

HOW TO COMPREHENSIVELY TAKE CARE OF THE

PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND SOCIAL HEALTH OF EMPLOYEES



Based on the findings of the
Work. Health. Economy. 2022 Outlook report

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Work. Health. Economy. 2022 Outlook report

Each year, Medcover prepares a comprehensive analysis of employees' health under Medcover's care. **Based on a large population and specific data, the report gives a reliable picture of the health of employees in Poland.**

This year, we present 2019–2021 data. These data make it possible to compare and assess changes that have occurred as far as the health of Poles during the pandemic is concerned.

Work. Health. Economy. 2022 Outlook report:



Gives a reliable picture of the main health risk factors and reasons for sickness absence.



Provides information about health risks that can be prevented so that they do not become the cause of serious diseases in the future.

New



Assesses employees' lifestyles, health-enhancing behaviours and opinions on their impact on health and performance at work.



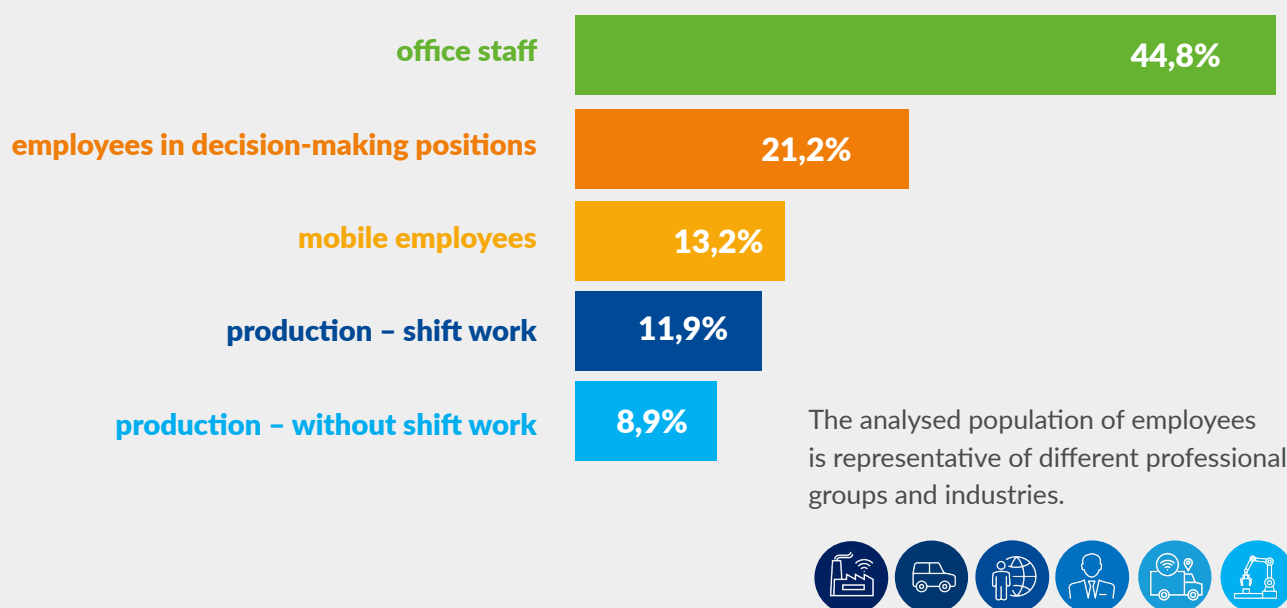
Provides an annual calculation of the costs employers incur due to selected employee diseases.

Report population



The population distribution of employees under Medcover's care represents nationwide data.

Professional groups



MEDICAL CARE AND PREVENTION

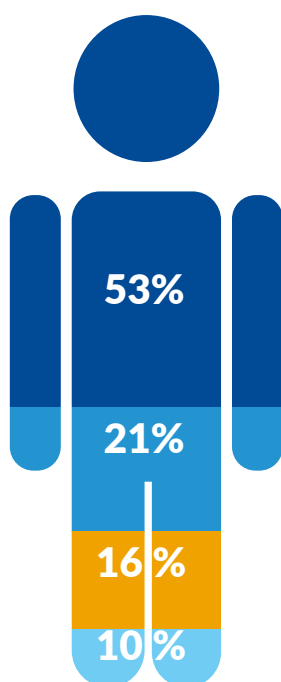
1 Risk factors for lifestyle diseases: Fundamental importance of lifestyle and prevention

Piotr Soszyński M. D. Ph. D.

Strategic Medical Advisory Department
Director Medcover

In 2020–2021, Poland saw a record-breaking mortality rate of nearly half a million deaths per year – the highest in decades. In addition to excess mortality from COVID-19 infections and complications, the leading cause of the deteriorating health of Poles are lifestyle diseases, including cardiovascular problems and cancer. The risk of developing lifestyle diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, heart attack and stroke, depends on many factors. They include congenital factors (genetic profile) and access to and use of health care, but most significantly the impact of the environment, including the workplace and lifestyle, especially diet, exercise and avoidance of stimulants and smoking. According to researchers at the Population Health Institute, University of Wisconsin¹, environmental factors and individual behaviours can account for as much as 70% of health risks.

1. <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/measures-data-sources/county-health-rankings-model>

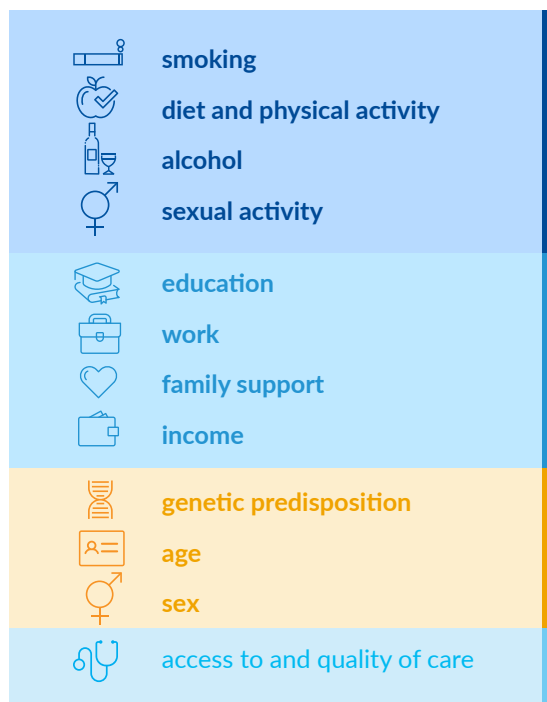


Lifestyle

Environmental factors

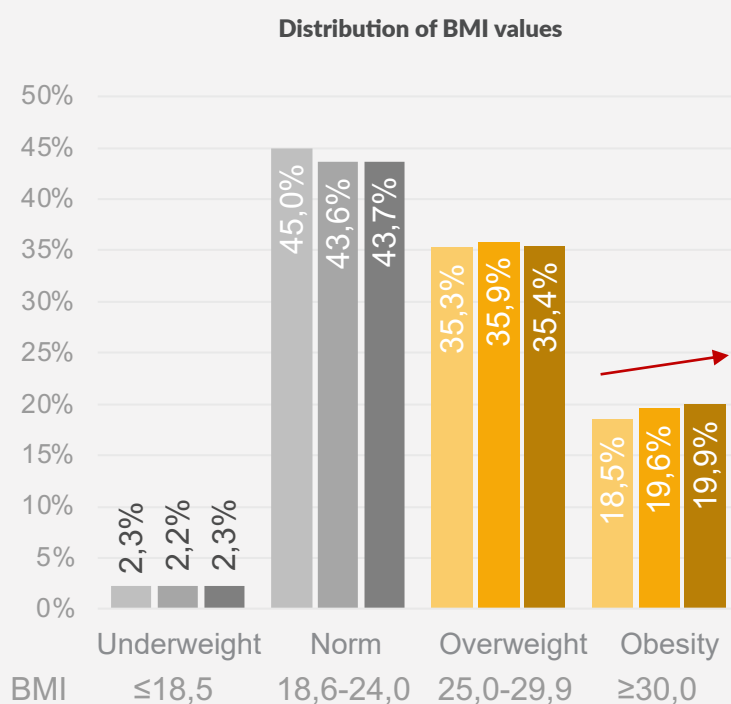
Biological factors

Health care

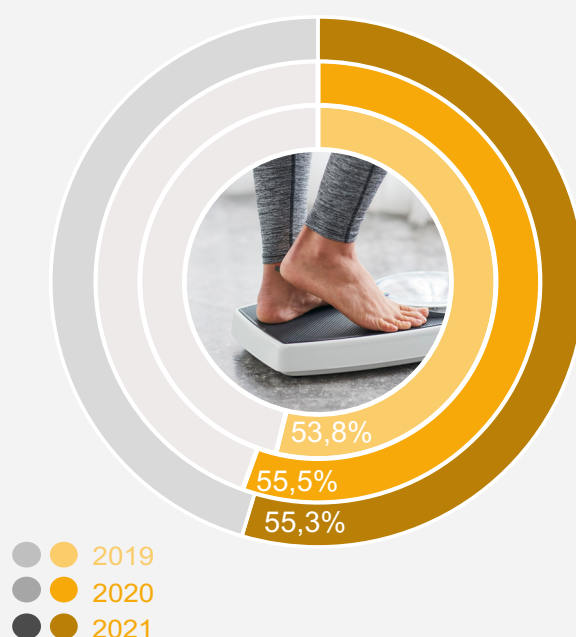


Modifiable health risk factors primarily include overweight and obesity, as well as associated high cholesterol, sugar and blood pressure. In the population of the Medicover's Work. Health. Economy. 2022 Outlook report, **more than 55% of employees had increased body weight, almost 50% had elevated cholesterol levels, and 19% had abnormal sugar levels. Blood pressure measurement – an abnormal result was found in 28% of the analysed population.** A particularly vulnerable group are men, in whom all the risk factors discussed are present in a much higher percentage than in women. In addition, men are more likely to smoke tobacco, which significantly increases health exposure.

Overweight and obesity: BMI values

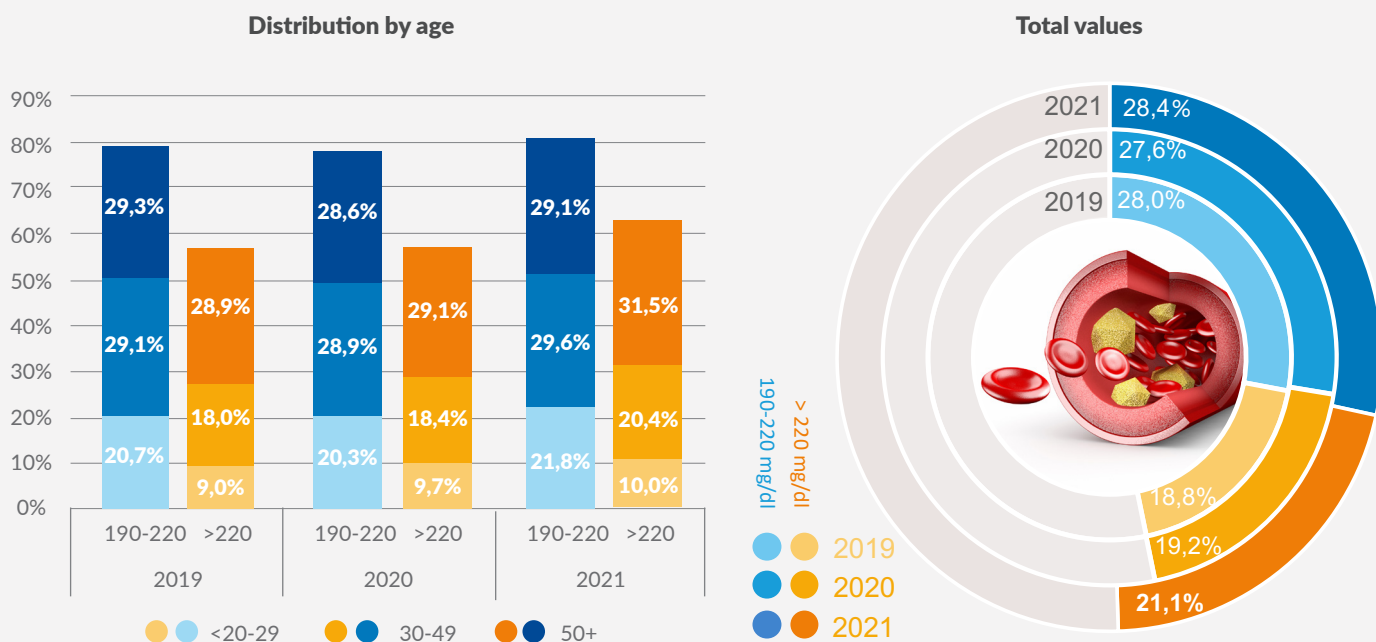


Overweight and obesity



The percentage of people with obesity (BMI above 30) has been steadily increasing in recent years, representing an increasing significant health risk. Healthy diet and physical activity are the best way to reduce body weight.

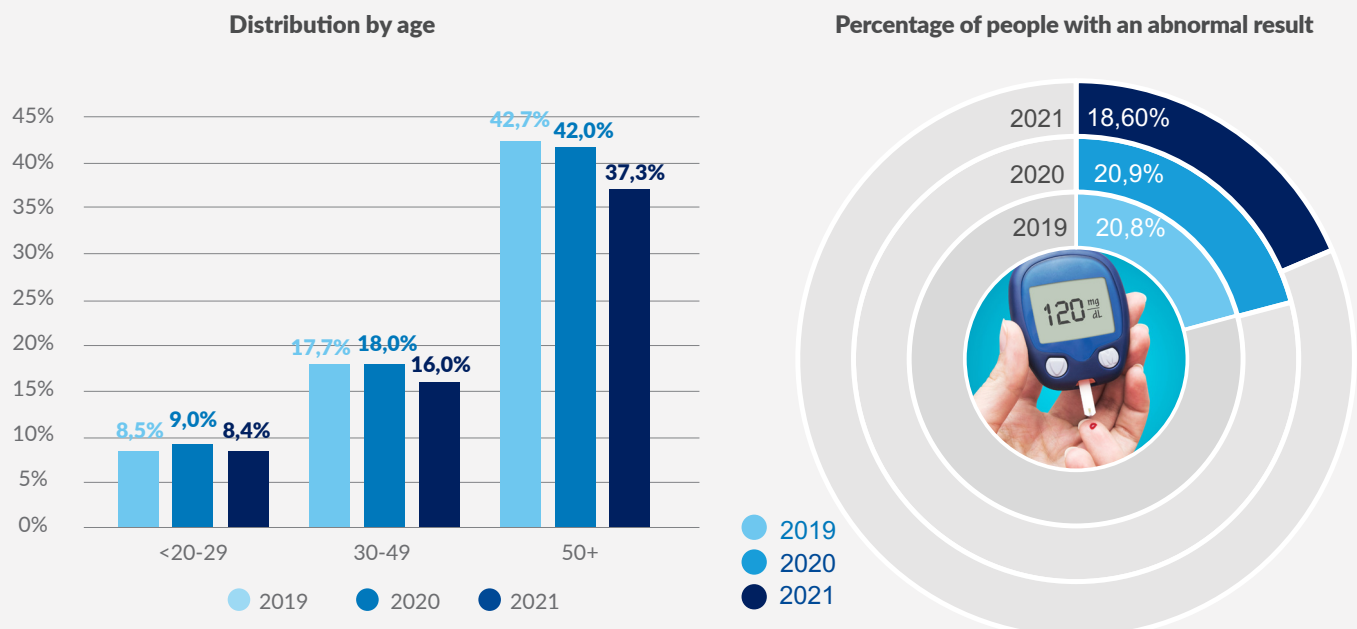
Abnormal total cholesterol



Nearly half of people tested have abnormal cholesterol.

This indicates the need for lifestyle changes. Body weight reduction, a healthy diet and physical activity play the most crucial role in preventing atherosclerosis.

Abnormal blood glucose level

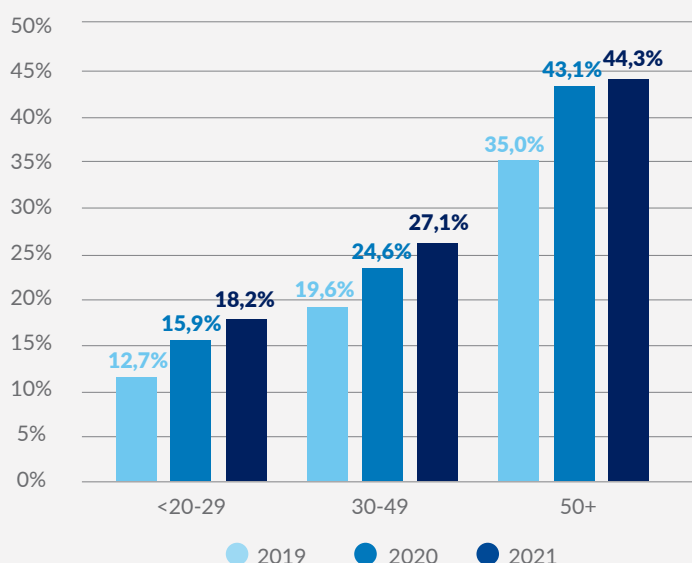


Every 5th blood glucose test result is abnormal.

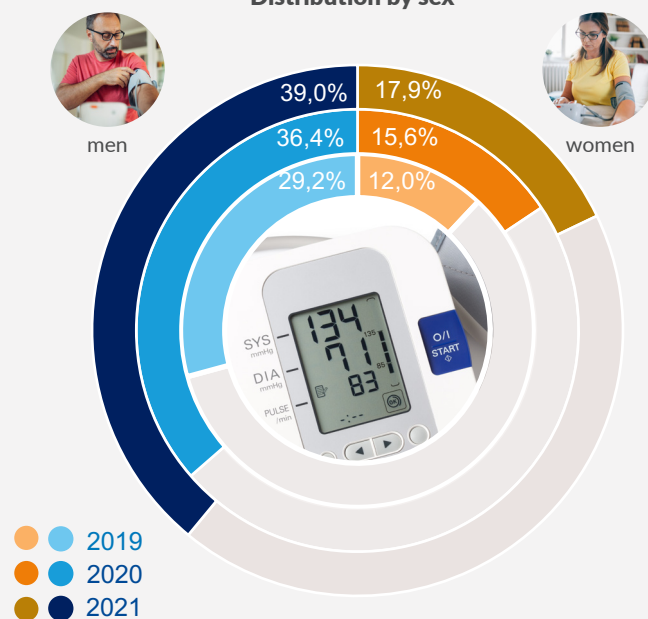
This means that it is necessary to control sugar levels and intensify diabetes prevention measures. Body weight reduction, a healthy diet and physical activity play the most crucial role in prevention.

Abnormal blood pressure

Distribution by age



Distribution by sex



In 2021, abnormal blood pressure was found in 28% of employees, more often than in 2020 (26%) and 2019 (21%). Elevated blood pressure values pose a risk of developing cardiovascular diseases, including stroke and death. Proper treatment significantly reduces this risk.

The risk of lifestyle diseases can be significantly reduced by modifying the environment, including the workplace, and changing behaviours to health-enhancing ones.

Professor Andrzej Rynkiewicz from the Clinical Cardiology Centre of the University Clinical Centre in Gdańsk gave such a simple recipe for health:



„The recipe for a healthy life is number 035140530, which represents 7 rules: smoke 0 tobacco, walk 3 kilometres a day (or exercise for 30 minutes), eat 5 portions of fruit or vegetables a day, make sure that systolic blood pressure is no higher than 140 mmHg, keep the blood cholesterol at the level of less than 5 mmol/L (190 mg/dL) and LDL cholesterol at the level of less than 3 mmol/L (115 mg/dL). The last 0 represents the absence of obesity. Following these rules can help to prevent not only cardiovascular diseases, but also other lifestyle diseases.”²

Even a 5% reduction in increased body weight, i.e. losing about 4–5 kg in people weighing 80–100 kg, significantly reduces the development of diabetes, hypertension or heart diseases. In addition, even a slight weight loss has a beneficial effect on many other parameters, such as knee pain, quality of sleep, sexual performance, liver function and even improved mood and reduced risk of depression.³

2. <https://naukawpolsce.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C384950%2Cekspersi-profilaktyka-wazna-w-walce-z-chorobami-cywilizacyjnymi.html>

3. Weight Loss and Improvement in Comorbidity: Differences at 5%, 10%, 15%, and Over. Donna H Ryan, Sarah Ryan Yockey. Curr Obes Rep. 2017, 6(2): 187–194

Losing a few kilograms should be relatively easy if you engage in physical activity as recommended by WHO⁴

That is at least **150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity throughout the week or at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity** (push-ups, sit-ups, working out with dumbbells, stepper, running, etc.). However, health benefits are seen already when you engage in even such moderate activity as daily walks, during which you take at least **4,000 steps**.

Health benefits increase with the duration and intensity of activity.

It is important to change your diet in accordance with healthy eating rules

It is advisable to eat more vegetables, fruit and whole-grain cereal products, and to reduce meat, fats and sugar.⁵

The healthiest diet which reflects these recommendations and which was recently ranked the best diet by U.S. News & World Report **is the Mediterranean diet**.

As little as a 5% improvement in health-enhancing habits and behaviours, combined with other elements essential for well-being, such as positive emotions and a favourable work environment, translates into a significant increase in productivity and a decrease in absenteeism.⁶

Such elements as high blood pressure, recurrent pain, unhealthy diet, sedentary lifestyle or work, etc. are independent factors that reduce productivity.

Environmental factors, especially health-enhancing behaviours, can significantly reduce the risk of many diseases and increase employee productivity. To achieve these benefits, it is worthwhile to introduce solutions in the company to support employees in their efforts to improve their physical, mental and social health.⁷



Check out Medcover's offer of prevention programs for employees:

Lecture: Physical Activity and Its Positive Aspects in Everyday Life

Seminar: How to Quit Smoking

Seminar: How to Eat Healthily

Read more at: [www.zdrowafirma.medicover.pl/en/prevention-and-safety-at-work/](https://zdrowafirma.medicover.pl/en/prevention-and-safety-at-work/)

4. Global recommendations on physical activity for health. World Health Organization 2010

5. Narodowe Centrum Edukacji Żywieniowej, Piramida Zdrowego Żywienia i Aktywności Fizycznej

6. The Association Between Modifiable Well-Being Risks and Productivity. Yuyan Shi, Lindsay E. Sears, Carter R. Coberley, James E. Pope. J Occup Environ Med. 2013, 55(4):353-64

7. Medcover Healthy Company. <https://zdrowafirma.medicover.pl/en/>

Martyna Adrian M. Sc. Eng.

optometry expert, Medicover Optyk

When evaluating employees' health in the last three years, it is impossible to ignore the organs of the visual system and the process of seeing itself. The last two years have been primarily a time of the coronavirus pandemic and pandemic-related restrictions. They have affected our way of life, i.e. work and leisure activities, which, unfortunately, has had a negative impact on our eyesight.

According to Statistics Poland's March 2020 data, approx. 2 million employees have shifted to remote work. This meant working in conditions other than those found in the office – using a small laptop screen instead of a large monitor, without adequate lighting and an appropriate number of breaks, in a small room and in a place unsuitable for doing computer work. The surveys also show that the declared number of hours spent in front of a phone or tablet screen has increased.



? Why has remote work negatively affected our vision?

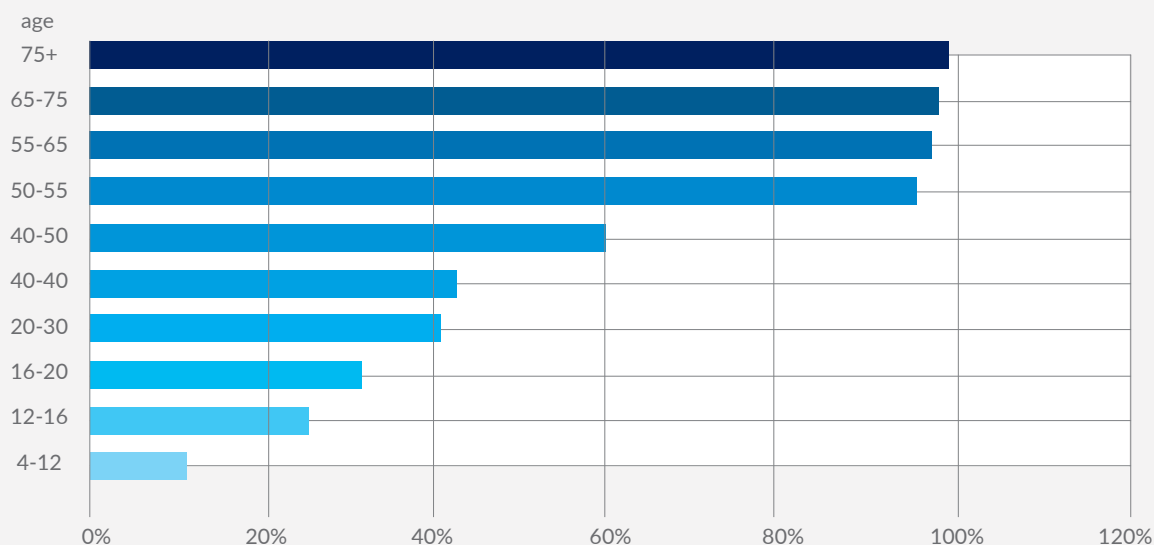
Biologically, our eyes are programmed to look into distance, and in this state, the muscles responsible for accommodation (i.e. the ability to change the power of the intraocular lens depending on the distance of the object being observed) are most relaxed.

When we look at objects that are closer and focus our eyes on them, the eye muscles tighten. The more often and longer this is done, the more effort the eyes make and the likelihood of vision problems increases. The keyword is distance – it is responsible for the negative impact of remote work on our eyesight.

Unfortunately, we do not yet have the results of research on the impact of the pandemic and remote work on our eyesight, as the studies conducted have mainly focused on children. However, in their daily work with adults, **optometrists observe an increase in short-sightedness, even in 30-year or 40-year-old patients, whose sight defect has already been stabilised for many years.** People with far-sightedness may develop symptoms not only from the visual system, such as eye fatigue, burning or pain, but also experience headaches and, consequently, feel bad. Due to heavy eye strain, even people with slight far-sightedness experience difficulties focusing on the text they are reading and sharpening the image when changing the viewing distance.



Percentage of the population in need of vision correction



Source: Internal data of Medcover Optyk, International Optometrist Association, 2020

How many people need glasses?

20 mln

people need glasses

98%

of people over
the age of 40 have
short-sightedness

50%

of school-age children
have a sight defect

>70%

of people are unaware
that they have a sight
defect

Source: Internal data of Medcover Optyk, International Optometrist Association, 2020

The pandemic-related change in lifestyle and work has resulted in an increasing number of patients coming to our optometrists with such problems. These are people who did not experience such problems before the shift to remote work. In addition, restrictions on movement and the availability of healthcare services have reduced the number of regular eye examinations. Data show⁸ that patients in 2020 were 30% less likely to consult ophthalmologists for short-sightedness than in 2019.

The above conclusions make us believe that nowadays, regular eye examinations are critical. In Medcover Optyk offices, our optometrists conduct a comprehensive examination of the visual system during a 30-minute consultation. They check both distance and near vision, but also, as eye care specialists, talk about optimisation of work in front of the computer and provide tips on ergonomics and occupational hygiene, also for work that is performed at home. They also explain how to eliminate the adverse effects of prolonged work in front of screens.

8. Work. Health. Economy. 2021 Outlook report



3 Lifestyle medicine – Medcover response to patients' treatment and disease prevention needs

Interview with **Patryk Poniewierza M. D.**,
Medical Director at Medcover in Poland

„After the challenging experience of the coronavirus pandemic, we want our patients to fully return to their physical, mental, social and professional activity. Development of lifestyle medicine helps achieve this goal and is consistent with our approach to health and well-being,”

Patryk Poniewierza M.D., Medical Director at Medcover in Poland



? 'Lifestyle medicine' is a broad term. What is Medcover's approach to it?

At Medcover, we look at lifestyle medicine in two ways. On the one hand, this term denotes a specific model of patient care based on close cooperation between the doctor and lifestyle medicine specialist (health coach). On the other hand, this term means for us that we need to pay more attention to **'lifestyle change' understood as a way to prevent and treat many diseases and thus to prolong life**. Especially now, after the challenging experience of the coronavirus pandemic, we want our patients to fully return to their physical, mental, social and professional activity. The development of lifestyle medicine helps achieve this goal and is consistent with our approach to health and well-being.





? What does a lifestyle medicine specialist do?

A lifestyle medicine specialist, apart from acting based on the current medical knowledge, **takes a holistic approach to the health of the patient** – they analyse their individual conditions and habits and **try to find 'healthier alternatives' on many levels of life – from sport and physical activity, through diet and sexual health, to mental hygiene**. So we have a solid medical basis – as before, but it comes with a broader, fresher and simply different perspective on the needs and characteristics of the patient.

? And what do patients think of this approach?

We are seeing a growing interest in such an approach. Many of us – doctors – often notice that more and more patients want to improve their health and to keep in shape, preferably without resorting to pharmacotherapy or keeping it to a minimum. Our initiative responds to these needs and represents a more integrated approach to health or *lifestyle management*, which is so valuable these days.

? How will the development of lifestyle medicine affect the quality of patient treatment in Poland?

It is known that many of the most significant health problems, also in Poland, such as overweight and obesity, hypertension, drug addiction, atherosclerosis and diabetes, are closely related to daily habits that have been established over the years. Lifestyle medicine makes it possible to take an even more detailed medical history, analyse health challenges more accurately, design and implement targeted treatment plans and monitor progress more effectively. And progress can already be seen shortly after starting the process. In the long term, lifestyle medicine is an opportunity to significantly improve the health of Poles and instil healthy habits in the next generation.



Check out Medicover's offer of medical packages for employees.
Read more at www.zdrowafirma.medicover.pl/en/

Case study:

prevention campaigns in practice. Rossmann **#PoPierwszeLudzie**

As part of Rossmann's extended **#PoPierwszeLudzie** campaign, the company is offering its employees the opportunity to get tested during a health promotion event – Mobile Health and Sports Village.

Glucose and cholesterol testing, breast ultrasound, the opportunity to have blood pressure measured and professional consultations with a personal coach – these are just some of the services offered to Rossmann's employees in the Mobile Village.

Four doctor's offices have been arranged at the special mobile examination and testing site. Rossmann's employees could use free-of-charge services included in an extensive package, including the following: thyroid, breast, abdominal or testicular ultrasound, cholesterol, triglycerides and glucose tests, and blood pressure measurements.

The organisers also prepared some attractions for those interested in physical activity. Everyone could take part in individual coaching consultations (body composition was also analysed), receive a personalised workout plan and dietary recommendations, and, together with the coach, analyse the mobility of their joints and muscles.

All the activities were aimed at making employees aware of the importance of prevention and regular examinations. The Mobile Village was very popular. A total of approx. 1,000 employees used the services it offered. The turnout and smiles on employees' faces confirmed us in our belief that such health campaigns are needed and appreciated, and we will continue to organise them.

Rossmann, Company Social Benefits Fund Management Department



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SOLIDNY PRACODAWCA ROKU 2022

FRIENDLY WORKPLACE 2022

4 What is the cost of illness for the employer?




Beata Wojciechowska, M. Sc.

Prevention and Health Promotion Team Manager,
Medicover

An employee's illness always involves expenses on the part of the healthcare system, society and the employer. However, the overall cost of an illness is not always the same. It depends on external factors, such as its prevalence or population structure. The financial picture of an illness is also affected by many factors related to the organisation and quality of care. Therefore, in the current edition of the Work. Health. Economy. 2022 Outlook report we present an up-to-date economic analysis. It provides an answer to one of the most critical questions: what is the cost of illness for the employer?

Of the numerous categories of illness costs, two were selected: **sickness absence**, i.e. the number of days of sick leave, and **presenteeism**, i.e. showing up to work despite having reduced productivity levels due to ill health. Thanks to the registration of sick notes, sickness absence is easy to measure and its cost can be easily calculated. Presenteeism, on the other hand, although still a less understood phenomenon, has been the subject of numerous studies and publications for many years. Data from the literature provide us with valuable information about the cost of showing up to work while sick without being productive.



more than
470 000
people



7
health
problems

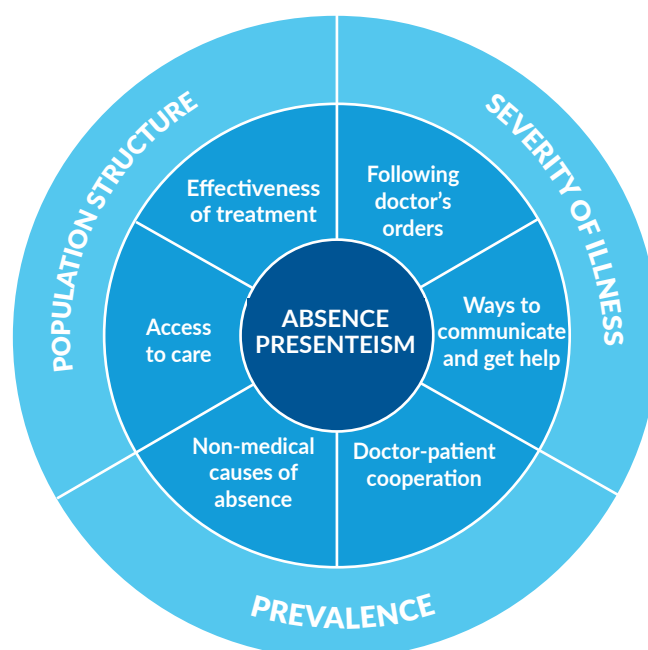
The analysis was prepared based on medical data collected in the electronic medical history of more than 470,000 people who receive care provided by Medicover and work in various branches of the economy – representative on a nationwide scale. This information was collated with data from the Sickness Absence in 2021 report prepared by the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) and the average wage in the business sector in the fourth quarter, in December 2021, from Statistics Poland (GUS).

The working population's 7 most common health problems were selected for economic analysis. They include mainly chronic diseases, such as **hypertension, diabetes, back pain, headache, asthma, allergy and gastrointestinal diseases, as well as some acute diseases** – respiratory infections. This sample has been selected objectively, for example, regarding the information available in the literature. We do not have data available for every disease, e.g. on presenteeism.

For the purpose of calculations, we standardised the population by age. This allowed us to compare the data of people under Medicover's care with those of ZUS patients. Thus, we were assured that the report's findings met all the criteria for this type of analysis.

The final stage of the analysis was to calculate the costs of absence and presenteeism for each of the analysed health problems, separately for employees under Medicovert's care and for the general population of employees in Poland.

The results show the financial dimension of the disease: the cost of the disease for the employer per one statistical – and not only sick – employee.



Costs of absence and presenteeism

	Hypertension	Back pain	Asthma and allergy	Diabetes	Headache	Gastrointestinal tract	Infections	TOTAL
Care at Medicovert (PLN)	17,1	324,3	7,0	13,5	40,6	16,5	599,4	1018
Care outside Medicovert (PLN)	80,2	1001,7	33,1	97,3	52,2	71,6	927,7	2264

Savings for the employer

whose employees are under Medicovert's care is **PLN 1,245** per statistical employee per year.

Annual savings for the state

According to Statistics Poland's data from the Economic Activity of Poles report, **employment in Poland in Q4 2021 was 16,780 thousand people.**

Thanks to access to coordinated outpatient health care, **the savings that could be achieved in such a large working population is:**

PLN 20,891 bn
(PLN 20,891,100,000) per year.



SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

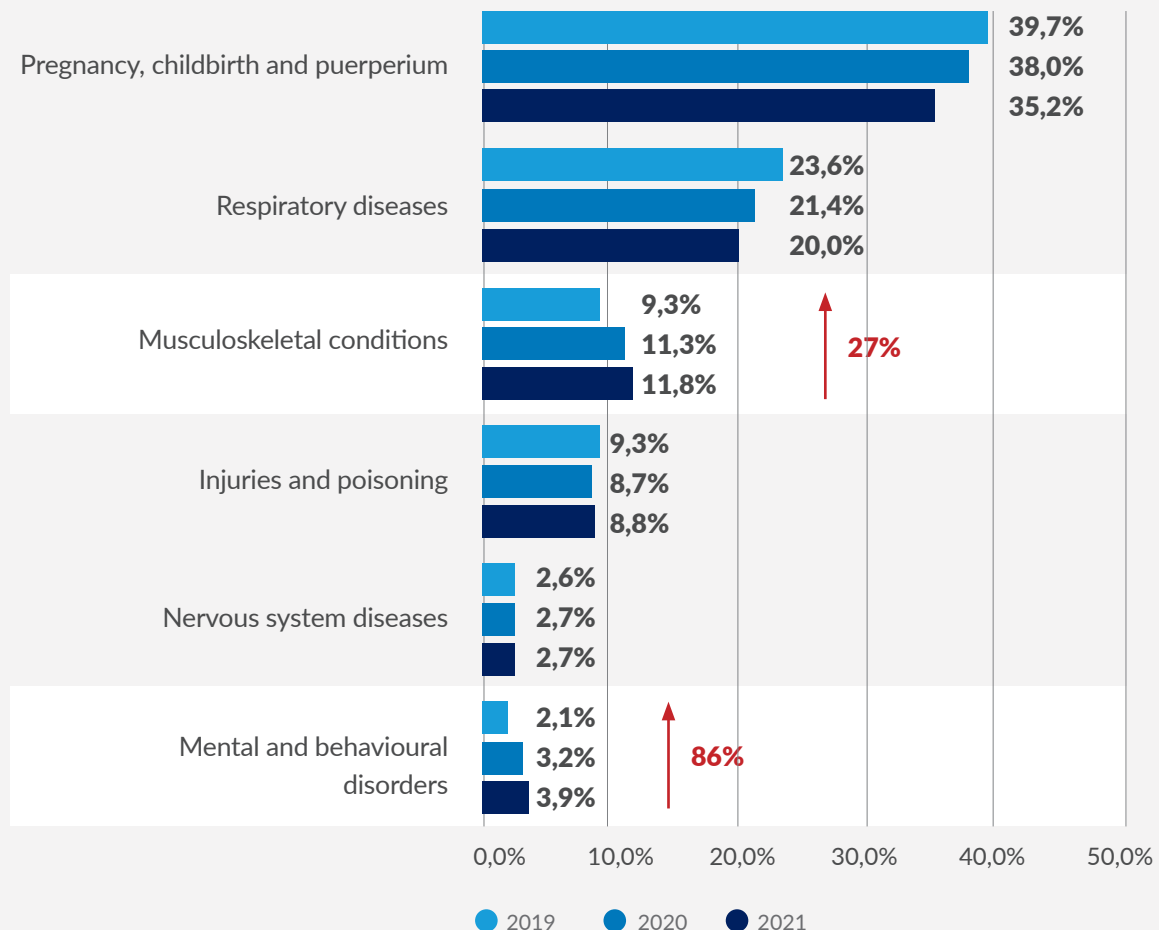


5 Physical activity and employee health

We all know that sport is good for our health. Findings of the Work. Health. Economy. 2022 Outlook report show, however, that employees are less active than recommended by experts and are suffering health consequences from reduced physical activity. Of course, there are also consequences for employers – in financial terms.

For several years, the number of sick notes issued to employees due to musculoskeletal conditions has been increasing. The increase in 2021 – compared to 2019 – is as high as 27%, i.e. higher than ¼ (Figure 1). In 2021, sick notes issued due to such conditions accounted for almost 12% of the total number of sick notes issued.

Reasons for sick notes in 2019–2021



Musculoskeletal conditions and mental disorders showed the most significant increase in absence in 2021. This indicates the need to intensify prevention measures as far as the musculoskeletal system, ergonomics, and mental health are concerned.



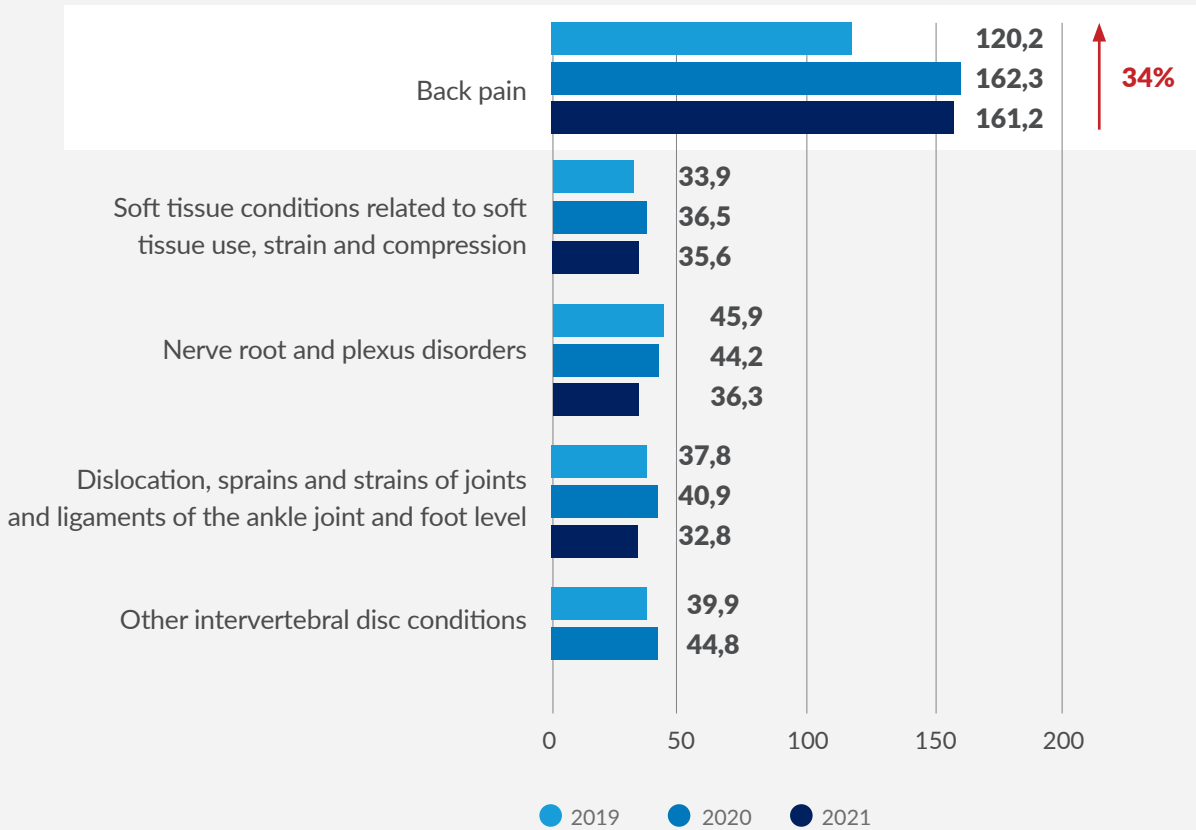
34%

As far as all musculoskeletal conditions are concerned, **the number of sick notes issued only due to back pain has increased by as much as 34%.**

This condition results from a **sedentary lifestyle and non-ergonomic workstations at home** during remote or hybrid work.

The second factor that has caused an increase in absence due to back pain is **insufficient physical activity**. At the same time, studies show that, **in the opinion of almost half (47.3%) of people, maintaining good health depends on regular physical activity**. And this is true.

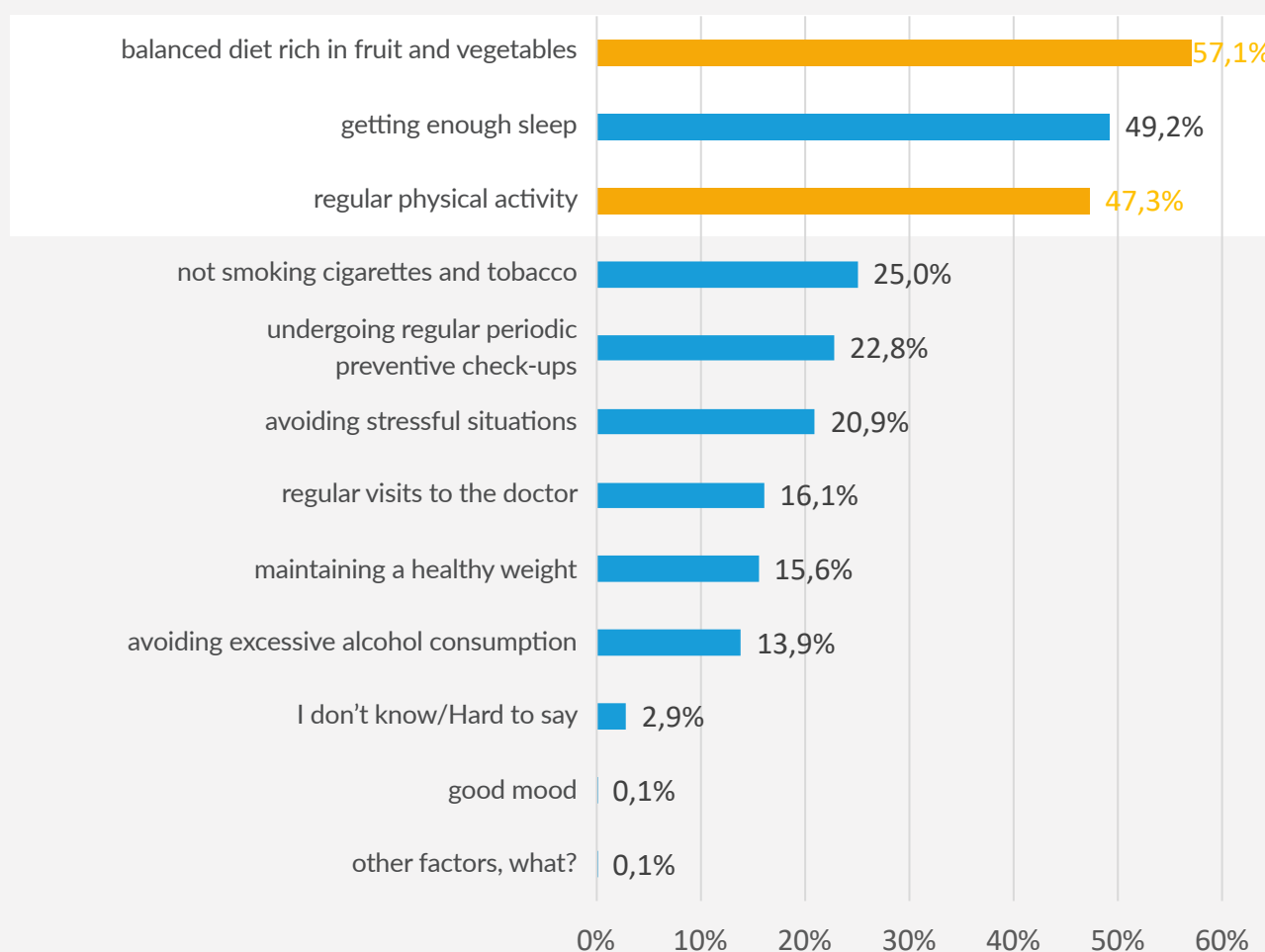
Musculoskeletal conditions and injuries (number of sick leave days per 1,000 employees in 2019–2021)



The increased number of sick leave days is maintained in the case of back pain.
Risk factors include a sedentary lifestyle, forced positions during remote and office work and insufficient physical activity.



Survey: lifestyle assessment – what affects our health?

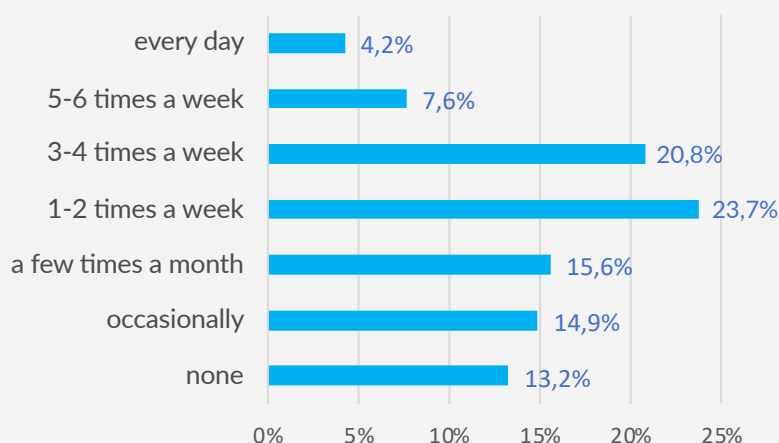


WHO RECOMMENDATIONS

The WHO recommends **150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity throughout the week or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity for adults aged 18 to 64.**

Nevertheless, as many as 67.4% of employees do not follow these recommendations.

Survey: lifestyle assessment – physical activity



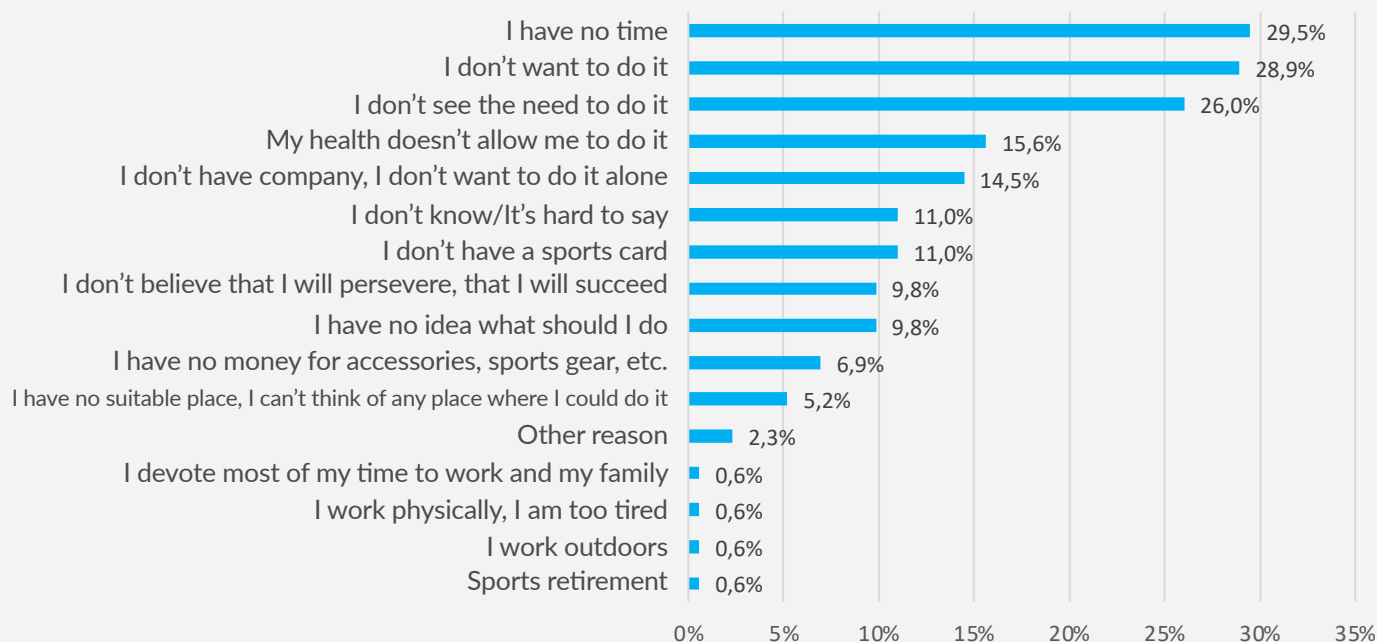
Moderate- or vigorous-intensity physical activity (i.e. e.g. jogging, brisk walking, playing sports, gardening or dancing) **for at least 30 minutes** is undertaken **every day** by only **4.2%** of people, **3–4 times a week by 20.8%** and **1–2 times a week by 23%**. Almost 15% of people declare that they engage in such physical activity occasionally and more than 13% say that they do not exercise, go for walks or do physical work.

As a reason for lack of activity, almost 1/3 of people say that they **do not have time (29.5%)**, **do not want to engage in physical activity (28.9%)** and **do not need to do so (26%)** (Figure 5). This may indicate a low awareness of the dangers of insufficient physical activity or ignoring the consequences of lack of such activity. Furthermore, they are apparent: the deterioration of health or at least the loss of the chance to maintain it.

Regular physical activity, even of moderate intensity, is beneficial for the body. It reduces the risk of cardiovascular diseases, the main cause of death in Poland. It regulates sugar levels and prevents the development of type 2 diabetes. It affects the growth of brain cells and more efficient connections between synapses, thus preventing dementia. It improves mood – beta-endorphins are produced after workouts, increasing self-esteem and preventing depression. It reduces bad cholesterol (LDL) while increasing good cholesterol (HDL). It reduces the likelihood of fractures, including of the ilium or spine. It also reduces the risk of colorectal, uterine and breast cancer (especially in menopausal women). It is also an effective method for maintaining a healthy body weight and indirectly protects against diseases caused by being overweight or obese.

Survey: lifestyle assessment – physical activity

Why don't you undertake moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity (e.g. jogging, brisk walking, playing sports, gardening or dancing) involving at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted exercise?



If only slightly more than 30% of employees undertake physical activity in accordance with the WHO recommendations, employers who care about the health of their employees and thus want to reduce their absence and increase their productivity at the same time, have many options. They can promote health-enhancing behaviours and enable employees to benefit from physical activity through various sports packages.

5 Five reasons for the increase in the number of sick notes

Ewa Smoleń M. Sc
Physical therapist

At least five factors have contributed to the increase in the number of sick notes due to musculoskeletal conditions.

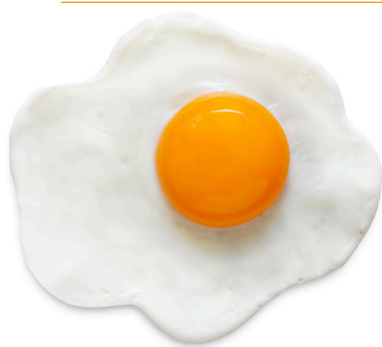
- 1** Firstly: it was caused by remote work and less need to travel. Company meetings were held online, from home, so people lost the chance even to take these few hundred steps they usually did when moving around the office. In addition, not every employee had (and has) an ergonomic workstation at home: a chair, a large monitor or possibly a laptop stand that allows them to work in a position other than with their head bowed down. Hence, shoulder and neck strains and, consequently, back pain and sick notes.
- 2** Secondly, the closure of facilities and places where the sport could be practised (sports clubs, swimming pools and even forests) has also contributed to an increase in the number of sick notes due to musculoskeletal conditions. Riding a stationary bicycle at home – as sometimes the only form of exercise available after eight hours spent at the desk – had to suffice, but that does not mean that all muscles were involved. Besides, not everyone had such a bicycle.
- 3** Thirdly, during the months of increased incidence of COVID-19, some people avoided sports because they feared contracting the disease in places where many people were present, such as a gym, fitness room or swimming pool.
- 4** Fourthly, as far as the increase in the number of sick notes is concerned, a disruption in leisure planning was certainly also indirectly involved. The habits we used to have, e.g. going to the swimming pool twice a week or going to the gym twice a week, have been given up during the pandemic, and now we use our free time for something else.
- 5** When looking for reasons for the increase in the number of sick notes due to back pain, we cannot forget about the fifth and crucial factor, i.e. motivation – or rather, the lack of it. Lack of willingness to once again include physical activity that was part of our daily activity calendar in our schedules. It is difficult to start practising a sport if you simply do not like it. Only a particular group of people who have been involved in various sports activities since childhood and who realise the health-enhancing value of sport in its broadest sense have succeeded



Check out the offer of Medicover Sport sports packages for employees. They give access to as many as 4,500 sports and leisure facilities! Read more at: www.medicoversport.pl/en

HEALTHY FOOD AND DIET

6 Risk factors for lifestyle diseases: Fundamental importance of lifestyle and prevention



Karolina Kryszkiewicz
Nutritionist, Medi Dieta

No, not about food. Let us talk about nutrition. For there is a big difference between food and nutrition. Even the food that looks best on Instagram or in a restaurant will not always be healthy and nutritious.

? Why is it important to talk to employees about healthy eating?

- 78%** of surveyed employees **say they eat healthily**, but despite this, there are more and more people with:
- **overweight and obesity** – in 2021, already over **55%**;
 - **hypertension** – **28%**, an increase of up to 7 p.p. compared to 2019;
 - **abnormal total cholesterol** – almost **50%** of respondents;
 - **abnormal blood glucose levels** – as many as one in five results.

Long-term abnormalities evidenced by parameters at abnormal levels may cause the following conditions:

- cardiovascular diseases (atherosclerosis, ischaemic heart disease and cardiac arrhythmias);
- hypertension;
- prediabetes;
- type 2 diabetes;
- chronic fatigue;
- stress,
- degenerative spine conditions and musculoskeletal conditions.

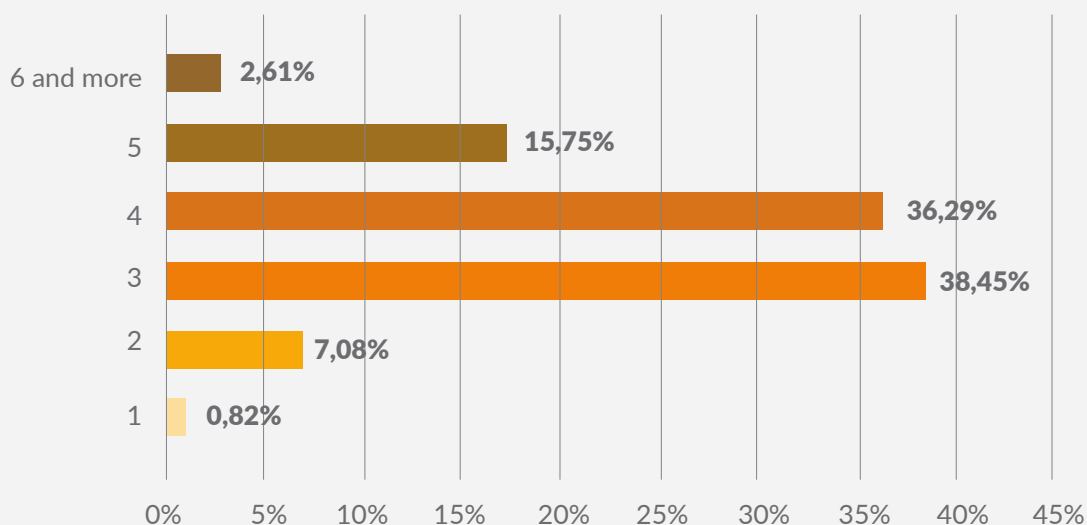
These conditions are largely diet-dependent, meaning that they depend on our lifestyle.



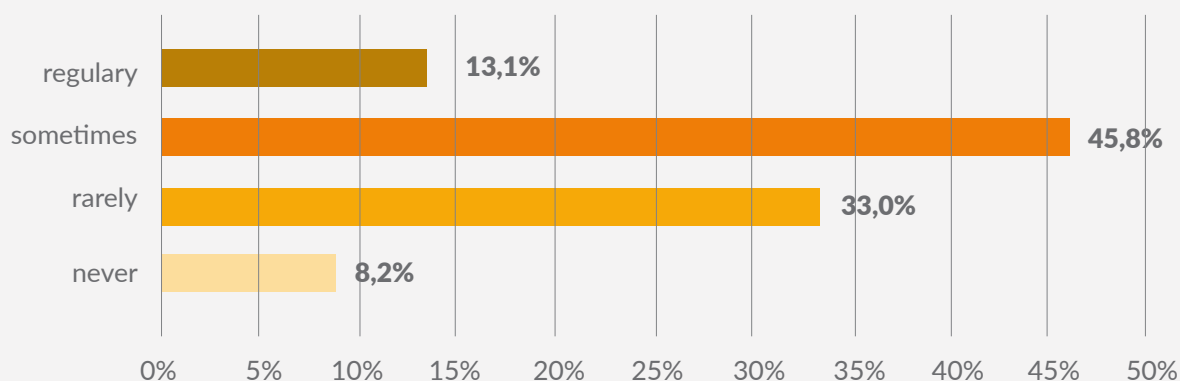
Nowadays, when we have easy access to knowledge, it is not difficult to get information about **healthy eating rules**. However, it is worth reminding employees of the basic ones:

1. Eat **meals regularly** (4–5 meals every 3–4 hours).
2. Eat vegetables and fruit as often and as much as possible, at least half of what you eat. Remember the right proportions: **3/4 – vegetables and 1/4 – fruit**.
3. Eat **cereal products**, especially whole-grain products.
4. Drink at least **2 large glasses of milk every day**. You can replace it with yoghurt, kefir and – partially – cheese.
5. **Limit your consumption of meat** (especially red meat and processed meat products to 0.5 kg/week). Eat fish, pulses and eggs.
6. **Limit your consumption of animal fats**. Replace them with vegetable oils.
7. **Avoid sugar and sweets** (replace them with fruit and nuts).
8. **Do not add salt to your food**; buy products with low salt content. Use herbs – they have valuable ingredients and improve the taste.
9. **Remember to drink water**, at least 1.5 litres a day.
10. **Do not drink alcohol**.

How many meals a day do you usually eat (not including snacks)?



How often do you snack between meals?





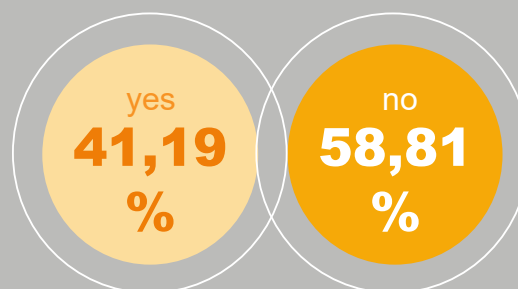
Why, having this knowledge, we are still eating unhealthily?

The most common dietary mistakes of Poles include the following:

- diet low in vegetables and fruit;
- too few groats and whole-grain products in the diet;
- irregular meal consumption – studies show that as many as 59% of respondents do not eat regularly;
- high consumption of animal products and salt, sweets, sweetened drinks and alcohol.



Do you eat your meals at regular intervals?



In a nutshell – we have a wealth of knowledge about healthy eating, but we do not use it.

Here are some practical tips on how you can change this:

1. Plan your meals in advance every day.

The day before, prepare your food for the next day or check your fridge and plan what you will prepare to eat the next day.

2. Follow healthy eating rules.

Follow all the healthy eating rules. Do not select only some of them, e.g. do not eat a lot of vegetables and at the same time a lot of meat products and sweets.

3. Change your eating habits gradually.

Sit down and think about whether you are sure you are following all the healthy eating rules. If not, plan a change. However, remember that you should not change all your habits at once. Pick two habits you want to change and work on them for a month or two until they become routine. Then you can move on to changing the next two habits. The change needs to be spread over time – over a year or even two years.

4. Consume your meals regularly and do not snack.

Eating regularly is one of the more difficult habits, and it requires planning, sometimes setting a meal reminder on your smartphone. Remember to eat three main meals and two smaller ones. A healthy diet catering service provider can help to keep your meals regular. Eating balanced meals regularly allows you to keep your blood sugar at the correct level, stop binge eating, and reduce your appetite for sweet and high-calorie snacks.

5. Pay attention to the composition of the products you buy and the meals you order.

Often, when we do not have time to prepare our dinner at home, we buy something from a nearby shop, restaurant or bar. Such products are often high in fat (of questionable quality), salt (which promotes the development of hypertension), sugar and preservatives. Even the best-looking meals can be a source of a lot of fat and, therefore, calories.



6. Control the amount you eat when you work from home.

Just like on the in-office days, plan your meals in advance, prepare them and eat them at scheduled times. If you have a habit of looking into your fridge a dozen times a day, out of boredom, every time you do it, answer the question: "Which of my five meals am I going to eat now?". If none, close the fridge.

7. Drink water.

Thirst is very often mistaken for hunger and instead of reaching for water, we reach for a snack and consume excess calories. Drink water regularly. If you do not remember to drink water, set a reminder on your phone.

8. Healthy snacks

Snacking is a bad habit, but if you are trying to get out of it and you do not always succeed, make sure you snack on healthy, low-calorie foods, such as peppers cut into strips, cauliflower, celery, carrots, tomatoes, kohlrabi, etc.

9. Order meals from recommended healthy diet catering service provider.

You have the right not to have the time to plan your meals and cook at home, or you may not want to do so. If this is the case, instead of consuming meals bought on impulse in a shop or bar near your work, choose meals offered by a healthy diet catering service provider. Thus, you will eat well-balanced meals of the right size.

Employer! Take advantage of our offer of training courses and webinars for employees. This will allow you to learn more, verify media reports on nutrition and ask questions to a specialist.

WHO RECOMMENDATIONS

According to new WHO recommendations, **adults (18–64 years of age) should undertake moderate-intensity physical activity for 150–300 minutes throughout the week or vigorous-intensity physical activity for 75–150 minutes throughout the week.**

Adults should also do muscle-strengthening activities at a moderate or greater intensity that involve all major muscle groups, and these activities should be done at least twice a week.

Did you know that with MediDieta you can provide your employees with healthy meals and snacks at the office?



The offer for companies includes vending fridges where employees can buy healthy, tasty and balanced meals and snacks.

Vending machines are intended for companies that:

- employ more than 200 people who work on-site at one location;
- do not have a staff canteen;
- want to take comprehensive care of their employees' health by offering them high-quality, healthy food.

As part of the offer, we guarantee support through tasting events, meetings with a nutritionist and thematic webinars on proper nutrition.

Meals can be subsidised from the Company's Social Benefits Fund and the company's working capital, making it possible to significantly reduce their price and create a real benefit for the employee.



HOBBIES AND ENTERTAINMENT



7 A visit to a museum or an opera house on a medical prescription? How do cultural events affect health?



Piotr Soszyński M. D, Ph. D.

Strategic Medical Advisory Director
Medicover Sp. z o.o.

Health, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), is “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.⁹

Social health is the ability to adapt in a group and to form, maintain and develop proper relationships with other people or animals. Social life is crucial for our personal and professional well-being and is also of great importance for our physical and mental health. According to researchers at the Population Health Institute, University of Wisconsin¹⁰, environmental factors, including socio-economic factors and individual behaviours, can account for as much as 70% of health risks.

We know well that a healthy diet, physical activity, not smoking and not drinking excess alcohol have a positive impact on our health and the quality and length of our life. However, can other factors, e.g. social and cultural events, in addition to the fact that they provide us entertainment and make it possible for us to learn more and to spend our leisure time pleasantly, also have a health-enhancing effect? It turns out that yes, and that this effect is significant.

9. <https://www.pzh.gov.pl/zdrowie-definicja/>

10. <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/measures-data-sources/county-health-rankings-model>



Not long ago, in 2019, the prestigious British Medical Journal¹¹ published a cross-sectional paper summarising a 14-year follow-up of nearly 7,000 people in England participating in a long-term study on population ageing. As it turned out, people who engaged in cultural activities – going to museums, art galleries, exhibitions, the theatre or the opera:

- 1–2 times a year – had a **14% lower risk of dying compared with those with no engagement;**
- every few months or more often – had the risk of dying as much as 31% lower! And this is after taking into account social and economic factors, as well as their general health.

Findings similar to those observed in England were published following a study on a large population in Sweden. They showed that people who **rarely¹² attended cultural events had a significantly higher risk of dying (between 14% and 42%)** than those who visited museums, art galleries, the cinema or concerts. Finally, the importance of culture and the arts for our health was most clearly highlighted in the document entitled ‘Exploring the Longitudinal Relationship Between Arts Engagement and Health’, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2015).¹³

60%
higher risk

After taking all potentially influential factors into account, it was found that people who rarely attend cultural events have a risk of dying as much as 60% higher compared with those who attend cultural events more frequently. **The conclusion is self-evident: culture in the broadest sense is good for our health!**

32%
lower risk

In addition, engagement with culture was associated with a lower **incidence of dementia and a risk of depression lower by 32%!**



Listening to music, including watching concerts and live performances, and using music therapeutically, including in combination with movement in the form of dance, has a beneficial effect on many areas of mental health.

It improves brain function and memory, helps treat dementia, and reduces anxiety, including anxiety before surgery. **It also helps to manage pain, reduces side effects in cancer treatment**, etc.

21%
improved
well-being

People who attended concerts were asked **about their feelings**, and it turned out that they felt better and declared an improvement in the well-being of 21% if they attended a live event rather than listening to music at home. Considering these conclusions and previous findings presented above regarding participation in cultural events, it is essential to emphasise that leaving home to go to a museum, cinema, theatre or concert, i.e. a socially engaging activity, has a positive impact on our health. Listening to music or watching a film on a streaming channel at home, on the other hand, unfortunately, has no such health benefits.

11. The art of life and death: 14 year follow-up analyses of associations between arts engagement and mortality in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. Daisy Fancourt, Andrew Steptoe. BMJ 2019;367:l6377 <https://www.bmj.com/content/367/bmj.l6377>
12. Visiting the cinema, concerts, museums or art exhibitions as determinant of survival: a Swedish fourteen-year cohort follow-up. B B Konlaan, L O Bygren, S E Johansson. Scand J Public Health 2000 Sep;28(3):174-8. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11045748/>
13. <https://www.artsforhealth.org/research/artsengagementandhealth/ArtsEngagementandHealth.pdf>

The period of the COVID-19 pandemic, apart from the direct effects of the virus infection itself and its complications, contributed to the deterioration of the health of Poles in many areas. One of the many adverse factors may have been restrictions on access to social activities and cultural events. So, now that these restrictions are lifted, we should attend them as much and as often as possible. Go to museums, theatres and concerts to have a good time and to improve your health. Doctors do not yet prescribe visits to the opera or theatre, but knowing that it is good for our health, we can buy tickets ourselves.

Check out Medicover Benefits – a platform that, through a cafeteria system, gives employees a free choice of benefits, including those enabling them to attend cultural events
Read more at: www.medicoverbenefits.pl

MENTAL HEALTH



8 Mental health of employees in the new reality

Karol Bieńkowski M. Sc.
Psychologist

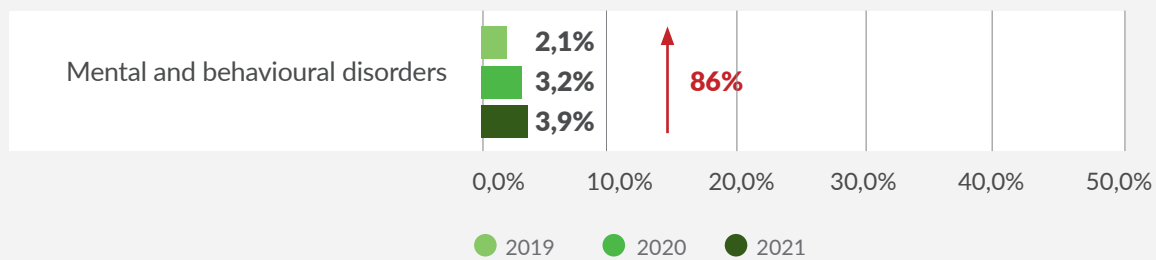
The Work. Health. Economy. 2022 Outlook report presents information about the leading health risk factors and reasons for absence in 2019–2021. In this review, we will take a closer look at what the report tells us about the mental health of employees in Poland.

Mental health-related sick notes accounted for 2.1% of all sick notes in 2019, 3.2% in 2020 and 3.9% in 2021, which is an 86% increase compared to 2019. In each analysed category, the number of days of employee absence from work was higher in 2020 than in 2019, and only two of these categories maintained their upward trend in 2021. In 2021, a depression episode was the reason for absence from work for almost 29.4 days (per 1,000 people), which is an increase of 107% compared to 2019. Similarly, the number of sick leave days due to recurrent depressive disorders increased by 47% compared to 2019.

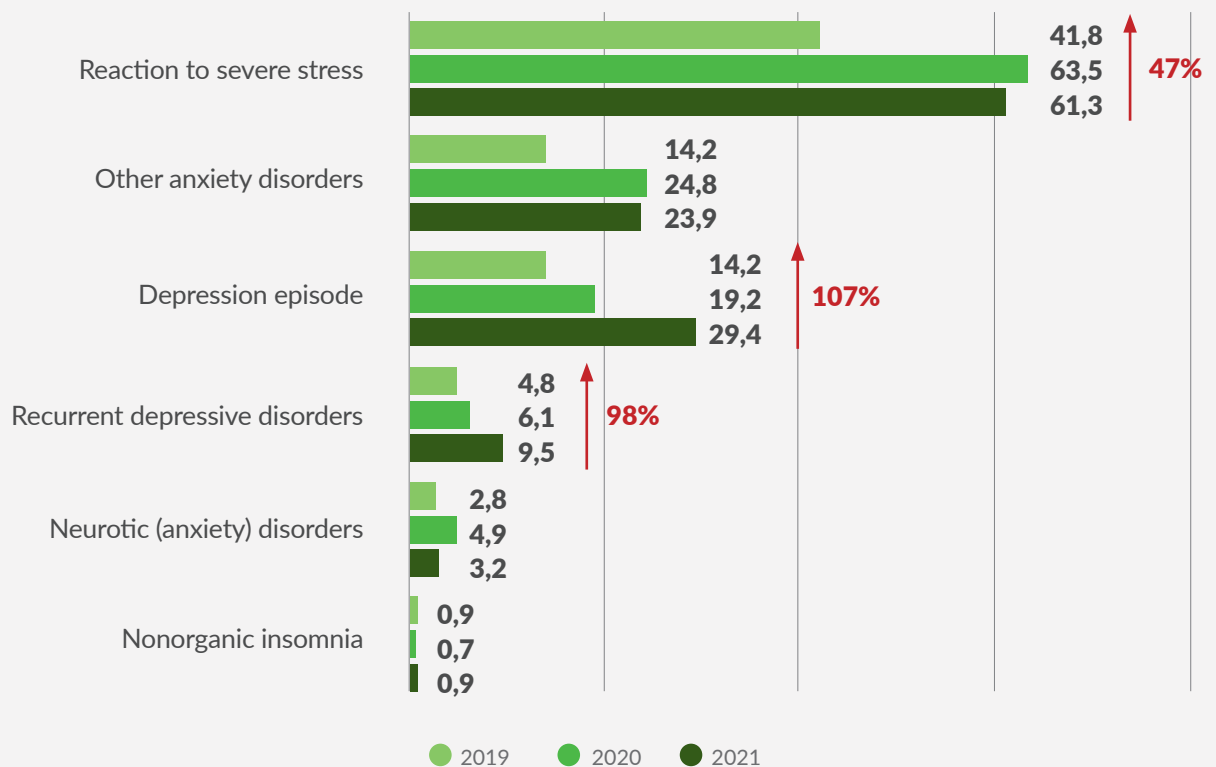
The cause of the longest absences due to mental disorders in 2019–2021 was a reaction to severe stress.



Reasons for sick notes in 2019–2021



Mental disorders – number of sick leave days per 1,000 employees in 2019–2021



The increased number of sick leave days is maintained for most mental health problems.

Particularly worrying is the increase in the number of absence days due to depression. Early specialist intervention and preventing mental problems from worsening is crucial.

The reason for such a significant increase in the number of absence days due to mental problems seems obvious – the coronavirus pandemic that began in early 2020. COVID-19 has affected all areas of our lives, causing economic problems, problems with the availability of goods and problems related to the operation of many businesses. In addition, and perhaps above all, COVID-19 made us worry about our health and the health of our loved ones and had (and continues to have) an impact on our mental health.

A study conducted by Twardowska-Staszek, Seredyńska, Rostek and Biel (2021)¹⁴ shows that “COVID-19 has negative consequences for mental health, especially in risk groups (women, younger age, living alone).” During the pandemic, the low mood was prevalent among adult Poles, which was also manifested as increased tension and reduced vitality and ability to feel pleasure.

14. Twardowska-Staszek, E., Seredyńska, A., Rostek, I., & Biel SJ, K. (2021). Nastrój i emocje Polaków podczas pandemii COVID-19. Horyzonty Wychowania, 20(55), 11-26. <https://doi.org/10.35765/hw.2075>

Similar conclusions, but concerning a student population, were reached by Dębowska, Horeczy, Boduszek and Doliński (2020)¹⁵, who surveyed 7,228 students from Poland, mainly women. The results showed a significant increase in the low mood with the progression of the pandemic.

55,2%

In a study conducted by Sebastian Skalski (2021)¹⁶, more than half (55.2%) of respondents declared that they “felt overwhelmed by negative information about the spread of the virus.” Approximately ⅓ of respondents declared that they felt stressed and mentally exhausted, had their mood lowered by the pandemic, felt that it was having a negative impact on their mental health and that they had negative thoughts about the future.

10%

Another study worth noting was conducted by Monika Talarowska in 2020¹⁷. It showed that approx. 10% of study participants felt suicidal during the pandemic.

Given the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that never before has the world as we know it had to face a problem of this gravity, it is hardly surprising that it has taken a toll on the mental health of Poles. The consequences associated with the pandemic explain well the increase in mental problems of Poles in 2020 and 2021. The pandemic has affected almost every area of our lives and some of the problems caused by COVID-19 will be experienced for years to come. Considering other difficult situations we have to deal with, we can draw one crucial conclusion: taking care of one's mental health is crucial to finding one's way in new and difficult circumstances. It is worth bearing this in mind and not seeking help as soon as possible.

9 Burnout – the problem of employees and employers. How to prevent it?



*Interview with Sylwia Rozbicka,
psychologist and psychotherapist at Mind Health
Centrum Zdrowia Psychicznego*

BURNOUT

In 2019, the WHO recognised burnout as a syndrome. **Among Poles, one in four (23.59%) feels burned out, and 70% declare they are close to it.** Burnout is experienced by 46% of Generation Z and 45% of Millennials. Correspondingly, one in five and one in four think their employer does not take their burnout seriously or does not take steps to change this situation.

15. Dębowska A, Horeczy B, Boduszek D, Dolinski D (2020). A repeated cross-sectional survey assessing university students' stress, depression, anxiety, and suicidality in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland. *Psychological Medicine* 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S003329172000392X>
16. Skalski, S. (2021). Selected aspects of mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland. In *Polskie Forum Psychologiczne* (Vol. 26, No. 2).
17. Talarowska M., Chodkiewicz J., Nawrocka N., Miniszewska J., Biliński P., Mental Health and the SARS-COV-2 Epidemic-Polish Research Study, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(19), 7015, 2020, doi: 10.3390/ijerph17197015.



We talk to Sylwia Rozbicka, psychologist and psychotherapist at Mind Health Centrum Zdrowia Psychicznego, **about burnout, how to take care of employees to prevent it and how to react when they experience it.**

Mental health has received much attention recently, which has been steadily deteriorating for some time, as evidenced by the latest research. What has changed that such a problem has arisen?

Indeed, there has been more and more talk about mental health recently. This does not mean that the problem did not exist before, and it was present – perhaps even to the same extent. It is just that we are more open about it now. Certainly, COVID-19 has contributed to this because, during the pandemic, it became apparent how important mental health is. We started to talk about it because it was difficult to remain indifferent to what was happening around us – we had to react to it and ease anxiety. The pandemic highlighted problems with stress, anxiety and depression.

How has the pandemic affected our work?

During the pandemic, the work-life balance has blurred. When you are in the office, you do not have to make much effort to feel like you are at work. At home, on the other hand, you really have to make an effort. The second issue is the time spent on work. Data from the People at Work 2022: A Global Workforce View report from ADP shows that, on average, we work almost 1 day more per week as we do nearly 6 overtime hours. Thirdly, the same report shows that women have been much more affected by the pandemic and are more likely than men to have high-stress levels and experience burnout symptoms. Women, especially during the pandemic, have often had to combine caring and working roles.

Too many responsibilities and prolonged stress are a straight path to burnout. So, what is burnout?

The WHO has expanded the definition of burnout and included it in the list of disease symptoms in the ICD-11 classification. According to this definition, burnout is a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. Symptoms such as feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, increased mental distance from one's job, less commitment, no sense of purpose in what one is doing and no desire to work are also highlighted.

It is worth remembering that this is about prolonged stress, and it is different from intense, short-term stress that comes and goes quickly. Regularity and chronicity and the inability to deal with this stress – this is what need to be prevented.



So what can employees do?

They should realistically assess their abilities and when something is beyond their competence, openly say so and talk with their manager about what can be done. Apart from talking to their boss, they should keep a work-life balance.

It is easy to say 'keep a work-life balance'... Yet, many people cannot do this.

We treat the work-life balance as something requiring special effort, and it is just our small everyday decisions, such that we take short breaks from work, go on holiday or plan a city break, i.e. a short weekend holiday. It is also about having time for our meals, going for breakfast or just drinking water. This is the daily balance that we should take special care of. It is also our decision that we have our career and our personal life, so we should do things we enjoy apart from our work duties. Work is necessary – it also benefits our mental health: we feel needed, we can fulfil ourselves and achieve our ambitions. However, to maintain our mental health, we should fulfil ourselves in both areas of our life – the professional and the private one. If one of them is disturbed, we feel bad. For our emotional and social development, it is also essential to take care of social relationships, to build a social support network – to have acquaintances and friends. We should also engage in activities outside of work, such as sports or other hobbies that we enjoy.

What can the employer do?

Burnout is a problem for both the employee and the employer. The employer wants a productive, efficient, healthy employee who will not go on sick leave too often. Therefore, they should take care of them. The employer creates a work culture. If they contact the employee regularly after working hours or at weekends (apart from some emergency situation or to schedule an appointment), if it is acceptable that employees regularly stay at work after working hours to read e-mails, make phone calls or do some computer work, it is a straight path to burnout and consequently losing employees. They will either hand in their resignation or go on extended sick leave. Another thing is to support the employees – not only when things are already bad, but before that happens. Employees need support in dealing with stress – workshops or webinars with a specialist will help build employees' mental resilience before a problem arises. **At Mind Health, we offer a wide range of workshops, training courses, webinars and support groups for companies.**

What is the manager's role?

Nowadays, managers must have more unique skills and higher social competence – to identify syndromes and the first warning signs of something wrong with their employees. Things that should draw the manager's attention include reduced productivity, a problem with taking on new responsibilities, greater cynicism, boycotting new ideas and unwillingness to put them into action, physical health problems and related absences, and sick notes. The manager should also pay attention to how the employee copes with stress when something needs to be done timely and quickly in emergency situations. The better they cope with stress, the more likely they will perform their tasks successfully.

The manager's role is also to allocate responsibilities appropriately. If the employee does not see the point in performing their duties because there are too many of them or does not have a sense of agency and does not feel responsible for their work, they are more and more unwilling to do their work and they are on the straight path to burnout.



At the same time, managers must be more sensitive and attentive to several questions: What is my team like? Who is on my team? How do they work together? If there is a pleasant atmosphere in the team thanks to, for example, good communication, the team is more likely to be productive. Here, too, the manager's role is to ensure a good exchange of ideas between employees. The clearer the communication, the more likely the employee will stay with the company. Let us also not forget that the manager is also an employee and needs team support.

What if (e.g. periodically) the number of tasks to be performed by the team is high and more time than regular working hours is required to carry them out? Do employees have to spend more time on their work?

In the long term, this may be deceptive. Long working hours should not be confused with efficiency. An overtired and overworked employee will not be efficient – this is impossible due to our physiology. We have such a mentality that we are paid for the hours we are at work, not for the tasks we perform. We are expected to work 8 hours daily, which sometimes counts more in some organisations than completing a specific task. I hope that this mentality will change. It seems that the point of work is not to work as long as possible but to work as efficiently as possible.

When is the best time to react if we see some worrying symptoms in our employee?

The best time is right away. Sometimes our intuition helps us – we see or feel something is wrong, and this is the time to react. The worst thing you can do is ignore or deny it, say there is no problem, do not see what is going on and at the same time impose additional responsibilities on the employee. When you see something that worries you, do not be afraid to talk to the employee and ask them what is wrong.

Unfortunately, managers or employers usually react when employee experiences burnout and is unable to do their job. Only then does the employer intervene. However, it is often too late, and we are unlikely to keep such an employee in the company. He leaves because he wants to change the working environment.



How to talk to the employee?

First of all, do not be afraid to talk. Talk based on facts: it is so and so, I have noticed this and that, something has happened, I have noticed some symptoms (e.g. frequent absence from work, aversion to something). At the same time, it is essential to emphasise that we want to talk and solve the problem. This does not have to be a conversation pattern to be strictly followed, although it can be helpful:

- 1) identify the problem;
- 2) think about what can be done and what can be changed;
- 3) and what steps to take to prevent this type of situation in the future.

The issue of burnout is crucial in the context of our functioning in the workplace. We spend a significant part of our lives at work.

Therefore, let us ensure that we feel good at our workplace daily. Stress is inevitable and often motivating, but when there is too much of it, it causes burnout. Therefore, let us address it and try to deal with it.



Burnout symptoms

1. Low mood
2. Reduced productivity
3. Unwillingness to take on new responsibilities
4. Concentration and focus problems
5. Energy depletion
6. Increased mental distance from one's job
7. Lack of sense of purpose in what one is doing
8. Somatic problems – headache, stomach ache and back pain



How to prevent burnout – what can employees do?

1. Keep a work-life balance.
2. Have a hygienic lifestyle: get enough sleep, eat regularly and be physically active.
3. Have a hobby, e.g. practise some sport.
4. Maintain social relationships and create a social support network – have acquaintances and friends.
5. Plan their rest and go on holiday.
6. Set boundaries.
7. Talk to their supervisor if feeling overburdened with work
8. Ask their supervisor or HR staff for support or stress management training.



How to prevent burnout – what can the manager do?

1. Observe their team and react as soon as they see any worrying symptoms that may indicate that the employee's mood is lowered.
2. Not to impose too many responsibilities on individual team members.
3. Give the employee a sense of agency and a sense of meaning in the work the employee performs.
4. Get to know the people they are working with – in general, learn about their personal situation and consider the limitations related to it.





How to cope with stress?

1

Recognize

- identify the problem

2

Reverse

- think about what to change and do to prevent such a situation in the future

3

Resilience

- take care of your health and resilience



Check out Medcover's offer of programmes to support employee mental health:

Seminar: *How Not to Go Crazy in Today's World? Dealing with Stress*

Seminar for managers: *How to Recognise stress, Anxiety and Burnout in Employees*
Seminar for managers: *Mental Resilience or How to Be Effective under Pressure and in Crisis*

Read more at: www.zdrowafirma.medicover.pl/en/mental-health/

10 Hybrid work and healthy relationships

The text is based on the Hybrid Work and Healthy Relationships webinar hosted by:

Tina Sobocińska, founder of HR4Future and HR strategic advisor

Justyna Bąk, therapist cooperating with Medcover

Poles have fallen in love with hybrid work. It is usually one of the first questions candidates ask during recruitment. Hybrid work is a combination of working in the office and remotely in a model that best serves the organisation, taking into account the sector in which the organisation operates, the nature of the work, the experience of the pandemic period, the culture of the organisation, the leadership style and preferences of its employees. Hybrid work allows us to enjoy the benefits of remote work (which proved successful during the pandemic) and working in the office, but in a different form than two years ago. Such a model improves efficiency, productivity and engagement and is good for our social relationships.



The role of social relationships

Why are social relationships so meaningful? As Aristotle argued, social relationships are essential in human life and healthy functioning. Contact with people improves our mood and helps us manage stress and get through crises. Our social network is one of our most essential resources. Studies, including those of the University of Chicago, point to the adverse health effects when we lack these relationships. When we have healthy relationships with other people, we recover faster after surgery and are more resistant to cancer.

WHO DEFINITION OF HEALTH

Health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, it is a state of complete mental and physical well-being. One of the three areas of our lives that affect our well-being, in addition to physical and mental health, is social health, i.e. the ability to form and develop proper relationships.

Poles' well-being in 2022

As studies (including those conducted by Medcover) show, in 2019–2021, in Poland, there was a significant increase in sickness absence due to depression (by 107%) and by 47% due to reaction to severe stress. A similarly alarming trend is confirmed by other reports, such as Human Power's Tired of Being Tired report. Fatigue, anxiety and depression have many causes and reasons outside the work environment. However, the fact is that with such a body of experience, we are entering another transformation of the work model – into hybrid work. What opportunities can it offer, and how can it incorporate a new sense and way of building social relationships that can support all of us?

New needs of employees

In many companies, hybrid work is introduced in dialogue with employees. Conversations with leaders, surveys, pulse checks, focus groups, and cross-functional project groups that gather information about employees' needs – are examples of how employees can be included in the dialogue to assess which work model is best for the organisation. Good practices also show flexibility in introducing a hybrid work model: the management sets the main objectives, managers adapt them to the nature of the work in their teams, and employees adapt them to the tasks they perform and their situations. Thus, a person with strong social relationship needs may want to work more often in the office than others. In contrast, an employee working from a location other than the office from the start may turn up in the office less often if this was part of the contract with the employer.

From the surveys and the feedback received, we can learn about essential employee needs in the context of hybrid work. An example is a company whose employees reported in surveys the need to bring to the offices their dogs adopted during the pandemic. When it turned out that it was not possible for objective reasons, the company organised a series of webinars with a dog behaviourist who provided vital tips on preparing a pet for a few hours' separation from its guardian when they are at work.





Constructive feedback

Employees who have been invited into the dialogue and involved in building the new hybrid work experience feel a shared responsibility for the decisions made and their implementation. This improves relationships within the company. They also feel encouraged – based on the trust thus built – to speak and provide constructive feedback when the hybrid work rules need to be clarified, adapted or improved. Feedback is also crucial at the team level, which sets new rules for hybrid work, e.g. spending one day a week in the office when all meet. It is worth checking at a team meeting once a month how these standards work for us. We should identify what we can improve so that everyone feels comfortable, included and positive that what we have agreed on makes sense. Then these standards will be put into practice and will not be just a slogan in a PowerPoint presentation.

Re-onboarding

Just as important as onboarding or offboarding is re-onboarding, i.e. introducing employees returning to their offices after a long break. There may be new people in the team who have joined the company in the last 2 years and have not worked regularly in the office. Or are there employees returning after their maternity leave or other long-term absence? Support and information about how we work today are essential in such cases and are also crucial for other team members. The return to the office needs to have a new sense – let us build it together. A short workshop on why we will be coming to the office can bring new arrangements and much good energy to the team, which has a chance for a new beginning. It is good to write down such new rules and return them to them once a month to verify how they work for us, whether they all make sense, and what we learn about ourselves by putting them into action.

Relationships are a process

Relationships are built over a period of time. In our private or professional life, each relationship needs to be cultivated. Hybrid work can include team rituals, such as celebrating birthdays, work anniversaries and achievements. Each of us will appreciate care from colleagues when we have difficulties, need help with new tasks or come to a new team. The trust we inspire in others requires constant care and commitment. Small gestures and just being friendly to others is so important. Sending a beautiful photo or a nice meme can mean much to the recipient and make the sender feel better.

Company benefits

In many companies, we can enjoy benefits that positively impact our well-being but also strengthen our relationship with ourselves. This is a crucial part of well-being. Knowing yourself and your needs, and taking care of your physical, mental and social health, including education and prevention in these areas, is crucial. It is worth taking advantage of webinars with experts, consultations with therapists, yoga classes, advice and tips to develop good habits and ensure a good lifestyle.



A new sense of meetings in the office

It is worth taking care of social relationships every time we come to the office. Hybrid work means that the office today has a different role. It is to be a place for meetings, exchange of ideas and experiences, problem-solving, creative workshops, learning or deep work in greater comfort than we have at home, e.g. in a quiet room where we can work in the company of other people focused on their tasks.

Mental health, including the mental health of leaders

Since the pandemic, mental health has taken on a different meaning. We have started to talk about it, take care of it and be aware that it affects not only our private life but also our work. It may happen that someone on our team is going through a tough time in their life. It is essential to show support and understanding and tell them they can get professional help, e.g. during consultations with a therapist offered by our company.

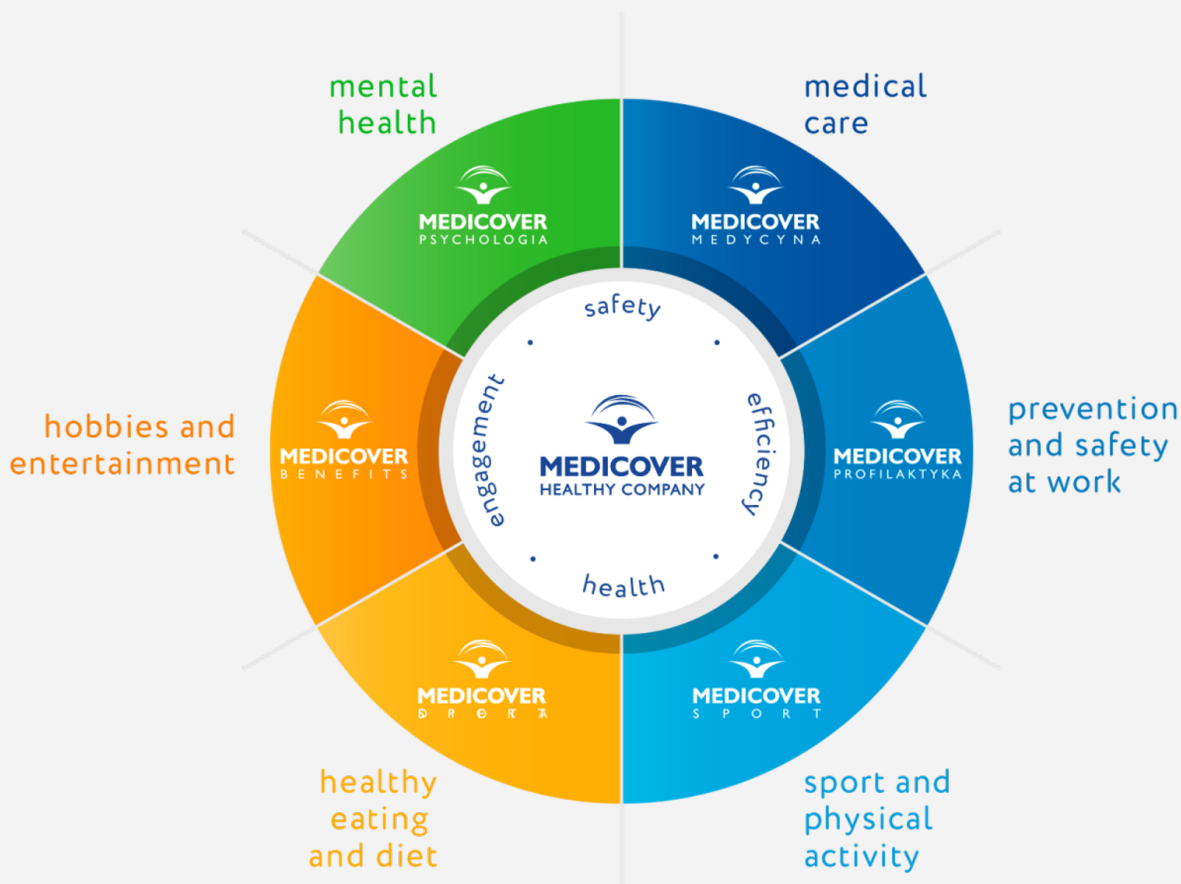
The last two years have shown that mental health has a universal dimension. It is crucial for both employees and leaders. As a manager, director or CEO, it is worth taking advantage of the exact solutions prepared for employees. A leader is also human – they have the right to feel worse.



Analysis of the effects

Any solutions we put in place in companies to improve the well-being of employees, including their social relationships, should be subject to periodical evaluations, reviews and needs analyses. Findings within the team related to the cultivation of relationships and work performance can be reviewed every month or two or three months on a temporary dynamic start-stop-continue analysis basis. It is worth measuring company benefits and establishing KPIs that show how employees use particular benefits and whether they are satisfied. It is also worth taking care of a healthy organisational culture and measuring its effects: everyone wants to work with the best results and happy and kind people around them.





Medicovert Healthy Company

From medical care to comprehensive well-being programmes – the development of benefits to taking care of employees' health.

Only a few years ago, taking care of employees' health basically meant only access to classic private medical care, and it did not seem that there could be anything more behind it. Nowadays, employee benefit programmes are rapidly developing in the direction of caring for the well-being of employees. There is a growing openness, among both employees and employers, to these innovations. This, in turn, means that benefit providers expand their offers and offer more and more exciting solutions.



What benefits are employees eager to use?

Firstly, **classic benefits in the form of private medical care still play a significant role.** The opportunity to visit a specialist or the availability of care for the whole family is of great value to employees. What has changed, however, is the target group which finds such a benefit attractive. Just a few or so years ago, young people did not choose medical care very often. Nowadays, regardless of age, it is a highly sought-after benefit. As a result, in many companies, it has been included in the set of non-salary benefits and is increasingly becoming a permanent element of the employer's offer.



The expansion of the age group and the growing awareness among employees of the need to pay attention to all aspects of health has led to a change in the approach to health care.

Psychological consultations, work-life balance, prevention programmes, webinars on health and the development of proper habits are what employees are looking for as they think about their well-being more holistically than before.

Employers, too, have started to see the benefits of offering employees a wider choice of options. They want to take care of their employees' mental well-being and support them; as part of offered benefits, they need to keep their work-life balance.



What is worth including in the benefit offer?

By looking at the options offered by service providers and the interest of employees in particular solutions, benefits can be tailored to meet the health-related needs of employees:

Sport and physical activity

As a complement to well-being care, it is an indispensable element in benefit programmes focusing on health. Cards providing access to sports clubs or the swimming pool, webinars and online consultations are essential. Employees can take care of these aspects of a healthy lifestyle whether they want to do so offline or online.

Healthy lifestyle and diet

Employees are more and more interested in what they eat. They are increasingly seeing the value of access to nutritionists, the availability of professional health programmes or the option to use a personalised diet.

Social health

The online cafeteria makes it possible to maintain and build interpersonal relationships through various forms of leisure activities, entertainment and hobbies. This translates into increased job satisfaction, greater commitment and the achievement of better business goals.

Supporting employees in keeping their work-life balance

There are many options regarding the choice of benefits to support broadly understood health, and their number is increasing every year. Employees are increasingly aware of the importance of taking care of their well-being, and employers see that investing in benefits that help employees take care of their physical and mental health increases their satisfaction, engagement and, ultimately, productivity.

Comprehensive support programmes

Depending on what kind of difficulties an individual faces or their working conditions, they may benefit from solutions that enable them to develop the proper operating patterns. The programmes consist of an educational component, self-diagnosis and psychological support. Whether the problem is stress, burnout or challenges related to, for example, the role of a manager, the available solutions provide professional tools and support to deal with these difficulties.

Joanna Kamińska, HR Director, psychologist, HRzPasja.pl blogger

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