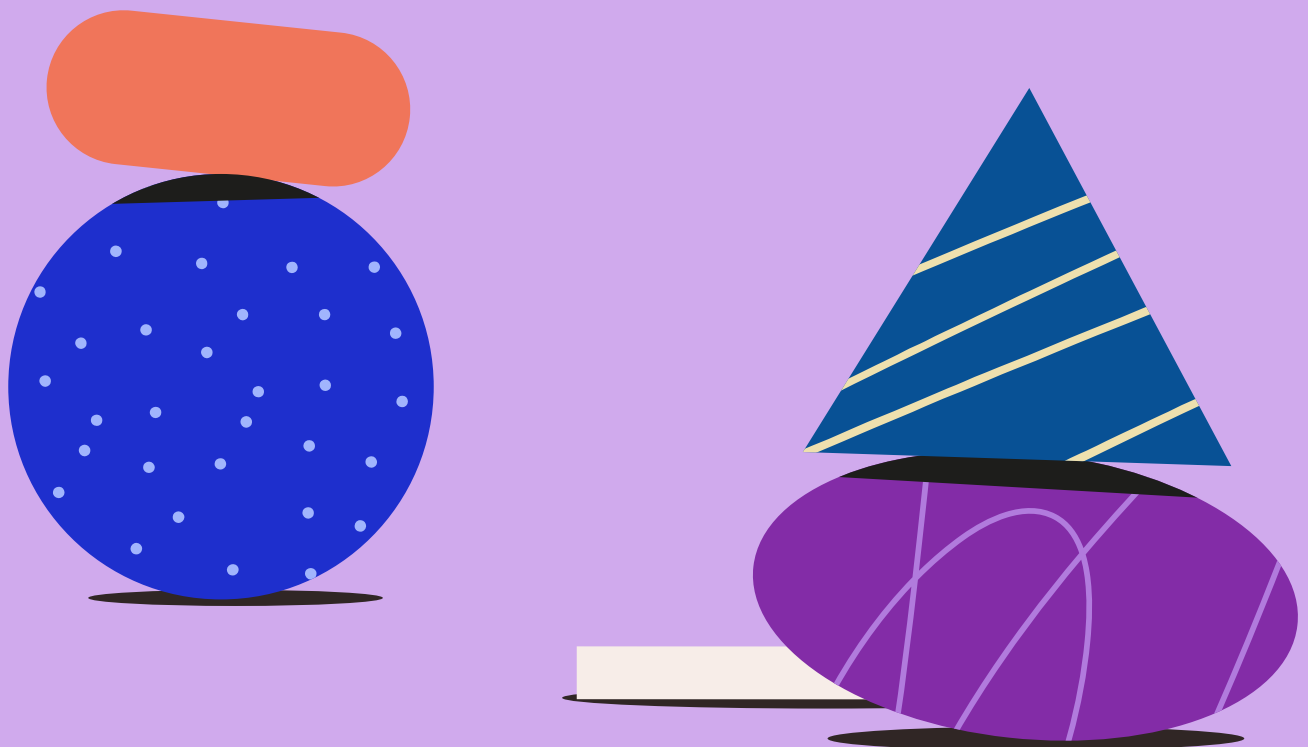
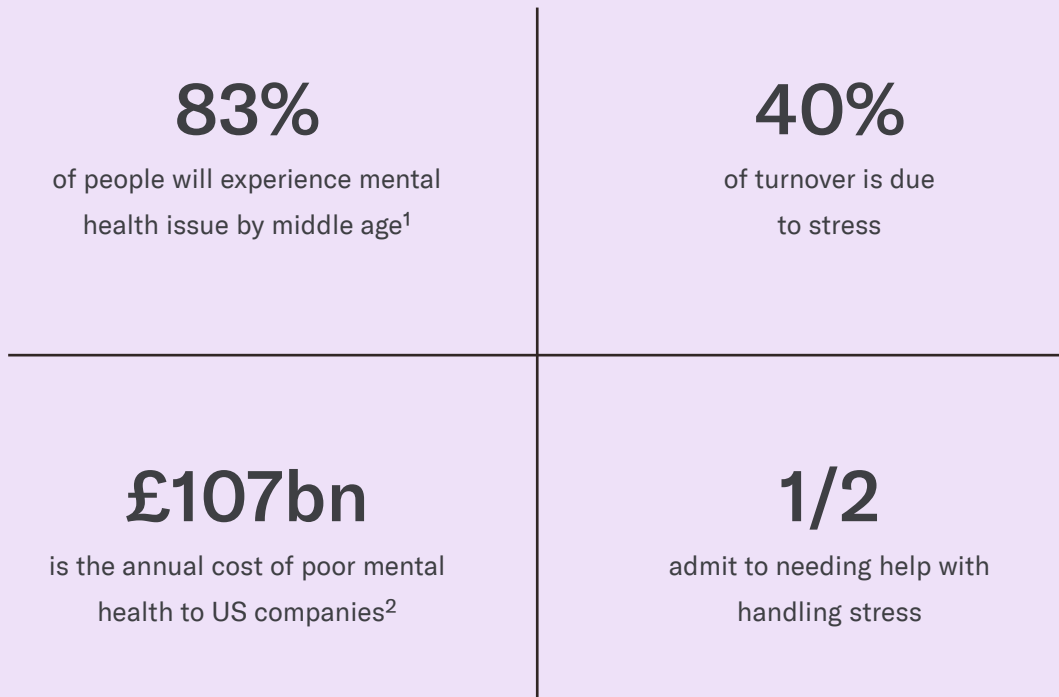


# How mental wellbeing impacts engagement and causes turnover

Does mental wellbeing really matter that much?  
Read the case.





Wellbeing doesn't stop at physical health. Thoughts and feelings make a difference, too. Which is why for the majority of employees (and their employers), prioritizing mental wellbeing has become a significant challenge as employees adapt to a rapidly evolving workplace.

Unfortunately, for companies everywhere, poor mental wellbeing means reduced engagement and productivity as well as significant upticks in absenteeism and turnover. But beyond financial and productivity costs, poor mental wellbeing is dangerous to employees' overall health. Linked to serious physical health risks like higher blood pressure and suppressed immune function, it also has a social impact, and may harm relationships.

Companies care. Most businesses are trying hard to take care of their teams and the last few decades have borne witness to this. Massive efforts on the part of employers have been undertaken to improve employee wellbeing through fitness, diet, and healthy-living initiatives. **Two-thirds of organizations** even say that these sorts of programs are a “critical part” of their employment brand and culture.

But it's not just the body that needs to be taken care of in today's always-on, hyper-connected culture. Fortunately, it's not all bad news. Employees know they need help managing their mental wellbeing and they're ready to accept support from their employers — **50% of them** want to see a greater focus on physical, mental and financial wellness in their workplaces. So what can companies do to ensure their teams stay productive and engaged while protecting their mental wellbeing?

Give them the tools they need to build resilience and handle everyday stress with science. The National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions (**NAHPC**) reports that every one dollar spent on effective and easily accessible mental health coverage returns four. Long story short: making mental wellbeing a priority isn't just good for your staff, it's good business. Read on for highlights from our deep dive into data from across the industry about mental wellbeing, stress, and best practices to support your team.





## What if “powering through” is just paving the road to nowhere?

Ashley’s been working at the same company for going on a decade. She works with a great team full of talented people she likes and appreciates. Her work is challenging and rewarding, and she enjoys it. But lately, she’s been off the mark somehow. Her projects and proposals fall short, or flat. Some of Ashley’s coworkers have tried reaching out. But the combination of her heavy workload and parenting three small children — during a messy home renovation—has Ashley so on edge that she wouldn’t dream of talking to anyone at work about what she’s going through.

Instead, she’s keeping her head down and trying to “get to the other side”. Which is a shame, really. Without some support, Ashley’s mental wellbeing isn’t going to improve and the stress she’s trying to ignore? It’s not going anywhere, either.

Chances are—wherever you work—you’ve seen this before. Someone on your team is going through a rough patch. Maybe they’ve lost a loved one, have a rebellious teenager that keeps them up at night, or just have too much on their plate between work and home. But whatever it is they’re going through, they don’t feel like they can risk looking unprofessional by letting it show at work. Not even if sharing their problems means they could receive help.



## Why does mental wellbeing matter?

Ashley isn't a rare case. Poor mental wellbeing is common. And not just during difficult times.

There were 488,000 cases of work-related stress, anxiety, or depression in 2015-2016 alone; that's the alarming number recorded by **Deloitte** in their 2017 Workplace and Mental Wellbeing Report. And the numbers don't get better from there. Up to **77% of employees** have experienced symptoms of poor mental health at some point during their lives. The **American Institute of Stress** reports 80% of workers feel stress on the job, and the U.S. Centre for Disease Control says **26% of workers** surveyed affirm that they're often or frequently very stressed.

## Is stress really that harmful to mental wellbeing and overall health?

Stress is a major factor in costly problems such as absenteeism, presenteeism, low employee engagement and increased turnover, also linked to poor health:

## Mental and Physical Health Problems linked to stress

Sources: **National Institute of Health, Mayo Clinic, WebMD**

### Stress may result in an increased risk of...

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Anxiety  
Depression  
Frustration  
Fatigue  
Low self-esteem

### Stress can result in a higher propensity to...

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Accidents  
Substance abuse  
Impaired speech  
Restlessness  
Forgetfulness

### Stress is also linked to an increased possibility of...

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Difficulty thinking clearly  
Difficulty making decisions  
Higher blood pressure  
Hypersensitivity  
Mental blocks  
Suppressed immune function

### Stress may also worsen or play a role in...

---

Asthma  
Heart disease  
Diabetes  
Migraines  
Ulcers  
Amenorrhea

Furthermore, stress and related mental health problems, cost the US industry alone 1 million absences daily, and \$300 billion annually in related expenses such as turnover, reduced productivity, and medical, legal, and insurance coverage (**Entrepreneur**, 2019). It also makes people nearly **three times as likely** to leave their current place of employment, and affects how their brains work— **temporarily impairing strategic thinking**, and even dulling creative abilities. Suffice it to say that stress that goes ignored or unmanaged causes serious harm.

1M

workers absent daily due to  
stress in the U.S. alone

\$300bn

cost of excessive stress to  
US Industry

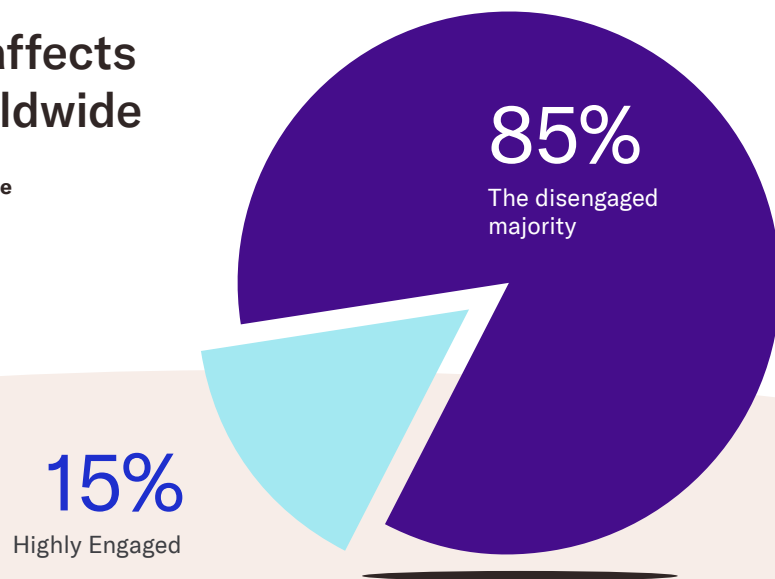
## What's engagement, why does it matter, and how is it affected by mental wellbeing and stress levels?

Engagement is extremely important for employees and companies. In more technical terms, employee engagement is the extent to which staff feel committed to and passionate about their jobs and is characterized by high levels of effort, energy, dedication, and absorption in tasks on a regular basis. Engaged employees are happier and more effective.

But alarmingly, per **Korn Ferry**, only about 30% of U.S. employees consider themselves to be “highly engaged” in their work, with an even lower figure of 15% of workers who would self-identify as “enthusiastic” and “highly involved” in their jobs world-wide reported by **Gallup** in 2017. In **Tower Watson's Global Benefits Attitudes Survey**, 57% percent of employees who claimed to be experiencing high-stress levels reported being disengaged. This is terrible news for productivity, innovation, and business in general.

## How stress affects turnover worldwide

Sources: **Korn Ferry Institute**



## Is stress really a factor in turnover?

Without a doubt. In fact, **40%** of turnover is due to stress and even in generally high-stress, high-turnover professions like nursing, studies have found links between stress and turnover with up to **35%** of employees prepared to consider employment elsewhere, if offered.

Worse still, stress unchecked leads to poor mental wellbeing, aka exhaustion, feeling mentally distant or negative about your job, and reduced efficacy, eventually showing employees out the door and onto the next position.

A study by **Kronos** found that 95% of human resource leaders say these extreme levels of stress sabotage workforce retention. 46% say it's responsible for up to half of their annual employee turnover.

Why does stress's effect on turnover matter so much? Because replacing employees is very expensive for companies. **Employee Benefits News** reports rehiring costs employers 33% of the original employee's annual salary, not to mention the damage done to the morale of coworkers left behind.



## What companies are doing about mental wellbeing

As more companies come around to the need to address mental wellbeing and stress at work, many are scrambling to jump on the wellness wagon, adding perks like onsite gyms, rest and relaxation spaces, and onsite yoga and wellness training—in fact, over half the employers surveyed in Tower Watson’s **Global Benefits Attitudes Survey** have either introduced initiatives to reduce stress or are planning to do so.

For the good of employees like Ashley, and the companies that employ them, it’s past time to normalize talking about mental wellbeing at work and make it a priority in the workplace.

## Why does wellbeing matter?



Making mental wellbeing a priority and helping your team learn to handle stress more effectively is a lot to take on. Like most large undertakings, it’s best divided into smaller, more manageable steps. Read on for our best advice on how to find out how your staff is actually feeling and next steps to help them build resilience over time.

### Create a safe space

If you want honest feedback from your employees about stress and mental wellbeing, first you’ll need to ensure that your workplace is a space where employees feel comfortable being sincere and sharing their feelings. Make it clear that the company cares and views their wellbeing as essential with a mental health at work plan.

Demonstrate that mental health is a priority by encouraging staff to take their breaks, lunches, and vacation days and stay home when they're suffering from poor physical or mental health.

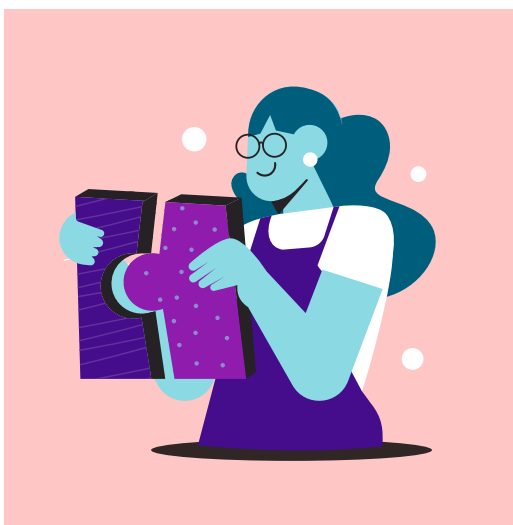
Do what you can to keep the lines of communication open so that staff know they can come to management when they need support or help with a problem. Share your personal stories to help address the stigma staff deal with when facing wellbeing problems. Make sure everyone knows about assistance and strategies that are in place to protect and encourage employee wellbeing.

## Gather data

Start with a survey (anonymous, so employees feel comfortable) to collect feedback from your entire team about their mental wellbeing and general stress levels. Regular one- to-one and smaller group (no more than 5 people) meetings, and performance reviews are also excellent places to get information about what's happening with your staff.

Keeping track of your team's mental wellbeing on a regular basis is key to knowing when and how to offer necessary support.

## Give your team the resources they need



Make sure your team has access to practical tools and support systems to help them take care of their mental wellbeing so that when stress happens, (or better yet, before it happens) they can do something about it. Easy-to-access telehealth tools provided by employers level the playing field for busy employees who may not have the energy, budget, or inclination to do an in-person wellbeing course in their limited free time.

Give your team members the resources and the agency they need to **build resilience and prioritize their mental wellbeing**. Improving mental health isn't an overnight process but you can make it easier for your team. Consider offering a **digital wellbeing tool** or service to your employees. Ensure they have access to engaging, science-based activities and programs they can use from the comfort of their mobile phones, whenever they need support, at work or at home.

## Lead from the top down

With great power comes great responsibility. Managers and executive leadership can help remove the stigma of talking about mental wellbeing by sharing anecdotes about their own battles with stress and wellness. Members of management can also make it clear to employees that wellbeing (mental, physical and otherwise) is a priority for everyone through their actions when it comes to openly taking time to exercise, making a point of not answering non-urgent messages after hours or on vacation, and staying home when sick.



Managers and leadership can also set an example for their employees to follow by participating in company-led mental wellbeing behaviors like meditation, and mindfulness, using mental wellbeing apps, and attending trainings and courses with staff.



## Workplace wellbeing: A few final reflections

Mental wellbeing and stress-related problems are serious issues for organizations and their employees across all industries. These problems are costly, and **they're on the rise**. And with a majority of the workforce feeling stressed at least some of the time, it's past time to take action. We have to help our teams find better ways to take care of their mental wellbeing at work and at home.

Mental health problems cost US companies between **\$80-100 billion** yearly and are predicted to cost the global economy **\$16 trillion** by 2030. Companies that want to survive and prosper are going to have to make mental wellbeing a priority — it's too expensive of a problem to put off addressing.

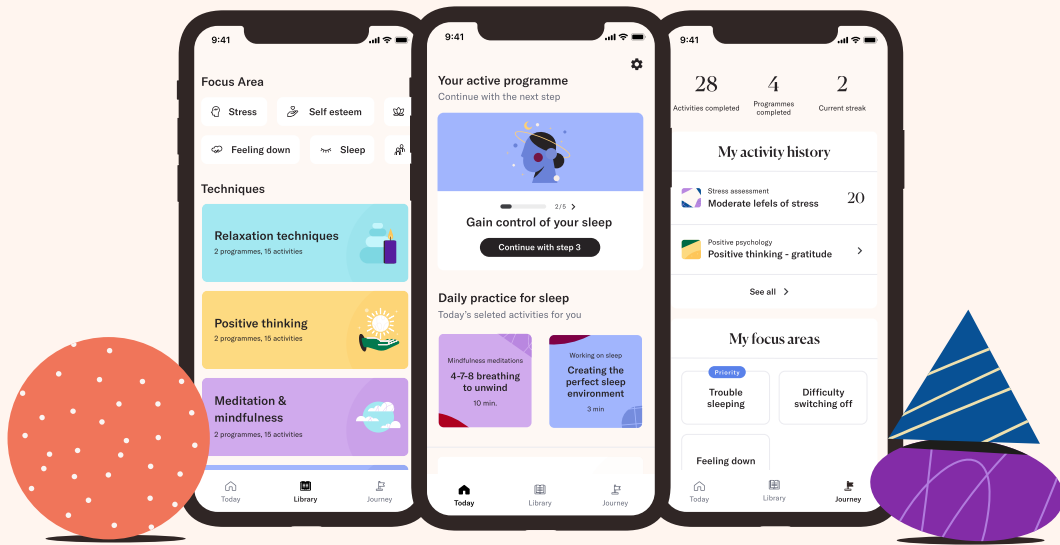
But despite all of the scary statistics, there's a silver lining to be revealed here. Studies show that employees not only recognize their need for help, they expect that help to come from their managers and are ready and willing to receive it. Mercer's **2018 Global Talent Trends** reports 50% of employees would like see a greater focus on physical, mental, and financial wellness at their place of employment and according to the **American Stress Institute**, roughly half of stressed workers admit to needing help learning how to manage stress, with another 42% saying their coworkers do.

So what's the solution? It's not enough to simply offer the chance to participate in wellness activities at work. Managers and higher-ups will have to take the first leap and lead by example. They'll need to be more open about their own struggles with mental wellbeing and stress to create the sort of safe space for employees that promotes a real culture of wellness and work-life balance. Companies will also need to offer **practical, easy-to-use tools** to help employees learn to better manage their stress and build resilience over time.

And finally, if you find that you personally or members of your staff need support when it comes to putting mental wellbeing first, we'd like to offer some help. Our science-based wellbeing program was designed with you and your team in mind.

Contact us at [foundations@koahealth.com](mailto:foundations@koahealth.com) to learn more.





## About Foundations

Give your employees access to practical, evidence-based tools to help them work towards more balanced wellbeing with Foundations, developed by **Koa Health**.

In our first randomized controlled trial (RCT), Foundations was shown to improve measures of stress, anxiety, resilience, sleep and mental wellbeing and three further trials are underway this year.

We want to help your team work towards a more balanced wellbeing with practical tools they can access from the comfort of their phones at whatever time works best for them. Because getting support should be the easy part.

To find out more about how we can help you support your workforce, contact us at **foundations@koahealth.com** to speak with a Koa expert.

**Note:** Foundations isn't a medical device and isn't intended to be used as one. While third-party research suggests that the techniques used by Foundations can help manage stress, and in turn reduce the risk of and potentially alleviate certain related conditions, Koa Health makes no claims, representations, or guarantees that Foundations provides therapeutic benefits. Foundations isn't intended to be used in the detection, diagnosis, prevention, monitoring, prediction, prognosis, therapy, treatment or alleviation of any mental or physical illnesses, conditions, diseases, or vital physiological processes.

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