds and bodies.
5. Nicotine – smokers take longer to fall asleep and wake up more frequently than non-smokers. Quitting is good for your sleep health too!
6. Reduce screen time – try to aim for 1 to 2 hours of screen free time before bed or use a blue light filter. Only view relaxing content. Blue light from devices interrupt our sleep hormones.
7. Write it down – write down worries or your to do list before going to bed.
8. Wind down – allow time to relax and unwind. If you struggle to get to sleep, get up and move to another room but aim to relax and avoid bright lights and screen time.

**Money Worries**

Financial pressures can add to our stresses and strains. Lower mental wellbeing can make managing money harder and worrying about money can make your mental health worse. If you are having worries in this area there are lots of sources of support:

* [Citizens Advice: what coronavirus means for you (England and Wales)](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/health/coronavirus-what-it-means-for-you/)
* [GOV.UK: coronavirus support for employees, benefit claimants and businesses](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-support-for-employees-benefit-claimants-and-businesses)
* [Mental Health and Money Advice](https://www.mentalhealthandmoneyadvice.org/en/)
* [Mind: money and mental health](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/money-and-mental-health)
* [Money Advice Service: debt advice](https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/tools/debt-advice-locator)

NHS Every Mind Matters 8 top tips for coping with money worries is also a great place to start. The 8 tips are:

1. Create a budget

2. Get free debt and finance advice

3. Know your rights and get support

4. Talk about how you are feeling

5. Be kind to yourself

6. Create and stick to a routine

7. Clear your mind

8. Look after your physical health

Visit https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/coronavirus/coping-with-money-worries-and-job-uncertainty-during-covid-19/ to read more about each tip and for further advice.

If your worries are business related, your local chamber of commerce, economic development team or bank manager might be able to help with advice and support.

We have a financial wellbeing and cost of living resource to support people in this area. To receive a copy, please email [workplacehealth@medway.gov.uk](mailto:workplacehealth@medway.gov.uk)

**Healthy Smile (Dental Health)**

Taking care of the mouth, teeth and gums is important for complete health and well-being as a poorly cared for mouth can have many negative consequences on the body.

A mouth that is kept healthy will enable you to:

* Eat and drink a wide variety of foods and drinks to maintain a well-balanced diet keeping you nourished and hydrated
* Talk and be understood, smile, laugh and socialise with others which is important for our mental health and well-being, and for forming relationships at work and in personal life allowing us to feel valued and accepted
* Have a life free from pain or embarrassment caused by tooth decay, gum disease or bad breath
* Save money by lessening the costs of dental treatments
* The health of the mouth will also affect chronic conditions that many people live with including.
  + - diabetes
    - kidney disease
    - cardiovascular disease
    - asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
    - dementia
    - healthy pregnancies

The best way to look after your mouth is to have a regular daily toothbrushing routine and to limit the amount and frequency of sugar intakes.

Plaque accumulates on the teeth and gums daily and needs to be physically removed with a toothbrush and paste. Plaque bacteria produce acids and toxins which are the main cause of tooth decay, gum disease and mouth odours.

Top tips:

* Brush at least twice every day; last thing at night and at one other time during the day, usually in the morning
* Use a Fluoride toothpaste containing 1450 parts per million fluoride (ppm) (This will be listed in the ingredients).
* Use a toothbrush with a compact head of medium-textured bristles, you can use either a manual or electric toothbrush
* Brush all surfaces of each tooth carefully including the gum edges, you may want to brush your tongue too
* Spit out after brushing is complete and do not rinse out as this reduces the effectiveness of the fluoride – spit don’t rinse
* Cleaning between the teeth is also important, use small interdental brushes, dental floss, or tape, ideally once a day
* Mouth washes will not remove plaque but can be used at a different time from brushing to freshen the mouth and breath

Many adults have early-stage gum disease which is generally painless. The first sign is seeing blood when you spit out after brushing, an area of the gum tissue may be slightly red and puffy too. It is usually caused by not brushing the gum edges where they meet the teeth or in the areas between the teeth, allowing the plaque to irritate the soft gum tissue

* Continue to gently brush any areas that bleed every time to clean the mouth and use interdental brushes or floss for between the teeth
* Antibacterial mouth washes can help you control gum disease but only use them for a limited time if brushing is painful
* If you smoke it will increase the risk of you having gum disease and masks the early warning signs of bleeding. The chance of your teeth becoming loose is increased the longer you smoke and have prolonged gum disease
* If you have diabetes and do not control your sugar levels well you are more likely to experience gum disease, and treatment/ control is less effective
* Some medications can affect gum health as they cause a ‘dry mouth’ or swelling of the gum tissue, you can ask our pharmacy for advice
* Pregnancy can cause gum disease due to hormonal changes

Source: <https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/related-conditions/common-> [symptoms/bleeding-gums/](https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/related-conditions/common-symptoms/bleeding-gums/)

The more times in the day that sugary foods and drinks are consumed, the higher the risk of the teeth becoming decayed. The saliva in our mouth is normally neutral but when sugars are eaten or drunk it increases the acidity and over time the tooth enamel begins to lose minerals and strength, eventually causing it to breakdown and the tooth will decay.

* Try to reduce the amount and number of times you have foods and drinks that contain sugars, no more than four times a day is advised
* Keeping sugars to mealtime eating/drinking is best when other foods can help reduce mouth acidity.
* Snacking or grazing on foods that contain sugar increase the risk of tooth decay
* Avoid having sugar-sweetened drinks between meals, such as fizzy drinks, fruit juices, smoothies, squashes, or energy drinks which are very high in sugars
* Drink water between meals and as a regular habit to stay hydrated
* Try to cut down on the amount of sugar you add to hot drinks or foods, try reducing it gradually by half a teaspoon at a time and you probably will not notice the difference
* Avoid having sugary foods and drinks just before bedtime as the saliva flow in the mouth slows down during sleep, increasing the risk of tooth decay

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-teeth-and-gums/> <https://www.dentalhealth.org/your-oral-and-dental-health>

**Mouth Cancer**

Many people are unaware that cancer can occur in the mouth, but it can affect anyone although some groups are at a higher risk

* Smoking, tobacco use (such as shisha, chewing tobacco and gutkha), and drinking alcohol in excess are the leading causes of mouth cancer
* The combined effect of drinking alcohol and using tobacco multiplies the risk of developing mouth cancer
* Around a third of mouth cancers are linked to an unhealthy diet which is lacking in antioxidants found in fruit and vegetables
* Human Papillomavirus (HPV) which can be transmitted through oral sex and is a major cause of the rise in mouth cancer in recent years
* Cancers of the tongue make up a third of all mouth cancers and cause 28% of all mouth cancer deaths
* The risk increases as we age and men over the age of 40 are a higher-risk group and are less likely to see a dentist regularly

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/mouth-cancer/>

[http https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/head-and-](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/toothache/) [neck-cancer/mouth-cancers://www.nhs.uk/conditions/toothache/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/toothache/)

<https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/mouth-cancer>

**Visiting the dentist**

Regular dental check-ups are important to maintain the health of your mouth, teeth, and gums. The dentist can spot any early signs of disease and provide treatment. The dentist will check for gum disease and the early signs of mouth cancers too

Although the Covid pandemic has caused a shortage of NHS dental appointments it is important to try to find a dentist even if you are put on a waiting list initially

* Telephone NHS Helpline 111 or Kent Dental helpline - 0300 123 4412 and ask for local dental surgeries with NHS provision
* Check the NHS search finder on [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk/) [https://www.nhs.uk/service-](https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist) [search/find-a-dentist](https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist)
* When booking always ask for an NHS Check-Up or if you require emergency treatment
* Patients are not registered with a practice but will be taken on from their first Check-Up. You may be added to a waiting list
* NHS dental treatment is free for children under 18 or under 19 and in qualifying full-time education
* Women are entitled to free NHS dental treatment during pregnancy and for any treatment started before their child’s first birthday
* Dentaline is the Out of Hours Dental Emergency service, for patients developing a severe problem outside of normal working hours
* Telephone: 01634 890 300. Provision of emergency treatment is by appointment only and you will be triaged before an appointment is offered

Find out more about dental charges and help with costs here:

[https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/dental-costs/understanding-nhs-dental-](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/dental-costs/understanding-nhs-dental-charges/) [charges/](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/dental-costs/understanding-nhs-dental-charges/)

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/dental-costs/get-help-with-dental-costs/>

**Cancer Support (Macmillan)**

1 in 2 of us will get cancer at some point in our lives.  Although getting this news can be devastating, help is out there. Macmillan, are here to help everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can, providing physical, financial, and emotional support.  So whatever cancer throws your way, they will be there to help.  To find out more, please visit: [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

If you or someone you care about has been diagnosed with cancer, Macmillan are there to assist. Find out how we support you and get information about different cancer types: [www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support)

To access the financial support Macmillan offers, please visit the below:

[Cost of living - support for people with cancer - Macmillan Cancer Support](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/get-help/cost-of-living)

[Macmillan financial grants - Macmillan Cancer Support](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/get-help/financial-help/macmillan-grants)

For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00

**Managing your work-life balance**

Tracy-Anne Barker from TA Barker Associates is a Management Trainer and Business Coach. Here she shares her top tips, as a fellow small business owner on how to manage your work-life balance and grow your business.

When you are the manager or owner of a small business, you have to wear many hats and it can be difficult to take a break from the 24/7. Here are some ideas for you to try.

**Emails & managing your time**

We spend a staggering 28% of our day looking at emails! This means a quarter of our day, we are getting distracted. Think how productive we can be if we can reduce that a little.

Source [www.ppm.express](http://www.ppm.express)

If we keep our emails open in the background of our laptop, tablet, or phone, that can mean up to 11 distractions in an hour.

Whether you are taking a break or making your working day more efficient, there are tips you can try to ensure that you are still communicating with your clients. Even whilst getting a break from your email. There are a number of tools that can also help us automate some of the more repetitive tasks we deal with in our emails.

We can help ourselves and our customers by setting boundaries and making sure we set an instant reply message. This should include as a minimum:

* when you are next in the office,
* a timescale when you expect to respond to emails
* the name of anyone, whom they can contact in your place and their contact numbers

There is also a **“Create Rule”** facility in your outlook, which enables you to push emails straight out of your inbox and into a folder ready for dealing with at another time, or onto another recipient.

For example, if you set up a rule for anything which says “Invoice” it can be dispatched to a folder ready to deal with on your admin day. The seconds it saves you in trying to find these emails later or dragging them to a folder, all add up during the month.

Talking of dragging emails into folders, have you tried the quick steps facility? It enables you to see all of your regularly used folders in a handy box at the top of your inbox and just one click and the email is moved!

Making room in your life for “time out” is so important. Giving yourself permission to leave your phone and computer out of reach, can be difficult. Particularly if you are self-employed, you can feel anxious about missing out on an opportunity. Or worry that you will fall behind, after all, when it’s only you it can be tough.

You can find out more here: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-gb/office/Manage-and-organize-b6d7ea98-a81f-492c-8e4b-694b6bb96b30>

**Reframing:**

Turning negative thoughts into positive ones is easier said than done sometimes. When we say ***“Should***”, it adds a whole heap of pressure to our workload.

One of the best ways of approaching “problems” is to see them as “challenges”, or turning a weakness into a strength. This is when we start to frame thoughts in a more positive way.

It will take practice. But next time you get someone cut you up on a roundabout, instead of thinking how selfish they are, or what a bad driver, try thinking that they could be rushing to the hospital, they could be a doctor trying to get to a patient, or they may just have made an honest mistake.

***Here are a few hints on how to reframe your thinking:***

* How can I look at this differently?
* Am I making assumptions?
* Could I learn something from this?

A great starting place is to remind yourself every morning, of the positives in your life:

Stuck in traffic on the way to work? You have a job to go to.

Feeling tired after a busy weekend? If it isn’t a health problem, just get an early night.

**Networking & collaborating - finding a balance**

Finding a balance isn’t always easy. Whether in trying to take time off or in juggling the everyday workload.

**Collaborating:** The first thing you need to remember is that you don’t need to do it all alone. There are some great Virtual Assistants (VA) out there who can assist you with all aspects of your business, whether Administration. Social Media or Bookkeeping.

A VA is an extra pair of hands when you need them. You can hire them for as many, or as few hours as you need. As an example – when you go on holiday, who manages your diary, your emails, and administration?

Recently for my two-week holiday, my VA took care of all of that, spending 15 minutes a day. Even when the budget is tight, it is possible. Don’t be put off thinking you need to pay a full-time salary, just a few hours might be a good solution.

**So where to find a VA?** Ask fellow business owners for recommendations or go along to one of your local networking sessions.

**Networking:** Aside from trying to grow your business, networking groups can have the benefit of you being able to share ideas and coping strategies, with people who are in the exact same situation as you.

If you need a gentle nudge, I would always advocate asking friends and colleagues which networking groups they attend, as having a friendly face can really help in the early days.

Not everyone likes to network and it is really important that as a small business owner you don’t become overwhelmed, at the thought of having to join a group or groups.

It is of equal importance that you find ways to ensure that you don’t feel isolated or cut off, which can easily happen if you work alone and long hours.

It’s all about finding a balance.

Try online groups, Professional Associations, or local Chambers of Commerce.

Go, on give some of these ideas a go!

Good luck

**Tracy-Anne Barker, TA Barker Associates**

**Where to get health help**

The following useful links are provided to signpost you to further sources of help:

[**https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/health/one-you-kent**](https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/health/one-you-kent)

[**www.abettermedway.co.uk**](http://www.abettermedway.co.uk)

[**https://livewellkent.org.uk/**](https://livewellkent.org.uk/)

## [**https://www.kentandmedway.icb.nhs.uk/your-health/local-services**](https://www.kentandmedway.icb.nhs.uk/your-health/local-services)**Contact**

For a no obligation meeting to get the Workplace Health programme started in your business, or for further information please contact:

By email [workplacehealth@medway.gov.uk](mailto:workplacehealth@medway.gov.uk?subject=Contact%20from%20Employer%20Guide%20downloaded%20from%20the%20website). By telephone 01634 334307 or visit the [website.](http://www.medway.gov.uk/healthyworkplace)

Thank you to all those who have contributed to this guide: Members of the Public Health Team,

The following sources of information were consulted in the production of this guide:

* Business in the Community Public Health England Toolkits:
* Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering: IGD
* Health and Safety Executive
* British Dietetic Association