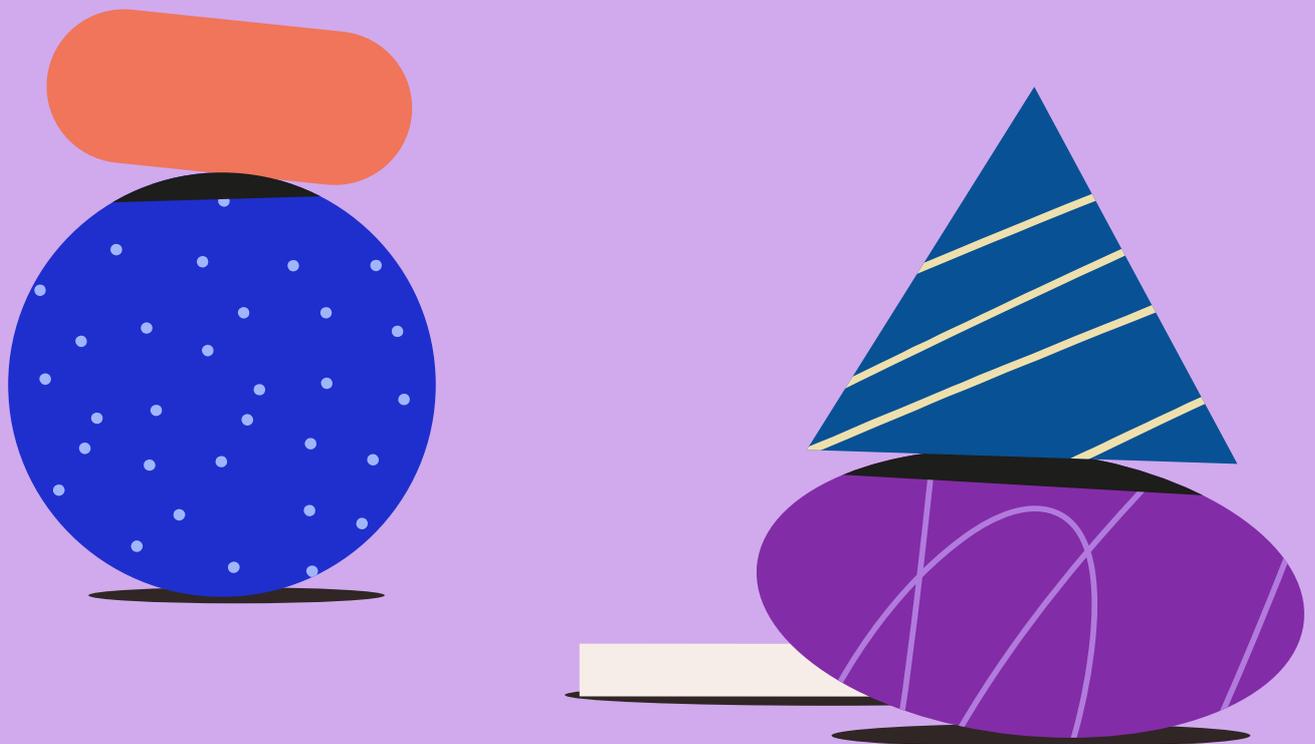


How to reduce virtual presenteeism

Practical tips to engage and support
employees working from home





The problem

Presenteeism is when an employee turns up to work when really, they shouldn't.

It means working when you're too physically ill or when suffering from poor mental wellbeing—often **stress**. It can also manifest as habitually working beyond, and responding to communications, outside of regular working hours.

Presenteeism basically means showing up when you're not fit to, and when employees do this, it unsurprisingly decreases **engagement**, motivation and productivity.

It's perhaps no surprise that with the recent mass shift from office to remote working, **virtual presenteeism is now a common problem**, and one employers are eager to address.

Research reveals that presenteeism has become a significant issue for employees working from home during COVID-19 restrictions. According to this survey, 46% of workers feel the need to be more present and more than a third have continued to work despite being ill, citing reasons such as:

- Not thinking their illness was serious enough to warrant a day off
- Having too great a workload
- Not wanting to hand important work to colleagues
- Worries about financial implications

The survey also reported that a quarter of remote employees now start work earlier and that 21% check emails more regularly outside work hours.

A **CIPD survey** states that presenteeism has more than tripled since 2010. It's an expensive problem too—in the USA presenteeism is **costing employers more than \$226 billion per year.**

Why is this happening?



We've already touched on some of the reasons for presenteeism, and really it comes down to job security, or rather insecurity.

Employees are also overwhelmed with health **concerns for themselves and people they care about**, and huge numbers of parents are juggling childcare and homeschooling with demanding jobs.

With all of this to deal with it's no surprise that presenteeism is an issue. The good news is that as an employer, you're in a position to help.

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What can you do about it?

So how exactly can you help your employees become more engaged and productive?

Suitable work from home setup

When it comes to physical health, it's important to make sure your remote employees have everything they need to get their job done. Many people are having to create makeshift workspaces in kitchens, bedrooms and living rooms, and may not have appropriate desks, chairs and other items they need at home.

Having a bad home setup and **prolonged sitting can cause postural problems**, back and neck pain, poor cardiovascular health and even an increased risk of diabetes. You can help your team by providing them with monitors, ergonomic chairs and other equipment to help keep them healthy and comfortable as they work remotely.

Company culture

Trust

A good company culture is a vital part of helping to reduce employee stress and create wellbeing, and a good culture starts with trust. If your employees feel distrusted they'll be more likely to feel the need to show how present they are and how hard they're working.

The same goes when people are micromanaged. Micromanagement shows a lack of trust that often leads to employee stress, increasing the chances of presenteeism. Trust is especially important during times when your team is working from home and guess what, **it increases productivity**. Trust breeds trust too, and **employees also perform better when they trust their leadership**.

Be clear about expectations

Effective remote management is key to building trust so as an employer you need a clear communication structure. Remote teams often use several different communication platforms—such as task management tools, messaging apps and email—so your team should know the purpose of each platform and when they're expected to be available, and when they're expected not to be.

Communicate asynchronously

This means sending information on a platform that doesn't have to be answered immediately, such as email. Many workers feel a need to be immediately available, but if a matter isn't urgent, reaching out to your team with asynchronous communication can let them work more efficiently and reduce **the stress caused by that little ping**, which can easily distract an employee, especially when a manager is contacting them.



Keep workloads in check

Employee workloads should always be monitored, but it's particularly important for those who tend towards overworking. Even if your team is under pressure—perhaps because of laid-off staff—allowing employees to take on too much will only be detrimental to their workload and to your organization's productivity in the long term.

Check in with employees regularly to see how they're managing, but also just to see how they're doing and if you can do anything to help. This will help relieve stress on their part and help you head off potential presenteeism.

Discourage an always-on mentality

Happy, enthusiastic workers are 21% more profitable, so employee wellbeing is key. It's also something that can be boosted by disconnecting after hours. For workers to feel comfortable doing this it has to be part of your culture—something you actively prioritize and role model yourself.

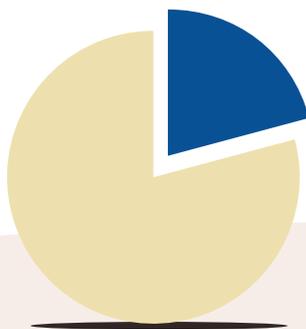
This should also mean encouraging people to take their allotted paid time off. In 2018, **47% of Americans left vacation days on the table**, yet doing this often leads to tiredness, stress and a lack of engagement.

Offer flexible working arrangements

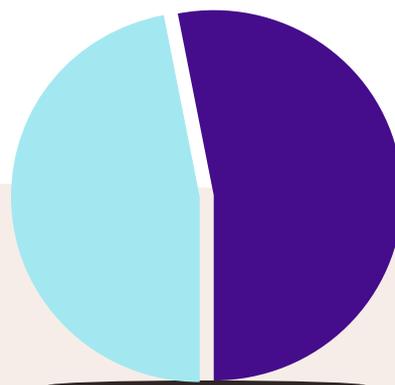
It's more important than ever to be empathetic about employees' home lives. While some may be feeling isolated and lonely, others might be overwhelmed by childcare and homeschooling on top of their work responsibilities.

Offering flexible working arrangements could be hugely beneficial for employees struggling with remote working, benefiting their work-life balance and their mental wellbeing. **Over half of employees are already working flexibly** in some way.

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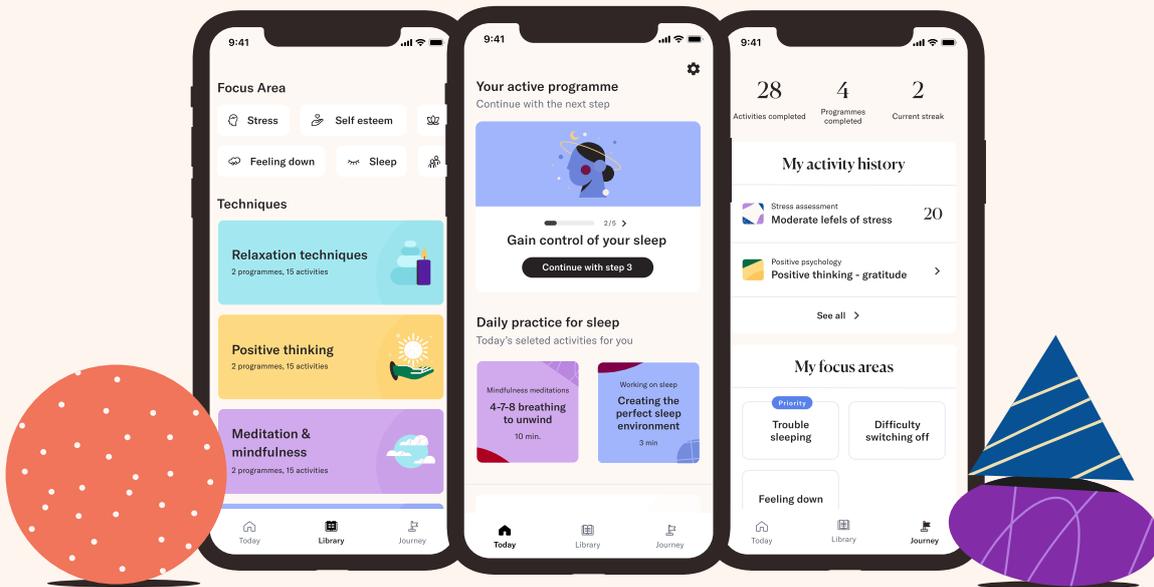
Socialize

Relationships at work can be damaged by working remotely so it's important to engage with colleagues, and not just in meetings. Schedule some time for you and your team to remotely drop in and socialize so that people can see each other's faces, share a meal, do a yoga session—whatever aligns best with your company culture. Humans are social creatures so getting together has real value, especially when we can't in the real world.

If your business needs support in prioritizing employee mental wellbeing, we'd like to offer our help. Our science-based mental wellbeing app is designed to help employees reduce stress and build resilience on good days and bad.

Contact us at foundations@koahealth.com to learn more.





About Foundations

Help your team get proactive about handling stress with Foundations, an app developed by Koa Health. Koa Health's main mission is to reduce the impact of mental health conditions and diseases with science.

Our diverse team of psychologists, researchers, designers, developers, and digital therapeutics experts is based in sunny Barcelona. Together, we work hard (and smart) to create practical wellbeing tools.

We want to help your team build resilience with engaging science-based activities and mental wellbeing programs they can access from the comfort of their phones at whatever time works best for them. Because getting support should be the easy part.

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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