

Hybrid & Healthy

A new study by IWG reveals how hybrid working is leading to a healthier, happier and more productive workforce, with employees exercising more, sleeping longer, eating better, and reporting better mental health.

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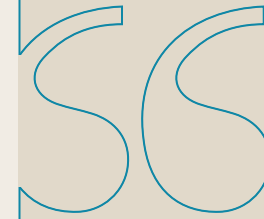




Hybrid working is building and maintaining a healthier and happier workforce by reducing the need for long daily commutes.

It offers businesses an easy way to put their employees first by freeing up their time and giving them greater control over their schedules. And as a result, organisations that have adopted hybrid working are also seeing more engaged and productive teams.”

Mark Dixon,
Founder and CEO, IWG



I believe the main pillars of a healthy life are good nutrition, physical activity, stress management, sufficient sleep, and social connection.

IWG’s survey shows that hybrid working can be beneficial in all five of these areas.”

Dr Sara Kayat,
GP and TV doctor



Three years on from the Covid-19 pandemic, people are discovering ever more advantages of hybrid working. IWG's latest study, carried out in conjunction with a leading healthcare expert, highlights the multiple health and wellbeing benefits that hybrid working can bring, along with a boost to productivity. The research shows that cutting down on the daily commute and working closer to home can lead to a longer night's sleep, healthier eating habits, weight loss, and improved mental health.

"Hybrid working gives us the ability to choose how and where we work, and given the chance, most people will choose to work closer to home," says Dr Sara Kayat, who is a world-renowned healthcare professional and TV doctor. "That means their commuting time will be cut by as much as a couple of hours each day, and they can use that time to prioritise other parts of their life."

A balanced diet, physical activity and good quality sleep are three of the bedrocks of a healthy lifestyle, according to Dr Kayat, and the data in IWG's study suggests that each is more widespread due to the extra time afforded by a hybrid working model. "Stress management and

social connections are also incredibly important to mental wellbeing," she adds. "The healthier work/life balance enabled by hybrid working helps in achieving these, as it allows people to make more time for family, friends and stress-busting hobbies."

The health and wellness boost brought by hybrid working brings benefits for companies, too. Increased productivity as a result of the switch to hybrid was highlighted by the report. As Mark Dixon, Founder and CEO of IWG, says: "Everyone wins. This is yet more evidence that hybrid working is best for both individuals and organisations."



Hybrid brings more time for exercise

Less time spent commuting equates to more time for daily exercise. According to IWG's study, the average hybrid worker is now getting 4.7 hours of exercise a week, compared to 3.4 hours before the pandemic. That's an increase of 38%.

And it's hugely significant, with regular physical exercise one of the most important things we can do for our health. It can reduce the risk of major illnesses such as coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and cancer, and can lower the risk of early death by up to 30%.

"You can't underestimate the benefits of even a small amount of daily exercise," says Dr Kayat. "But the more we do, the greater the results."

The most common forms of exercise used by the respondents in their new spare time are walking, running and strength training.

"Walking is one of those really overlooked kinds of exercise, but if you can get a brisk walk in, you can get your heart rate up by a significant amount, and then it

does confer medical benefits," says Dr Kayat. "People think they have to do a run in order to get real benefits, but actually a longer walk can be just as beneficial. Think of taking a good walk in a local park at lunchtime, say, or use your extra time in the morning to take a brisk stroll around the local area."

Running is a good cardiovascular exercise and also improves muscle mass, as well as helping to reduce anxiety and stress. The local park can come in handy here, too. Or hit the running machine at a local gym, where strength training is an added option.

"We should all try to include some strength training within our routines, because our muscles need to continue to build, and

that's even more relevant as we get older and our muscle mass starts to decline," says Dr Kayat. "It may not be appropriate for everyone, but most people can manage a low weight and high reps."

The most important thing is to not make exercise feel like some sort of punishment, adds Dr Kayat. "You need to incorporate it into your life in ways that don't make it feel arduous," she says. "It might be something as simple as adding in some stretches in bed before you get up, now you've got more time in the morning. And if you don't have the impetus to go to the gym, there are plenty of online exercise classes available to do at home, as lockdown showed us."

CUTTING THE COMMUTE

Time-wasting, expensive, and bad for our health, the daily commute is also a major source of carbon emissions.

Nobody enjoys commuting. Whether it's in a car stuck in gridlocked traffic or on a packed bus or train, it uses up precious time and is a major source of stress. A report by the UK's Royal Society for Public Health highlighted the health impacts, showing that longer commuting times are associated with increased stress, higher blood pressure and BMI, and reduced time available for health-promoting activities such as sleep and exercising (as IWG's report confirms).

Commuting is also a major source of carbon emissions. Cutting down on commuting is the single biggest thing that companies can do to reduce their carbon footprint – and their employees know it. Research by IWG found that two-thirds (66%) of office workers agree it was important to cut down commuting to make life more sustainable, while more than three-quarters (76%) said that commuting less was an important step in fighting the climate crisis. More than four-fifths (84%) believed that the environmental gain that comes from cutting down on the commute was one of the benefits of hybrid working.

Business leaders are equally aware of what's at stake and how to make a change for the better. More than two-thirds (69%) say that helping staff cut down on their daily journeys is an important way to help to meet company sustainability targets. And more than three-quarters (77%) say hybrid working has had a positive impact on their company's carbon footprint. A recent study by IWG and Arup showed that the switch to hybrid working can reduce transport-related carbon emissions by up to 90%.

Commuting is also a financial drain on employees' pockets. According to research by Confused.com, workers saved as much as £544 a month on commuting and other work-related costs during pandemic-enforced lockdowns. "Commuting is one of the craziest inventions of the last 100 years," says Mark Dixon. "For a lot of people, its expense used to be just a fact of life. But nowadays the daily trip to a city centre office looks like a considerably more expensive endeavour – and that's even before you've bought yourself a sandwich and a drink for lunch. Add in the health and environmental benefits, and cutting down on commuting is a no-brainer."



A good night's sleep is crucial for our physical and mental health – and for a country's economic wellbeing. According to Fortune magazine, lack of sleep costs the United States more than \$411 billion and 1.23 million working days annually. Economic modelling of data from five OECD countries by the Rand Corporation found that up to three per cent of GDP is lost due to lack of sleep, and "an increase in sleep could add billions of dollars to a country's economy".

Some extra ZZZs can also make a big difference to our health. "We should be getting on average seven to eight hours of sleep every night," says Dr Kayat. "It's the time that's required for physical healing and also for consolidating all the information and thought processes that have gone on in our minds through the day. We know that people who regularly sleep less than seven to eight hours every night are at increased risk of heart disease, diabetes and strokes and generally have a higher mortality rate. And we know how sleep benefits us psychologically as well. You just have to have a couple of bad

nights of sleep and you're likely to find it hard to stay focused at work."

IWG's study found that hybrid workers are now sleeping longer thanks to the additional amount of time they can spend in bed in the morning, having been freed from the daily commute. In total, they're getting up to 71 more hours of sleep a year – or more than three whole days of extra bed time.

"Getting the right amount of sleep each night can make a big difference," says Dr Kayat. "Anything that can get you closer to that target of seven or eight hours a night is going to be beneficial, and you'll see the results not just at work but also in your personal life."



HYBRID WORLD: SUSTAINABLE WORLD



Good health and wellbeing are part of the UN's sustainable development goals for 2030

"Healthy people are the foundation for healthy economies," says the United Nations. That's why one of its 17 sustainability goals for 2030 is to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all. Individuals can play their part by protecting their own health and the health of those around them by making informed choices, the organisation says.

As IWG's survey demonstrates, hybrid working can bring a significant number of benefits to both health and wellbeing. The hybrid model has also been shown to support several other UN sustainability goals, including Decent Work and Economic Growth, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Gender Equality, and Climate Action.

MORE RESTED:

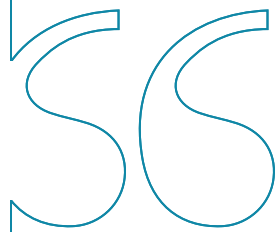
Hybrid enables a good night's sleep



Hybrid workers are getting 71 extra hours of sleep a year - equating to three days.

HEALTHIER:

Hybrid allows more time to prepare nutritious meals



It's all about using fresh, healthy ingredients. Food doesn't have to be really complicated to be tasty and nutritious."

Dr Kayat

The food that we eat has major implications for our wellbeing, and having the time to prepare nutritious meals with healthy ingredients is key. The workers in IWG's study reported that their eating habits had dramatically improved. Nearly three-quarters (70%) said that hybrid working gave them the chance to prepare a healthy breakfast each morning, while more than half (54%) said they had more time to spend cooking nutritious meals during the week.

"We know that processed foods are often higher in salt, sugar and fat, which can lead to a whole host of health issues," says Dr Kayat. "If we can find the time to make meals from scratch, those meals are not only likely to be more nutritious but we're also removing all the potential hidden nasties that you find in processed foods."

Almost half of the hybrid workers surveyed are eating more fresh fruit and vegetables (46% and 44% respectively), while a fifth said they were eating more fish.

"It's all about using fresh, healthy ingredients," says Dr Kayat. "Food doesn't have to be really complicated to be tasty and nutritious, so don't worry about trying to be the next Gordon Ramsay. Just make sure you've got a balanced plate of food. And think about making simple swaps: wholegrain pasta or wholegrain rice for your usual rice or pasta, or switch your yoghurt to a live yoghurt. Simple switches like this can make a big difference when it comes to a healthier diet."



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Enforced home working during pandemic lockdowns showed the potential dangers of prolonged remote working. Home workers often failed to draw a line between work and leisure time, resulting in increased cases of burnout.

“As a doctor I’m all too familiar with burnout and workplace stress,” says Dr Kayat. “I’ve seen burnout in my patients, and I’ve seen it in my colleagues as well. And whilst I’ve never experienced burnout, I’ve obviously experienced my own kind of workplace stresses too. I think it’s something that’s pretty widespread in the working environment, and it’s really important to ensure your work/life balance is a healthy one.”

As was also shown during the pandemic, hybrid working helps to redress that balance. Individuals who spent less time commuting, as they embraced the hybrid model, discovered that they could reclaim valuable time and spend it in ways that boosted their mental health and wellbeing. More than four-fifths of workers in IWG’s study said they feel they had additional personal time compared to pre-pandemic,



Enhancing your mental health

and the majority use it with family and friends (55%), exercising (52%) or taking a short walk during the day (67%). Two thirds said that they felt their mental health was good thanks to the shift to hybrid working.

“Being able to spend time with family and friends is particularly important,” says Dr Kayat. “The lockdowns during the pandemic showed us what social isolation can do. We saw sharp increases in referrals to mental health services, and I think that was partly due to a lack of social interaction. We’re coming to understand more and more how imperative social

connections are when it comes to our health.”

The role of local flex spaces should also not be underestimated when it comes to preventing feelings of isolation. They offer the chance for interaction with like-minded individuals without the need for a long commute. Both organised meetings and chance encounters are a fertile breeding ground for, creative collaboration and the growth of personal relationships.

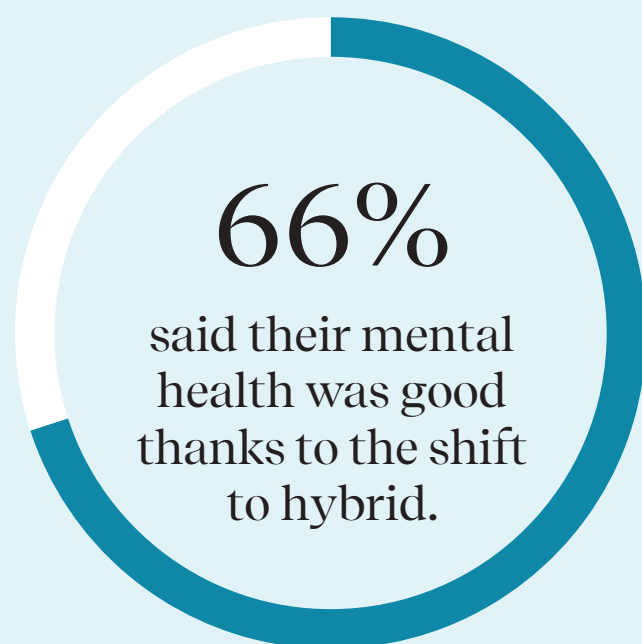
SLIMMER:

A healthy hybrid life is good for the waistline



Thanks to the healthier lives they’re now living because of hybrid working, more than a quarter (27%) of workers in the IWG survey reported losing weight since the start of the pandemic. Two in five (42%) lost between 5kg and 9.9kg, while a remarkable 23% lost more than 10kg. The biggest drivers of weight loss have been increased time for exercise (65%) and more time to cook healthy meals (54%).

It’s estimated that around two billion people in the world are overweight or obese – that’s a quarter of the Earth’s population. “This just goes to show how important regular exercise and a balanced diet really are,” says Dr Kayat. “Losing weight in a responsible way can not only reduce the risk of obesity and serious illness but also brings other benefits such as more energy and better sleep”.



Greater productivity and less stress



Almost four in five (79%) of the workers in IWG's study said they had been more productive since switching to hybrid working, and nearly half attributed this to their decreased stress levels and increased time for relaxing and unwinding after work.

"People who are stressed exhibit lower motivation, lower focus and lower productivity in their work," says Dr Kayat. "They're also likely to take more sick days, because we also know that our immune system can be affected by chronic stress. In terms of their mental health, they can also experience social withdrawal, mood swings and anxiety."

Workplace stress is something that needs to be dealt with in a radical way, believes Dr Kayat. "It takes more than a holiday or a massage to deal with it," she says. "A change is usually needed, which involves working out how your life can be modified or how you can engage with your work in a different way, to relieve the causes of stress. And that's where hybrid working can offer a solution, because it gives you back more control over where and when you work and also gives you more time for stress-relieving activities."

According to Professor Nicholas Bloom of Stanford University, who is a world-renowned expert on hybrid working, the overall increase in productivity brought by the hybrid model can be three or four per cent, which can make a significant difference.



Four in five workers said they had been more productive since switching to hybrid working.

It's clear that the hybrid model is here to stay and the potential for improving everybody's health and wellbeing is considerable.

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It's hard to overstate the benefits of the hybrid working model. It's changing the lives of millions of people around the world for the better. As we've seen here, it can make a workforce happier and healthier – and more productive. People get to spend more time with their loved ones, their stress is reduced, and their general health and mental wellbeing are boosted. Plus they can exercise more and take the time to prepare more nutritious meals.”

Mark Dixon,
Founder and CEO, IWG



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There is no doubt that hybrid working has facilitated some major health benefits. A balanced diet, physical activity and good quality sleep are the bedrocks of a healthy lifestyle, and this data suggests that each is more widespread due to the extra time afforded by a hybrid working model.”

Dr Sara Kayat,
GP and TV doctor

We support a network of more than eight million hybrid workers in 4,000 locations spanning more than 120 countries. Find out more about what we do at [iwgple.com](https://www.iwgple.com).