



2021

WORKING AMERICANS'
STATE OF
PHYSICAL WELLBEING

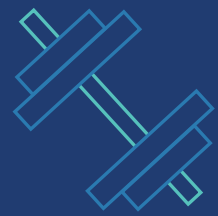


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic was a time of change in the physical and emotional wellbeing of workers, as the 2021 Working Americans' State of Physical Wellbeing Study confirms, and that many of these changes can and are negatively impacting the health of workers.

To help employers understand the current state of worker wellbeing, the research identifies the behavioral changes that have taken place since the start of the pandemic, the key impacts on workplace performance, and the barriers workers are encountering in caring for their physical wellbeing.

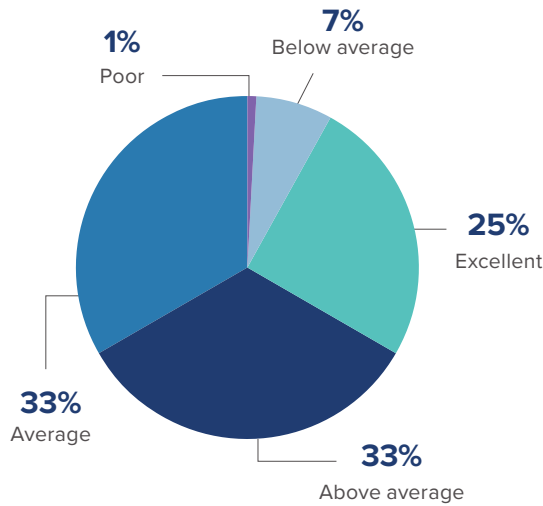
Based on the findings, American employers can play a key role helping their workers maintain or even improve their physical wellbeing, which can, in turn, help improve worker performance.

- Workers report being generally satisfied with their wellbeing – but self-reported practices of strategies for maintaining wellbeing indicate that employees are struggling more than they're divulging.
- Women were far less likely than men to report that their physical wellbeing is "excellent" or "above average" or to report that their physical fitness, nutrition, or sleep habits have improved significantly.
- Fewer than half of workers' sleep, nutritional, and exercise habits remained the same as prior to the pandemic; the rest either reported improving or worsening in one or more of these behaviors for maintaining physical wellbeing.
- Job activities have become either more sedentary or significantly more sedentary since the start of the pandemic – even for those working on-site.
- Employees overwhelmingly are experiencing an onset or worsening of insomnia, fatigue, or a lack of energy since the start of the pandemic and others are reporting an onset or worsening of aches and pains and digestive issues.
- Lack of motivation is the most common barrier, followed by a lack of separation between work-life and home-life for employers to fully maintain their physical wellbeing, indicating a key health-improving and loyalty-building opportunity for employers.
- Half of workers report that their employers are not supporting their physical wellbeing. For those who do report receiving benefits, they're most likely to be in the form of wellness programs and on-demand virtual/video resources.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The 2021 Working Americans' State of Physical Wellbeing's twelve core questions explored workers' self-perceptions of their wellbeing, changes in the practices that enable employees to maintain their physical wellbeing, the effects of these changes on workplace performance, current barriers to maintaining physical wellbeing, and typical employer benefits for the maintenance of wellbeing. By reviewing the findings on the following pages, grouped into like categories for the analysis, a picture emerges that HR executives can use when designing and implementing programs and policies in their organizations that can help counteract negative behavioral changes brought on by pandemic and reinforce the positive ones.

Q1: HOW DO YOU RATE YOUR OVERALL PHYSICAL WELLBEING?



The fields of psychology and behavioral economics recognize a cognitive bias that people make called illusory superiority. Because of it, people tend to rate themselves as being above average in their traits and abilities – even though only half the population can literally be above average.

Keeping this bias in mind, it should be no surprise that more than 58% of the participants in the 2021 Working Americans’ State of Physical Wellbeing study rated their physical wellbeing as being “above average” or “excellent” with an additional 33% rating it as being

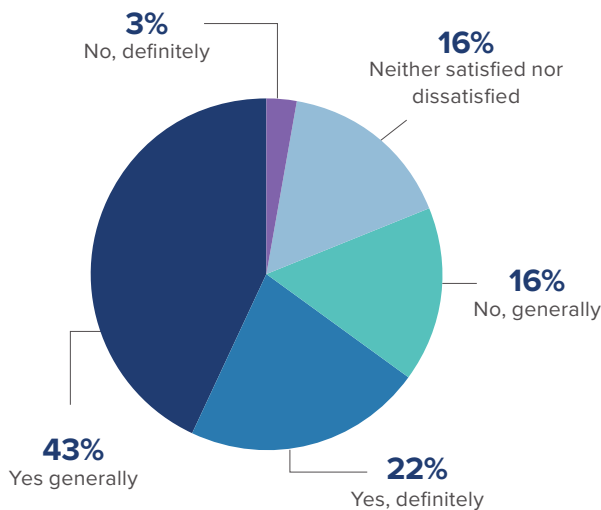
“average.” Only about 8% said their physical wellbeing was “below average” or “poor.” Men are more likely than women to report their current state of physical wellbeing is “excellent” – approximately 35% compared with 15%. Not surprisingly, those under forty-five tend to rate their overall physical wellbeing as “above average” or “excellent,” with a slight drop for those over forty-five.

No difference was found between those working on-site and those working at-home for overall physical wellbeing, although slightly more at-home workers report being dissatisfied with their current state of wellbeing.

A difference was found between workers with benefits and those without, both for the hourly and salaried employees, as a higher percentage with benefits rated their physical wellbeing as being “excellent” or “above average” compared to those without benefits (when looking at hourly with benefits compared to hourly without and salaried with benefits compared to salaried without), indicating a relationship between benefits and the feeling of maintaining one’s wellbeing.

Finally, a higher percentage of workers in organizations with 500 to 9,999 ranked their wellbeing as “excellent” or “above” average than workers in organizations with fewer than 500 workers or in those with more than 10,000 workers. While more research would need to be conducted to find the actual causes, one can draw the hypothesis that smaller organizations have fewer or no benefits, aligning with the results reported above, and that larger organizations have older, more inflexible benefits programs that lead to wellbeing.

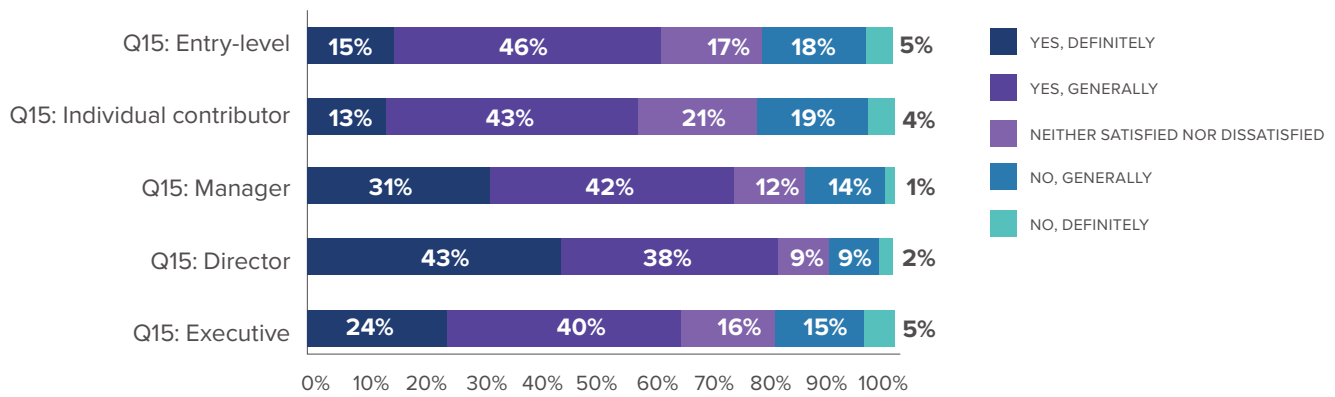
Q2: ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH YOUR CURRENT STATE OF PHYSICAL WELLBEING?



Likewise, because of cognitive bias, it should be no surprise that nearly 65% of the participants claim that they’re “generally” or “definitely” satisfied with their current state of physical wellbeing. Again, at 70%, men are more likely to report that they’re “definitely” or “generally” satisfied with their current state of physical wellbeing than women at 60%. And, there was very little difference in satisfaction between those working on-site and at-home.

Corporate rank, however, did seem to show a relationship to one’s perception of overall level of satisfaction with their current state of physical wellbeing: Approximately 60% of entry-level workers were either “definitely” or “generally” satisfied while 56% of individual contributors, 73% of managers, 81% of directors, and 64% of executives reported the same.

Meanwhile, a higher percentage of younger workers, those 44 and younger, were “definitely” or “generally” satisfied with their current state of wellbeing than those 45 and older – no surprises there, as medical maladies tend to show up later in life.



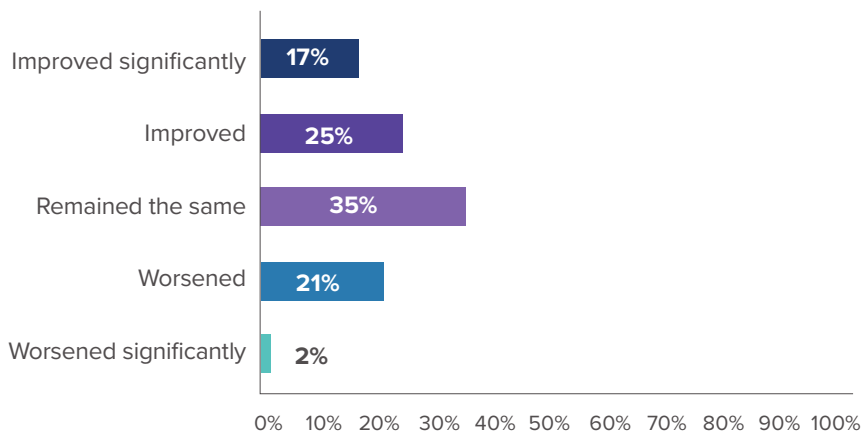
Finally, a higher percentage of workers with benefits, both for hourly and salaried, reported they were “definitely” or “generally” satisfied with their state of physical wellbeing when compared to those reporting that they’re employed without benefits (hourly with benefits compared to hourly without and salaried with benefits compared to salaried without). In other words, the mere fact of simply having benefits seemed to correlate with one’s perception regarding their current state of physical wellbeing.

And there seemed to be a relationship between the company size and satisfaction with one’s state

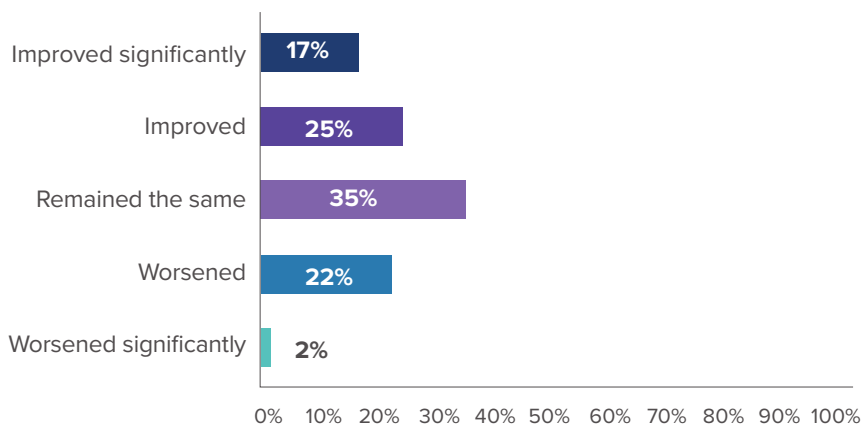
of wellbeing. A higher percentage of workers in organizations with between 500 to 9,999 employees were “definitely” or “generally” satisfied with their state of physical wellbeing while the level drops off for organizations with fewer than 500 employees and for those with more than 10,000 employees. More research would need to be conducted to explore why these results were uncovered but could be related to the extent and type of benefits the smaller and larger organizations offer to their workers.

WORKER BEHAVIORAL CHANGES

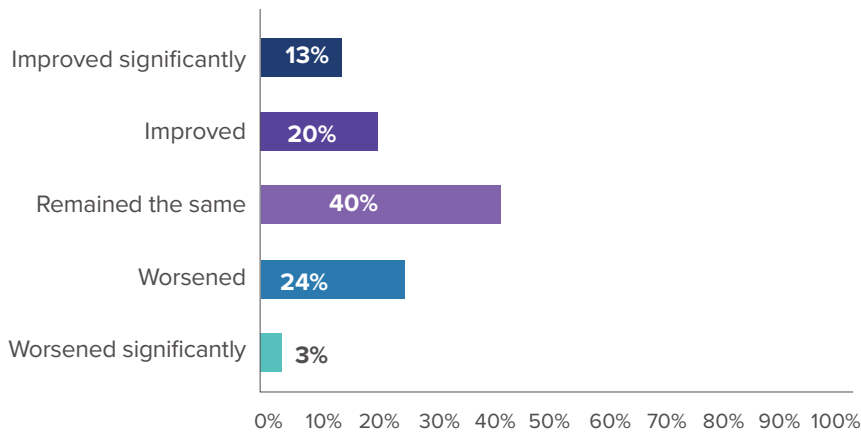
Q3: COMPARED WITH BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, HAVE YOUR PHYSICAL FITNESS HABITS (I.E. EXERCISING)



Q4: COMPARED WITH BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, HAVE YOUR EATING HABITS (I.E., FOOD CHOICES, SERVING SIZES, EATING SCHEDULE)



Q5: COMPARED WITH BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, HAVE YOUR SLEEP (I.E., QUANTITY, QUALITY, SCHEDULE)



There’s no doubt that the pandemic drove substantial change in worker behavior. The research shows overall behavioral improvements for some workers while other workers report the exact opposite.

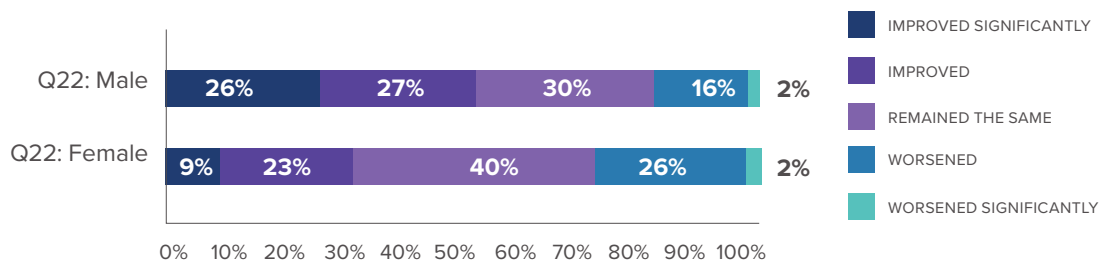
Combined, the behavioral changes were greater than the employees who reported no change. For instance, 42% of the respondents reported that their physical fitness habits either “improved significantly” or “improved,” while 23% reported that it “worsened” or “worsened significantly.” Likewise, 42% of workers reported that their dietary habits either “improved significantly” or “improved” and 24% reported that it “worsened” or “worsened significantly.” Finally, 33% claimed their sleep habits either “improved significantly” or “improved” and 27% reported that it “worsened” or “worsened significantly.” In other words, in each of these areas, those reporting no change in each of the categories was below 50%

While it’s positive that more workers reported improving their physical fitness, dietary, and sleep habits, it is

concerning that nearly 25% in each category reported a worsening. It’s been said that habits form, get reinforced, and become permanent over the course of three months – and we’ve been living through the pandemic for a year. As a result, those who have adopted negative behaviors will have a harder time breaking them.

Dig deeper and one can see that there’s a correlation with the size of the organization. A higher percentage of those in organizations with less than 500 employees and those in organizations with 10,000 or over reported that their habit of exercising “worsened” or “worsened significantly” than those in organizations with 500 to 10,000 employees. Meanwhile, more than 50% of men reported that their physical fitness “improved significantly” or “improved” and 18% reported that it “worsened” or “worsened significantly;” meanwhile, only 32% of women reported that their physical fitness has “improved significantly” or “improved” while 28% reported that it “worsened” or “worsened significantly.”

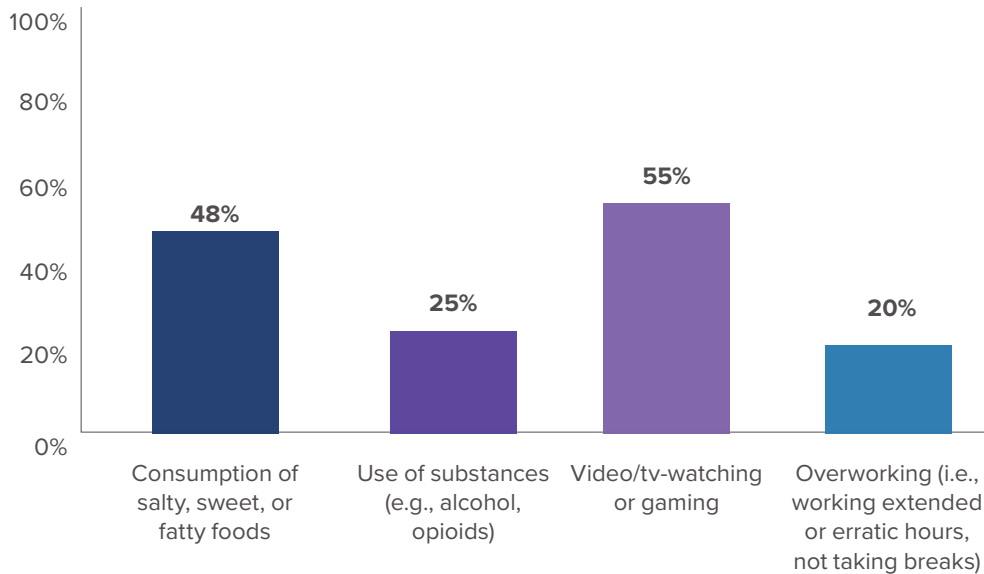
COMPARED WITH BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, HAVE YOUR PHYSICAL FITNESS HABITS (I.E., EXERCISING)



As for other screens, slightly more of those working from home reported a positive or negative change when compared to those working on-site, but again the percentages of all cohorts were higher in reporting positive or negative change than those reporting no change.

In other words, all organizations should recognize the prevalence of this change, reinforce the positive movements, and work to help those whose behaviors have worsened if you want your organization to avoid any eventual negative impacts.

**Q10: WHICH BEHAVIORS, IF ANY, HAVE INCREASED SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC?
(PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)**



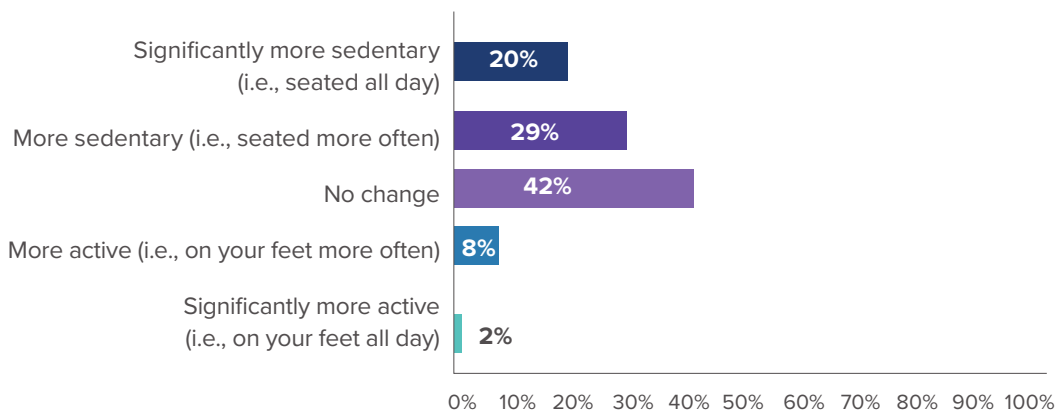
Although workers were generally satisfied with their current state of physical wellbeing, as noted earlier, looking at the actual daily practices that contribute to maintaining physical wellbeing, a different picture emerges. The research revealed substantial increases in the consumption of sweet and salty snacks and fatty foods (48%) and video/TV watching and gaming (55%). Even at smaller percentages, the use of substances (25%) and overworking (20%) can be a concern for your organization.

The adoption of these negative behaviors was across all job levels, particularly from entry-level through manager,

and tended to be in firms with fewer than 500 people, followed by those with 500 to 1000 employees. There was no substantial difference between those working from home and those working on-site, except for the increase in video/TV-watching or gaming with those working from home, although more than 50% of both groups reported an increase.

Finally, while an increase in snacking on comfort foods might not have an immediate impact on the bottom line and serve as a more long-term indicator of medical issues, the adoption of video/TV-watching or gaming behaviors could result in time lost to more productive activities that immediately impact the bottom line.

Q7: HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED THE DEGREE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OF YOUR JOB?



Nearly 50% of workers reported being either “significantly more” or “more” sedentary on the job since the start of the pandemic, while only 42% reported “no change.” Worse, only 8% reported being “more” active and only 2% reported being “significantly more” active at work.

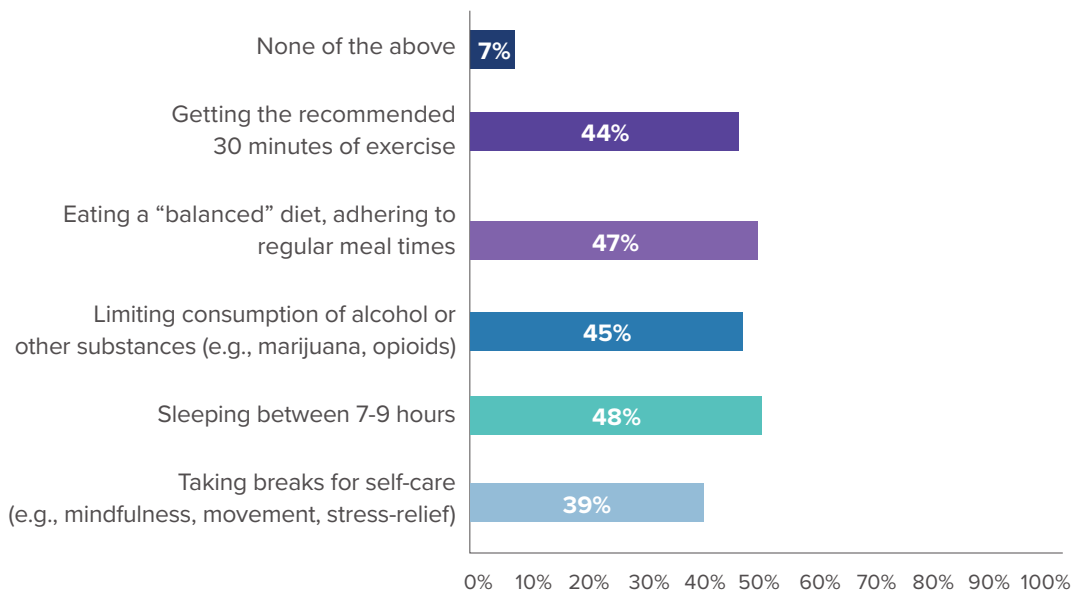
Interestingly, a higher percentage of employees in the organizations with 500 to 9,999 (60%, 54%, and 51%) reported their jobs were either significantly more or more sedentary than before the pandemic while those with fewer than 500 workers or in those with more than 10,000 workers reported a much lower rate change (43% for below 500 workers and 48% and 46% for above 10,000 workers), a mirror opposite of those reporting satisfaction with their current state of wellbeing.

To look more specifically, a higher percentage of men reported being either significantly more or more sedentary since the start of the pandemic (54%) than women (44%). However, at-home workers were either significantly more or more sedentary (58%) compared with those working on-site (42%) as well as salaried with benefits (58%) compared to hourly with benefits (47%), hourly without (44%), and salaried without (46%). Finally, the group with the highest percentage of those reporting being either significantly more or more sedentary are director-level (72%), followed by manager-level (60%) employees.

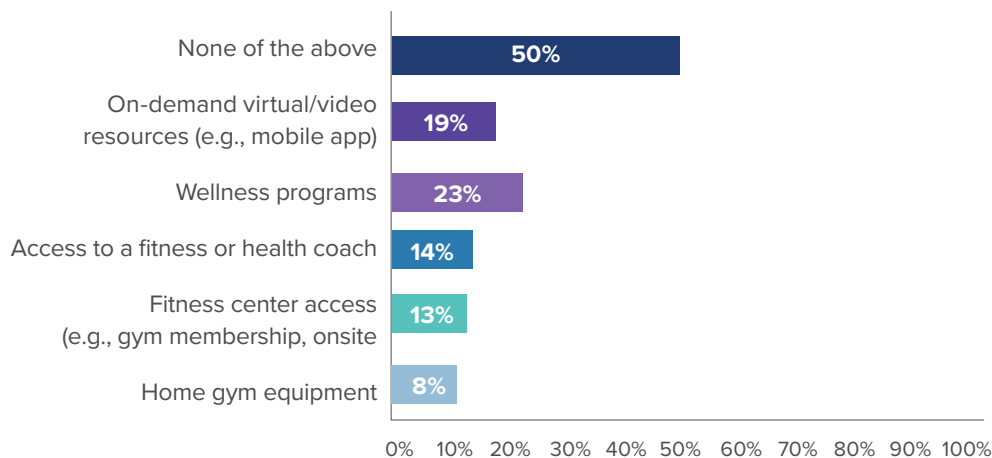
By looking at the data through these various screens, HR executives can start painting a picture of who they need to reach and inspire to get moving.

MAINTENANCE OF WORKER WELLBEING

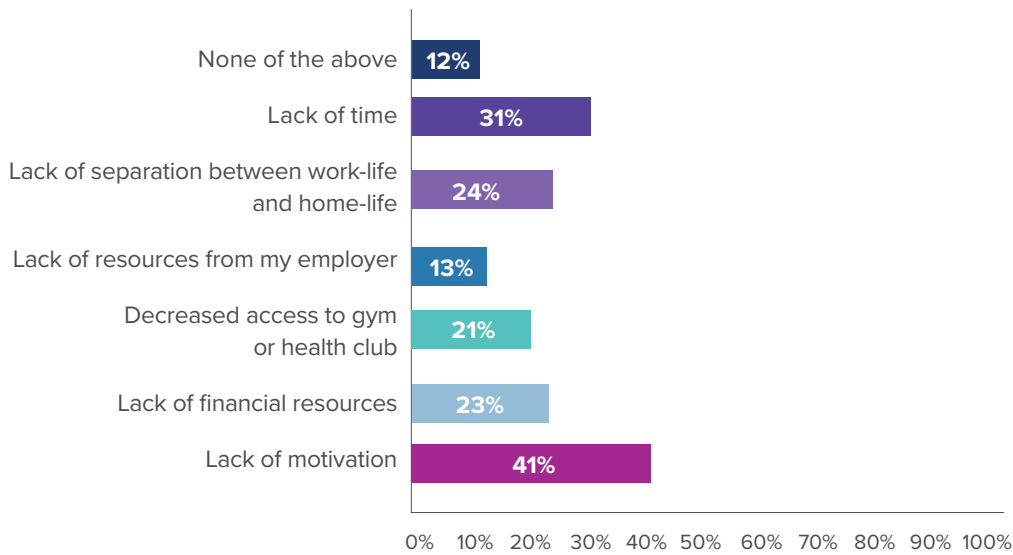
Q6: MOST DAYS OF THE WEEK, DO YOU ENGAGE IN THE FOLLOWING BEHAVIORS TO HELP YOU MAINTAIN YOUR PHYSICAL WELLBEING (PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)?



Q8: HOW IS YOUR EMPLOYER HELPING TO SUPPORT YOUR PHYSICAL WELLBEING (PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)?



Q12: WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON BARRIERS TO TAKING CARE OF YOUR PHYSICAL WELLBEING?



Taken together, the responses to these three questions indicate that workers are struggling to maintain their wellbeing. Overall, fewer than 50% of workers reported they’re currently getting the recommended thirty minutes of exercise; eating a balanced diet; adhering to regular meal times; limiting consumption of alcohol or other substances; sleeping between 7 – 9 hours; and, at the lowest level, taking breaks for self-care. A higher percentage of employees working from home reported engaging in the behaviors to maintain wellbeing than those working on-site.

A smaller percentage of those without benefits, both salaried and hourly, were likely to engage in behaviors that help maintain their wellbeing when compared with those with benefits (hourly with benefits compared with hourly without and salaried with benefits compared with salaried without). In addition, it should be noted that, overall, nearly 50% report that their employers are not supporting their physical wellbeing. For those who do report receiving benefits, they’re most likely to be in the form of wellness programs (23%) and on-demand virtual/video resources (19%).

Common reported barriers to maintaining one’s wellbeing include lack of motivation, separation between work-life and home-life, time, and financial resources.

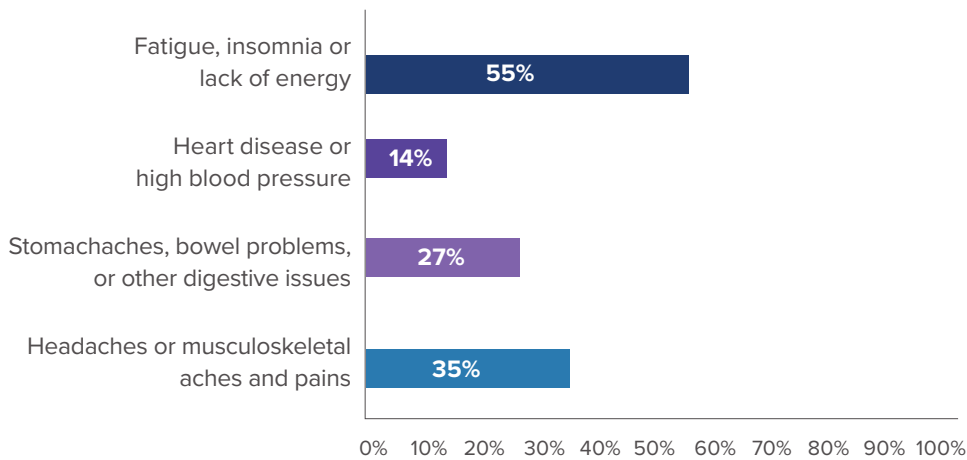
A significantly higher percentage of men over women reported the lack of separation between work-life and home-life, resources from employers, and access to a gym or health club as the barrier to maintaining their wellbeing, while a significantly higher percentage of women over men reported the lack of motivation as the main barrier. There were other differences between men and women as well. Research revealed that a significantly higher percentage of men over women also report getting the recommended thirty minutes of exercise; while, a significantly higher percentage of women over men reported taking breaks for self-care.

Finally, through a different way of looking at the data, a significantly higher percentage of those working at-home than working on-site report that the lack of separation between work-life and home-life and decreased access to a gym or health club were key barriers to maintaining their wellbeing – while a significantly higher percentage of those working on-site reported the lack of time.

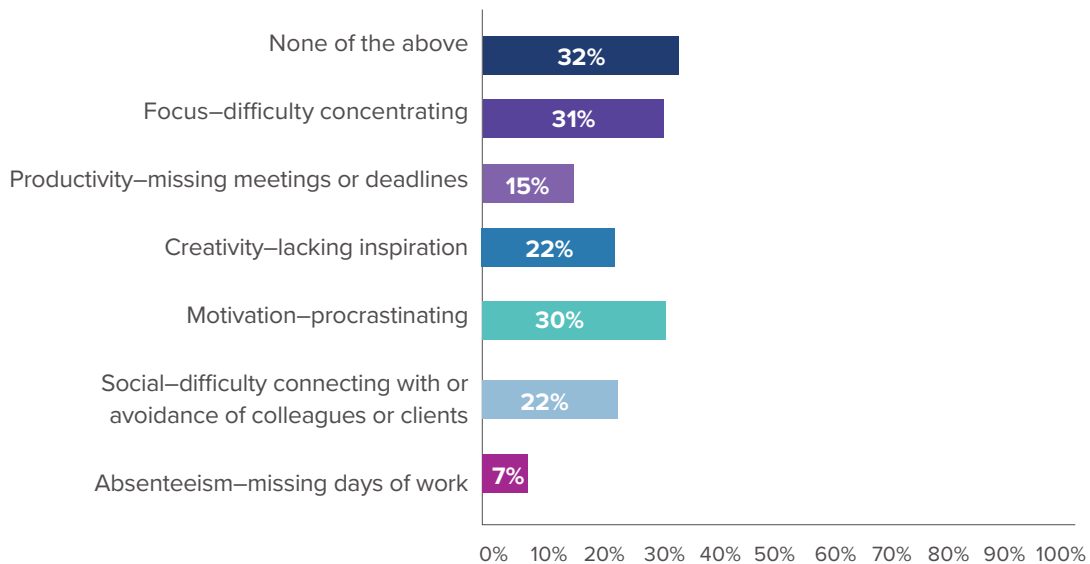
Noting the key differences in the barriers and behaviors indicate the need for offering flexible and targeted initiatives that help employees maintain their wellbeing.

IMPACT ON WORKER JOB PERFORMANCE

Q11: HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE ONSET OF OR WORSENING OF THE FOLLOWING PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS OR BURNOUT SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC? (PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)



Q9: IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, IS YOUR STATE OF PHYSICAL WELLBEING NEGATIVELY AFFECTING YOUR WORK? (PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)



Reinforcing this assumption that workers are currently suffering, over half report the onset of or worsening of fatigue, insomnia, or lack of energy and over a third of workers report the onset of or worsening of headaches or musculoskeletal aches and pains. In addition, over 25% report the onset of or worsening of stomachaches, bowel problems, or other digestive issues as well as nearly 14% report the onset of or worsening of heart disease or high blood pressure. All of these have been correlated with lower worker productivity. The group with the highest percentage of those reporting fatigue, insomnia, or lack of energy were director-level workers.

There is little doubt about the connection between the onset of burnout and illness and the drop in individual worker contributions. But workers are also explicitly reporting issues that can affect the bottom line. In fact, more than 30% of respondents report difficulty

concentrating and 30% of the respondents reported procrastinating. Keep in mind that these might not be the same individuals experiencing both issues.

With the exception of procrastinating, a higher percentage of men than women reported that their current state of welling was affecting their work. Plus, a significantly higher percentage of men than women reported the onset of or worsening of heart disease or high blood pressure – not surprising since only 34% of men report taking breaks for self-care (see Q6) – while a significantly higher percentage of women reported the onset of or worsening of headaches or musculoskeletal aches and pains. A higher percentage of Director-level employees reported difficulty concentrating and procrastinating.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR EMPLOYERS

- The pandemic has been a time of substantial positive and negative behavioral change for workers.
- While workers report general satisfaction with their state of physical wellbeing, current self-reported behavioral practices indicate that many workers are struggling.
- There are differences in wellbeing maintenance behaviors, both positive and negative, between those who work at-home and those who work on-site and between men and women.
- Medical issues that workers report include worsening of fatigue, insomnia, and lack of energy as well as headaches or musculoskeletal aches and pains.
- While direct causality can't ever be proven, the research shows a relationship between benefits programs and the maintenance of health and wellbeing activities in terms of driving behavior and overcoming barriers.
- There exists an important opportunity for employers to provide benefits such as wellness programs and on-demand virtual/video resources to help support their employees' physical wellbeing.

NEXT STEPS FOR EMPLOYERS

The warning signs are clearly evident: Workers are suffering, the conditions related to potential medical and burnout issues are on the rise, and the adoption of negative behaviors indicate the potential for additional issues that could hurt the bottom line in the future.

While the study is not sensitive enough to dig deeper than the analysis presented here, it should serve as a wake-up call and provide directional evidence to either tweak or fully restructure your employee wellbeing programs.

As we slowly emerge from the pandemic, employers and employees should all want to maintain the behaviors that enhance or protect health and wellbeing. But both employers and employees should also aim to address and eliminate the negative changes in behavior.

The time to act to ensure that change is now.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Grokker Innovation Labs conducted its State of Physical Wellbeing research from February 16 - 17, 2021, releasing the report in March 2021. The source survey, which was completed by 1,120 working Americans through an online tool. All percentages in the charts and tables are rounded to the nearest percent; therefore, totals may not always equal 100%. Full reported data is available upon request.

The report was analyzed and authored by Laurence Minsky, an associate professor at Columbia College Chicago. His research interests include methodologies to improve the effectiveness of advertising, social media, and other brand marketing efforts; strategies for career success; and improving corporate practices.

His books include *Global Brand Management*; *Audio Branding: Using Sound to Build Your Brand*; *The Activation Imperative: How to Build Brand and Business by Inspiring Action* and contributed to the development of *It's Personal: The Business Case for Caring*. And, his articles have been published by The Harvard Business Review and The European Business Review, among other publications.

Finally, he is a presenter at academic and professional conferences and a workshop facilitator for the Association of National Advertisers.

ABOUT GROKKER INNOVATION LABS

Founded in 2019, Grokker Innovation Labs is a research organization committed to advancing employee wellbeing and workplace culture. Grokker Innovation Labs works with Grokker customers, partners, experts and employees to discover best practices and strategies to enhance employee wellbeing.

AGE GROUP

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
18-29	35%	136
30-44	34%	388
45-59	38%	425
60+	15%	169
TOTAL		1,118

EMPLOYER SIZE

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 - 499 employees	47%	531
500 - 999 employees	21%	231
1,000 - 4,999 employees	14%	156
5,000 - 9,999 employees	7%	73
10,000 - 19,999 employees	2%	27
20,000+ employees	9%	102
TOTAL RESPONDENTS		1,120

HOW PAID BY EMPLOYER

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Hourly with benefits	41%	462
Hourly without benefits	22%	248
Salaried with benefits	30%	336
Salaried without benefits	7%	74
TOTAL RESPONDENTS		1,120

GENDER IDENTITY

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Female	53%	588
Male	47%	530
TOTAL		1,118

JOB LEVEL

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Entry-level	23%	255
Individual contributor	29%	326
Manager	31%	343
Director	7%	82
Executive	10%	114
TOTAL RESPONDENTS		1,120

CURRENT WORKING ENVIRONMENT

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I am working on-site	54%	600
I am working from home	32%	361
I am working both on-site and from home (hybrid work arrangement)	14%	159
TOTAL RESPONDENTS		1,120