

WORKPLACE SERIES

Enhancing your workforce
nutrition programme



MENTAL HEALTH AND NUTRITION

A practical guide for employers to embed
nutrition into mental health programmes

**WORKFORCE
NUTRITION ALLIANCE**

**What you eat shapes
how you think and feel**

Version

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Workforce Nutrition Alliance

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1

Introduction

BEFORE YOU START

BACKGROUND

Introduction

A practical tool

Mental health problems are recognised as one of the leading challenges facing workplaces worldwide, contributing to absenteeism, high employee turnover rate, and lost productivity, that pose substantial costs for businesses. In response, many employers have instituted mental health programmes to mitigate these impacts.

This guidebook is designed as a practical resource to help employers strengthen their workplace mental health programmes by integrating nutrition. It translates the latest evidence on the intersection of mental health and nutrition into clear, actionable steps that employers can adopt to support employee wellbeing.

For employers without an existing mental health programme, this guidebook is also a good place to start. However, it is recommended that employers consult a mental health expert when setting up a programme, to ensure that nutrition is integrated into a solid and well-informed foundation.

This guidebook is part of a wider effort by the Workforce Nutrition Alliance to support employers in improving workplace mental health by maximizing existing mental health programs through nutrition in the workplace. By doing so, employers can improve morale, focus, boost productivity and support the overall wellbeing of their employees. You can download the other [guidebooks](#) on our website.



Who is this guidebook for?

This guidebook is designed for persons who play a key role in employee wellbeing, including:

- Human Resource (HR) and programme managers responsible for employee benefits.
- Mental health champions and internal medical staff supporting employee health.
- Occupational safety and health (OSH) colleagues responsible for employee welfare.
- Catering and food service managers who influence what employees eat at work.
- Other relevant colleagues involved in wellbeing, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), or workplace health initiatives.

Whether your employer is just starting to explore workplace nutrition or seeking to integrate a nutrition lens into existing mental health programmes, this guidebook will provide guidance on the next step.

Who we are

The Workforce Nutrition Alliance was launched in 2019 by The Consumer Goods Forum (CGF) and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN). Our mission is to improve the access of ten million employees and supply chain workers to better nutrition by 2030.

FIRST TASTE

A practical tool



Why is this guidebook important?

Mental health problems are increasingly recognised as a major global challenge. Because they primarily affect people of working age, the consequences are felt directly by businesses and economies. This makes the workplace a key setting to make a difference.

Given the scale of mental health challenges in the workplace, it is important to consider all contributing factors including poor working environment, excessive workloads, job insecurity and lifestyle habits such as nutrition. Though often overlooked, nutrition plays a direct role in shaping mood, stress, and energy of employees. Employers are encouraged to maximise the benefits of their mental health programmes by integrating nutrition, as this offers a low-cost and high-impact way to care for employees while strengthening productivity.

By using this guide, employers can take practical steps that improve both mental health and nutritional outcomes for their workforce. Employers are encouraged to start small, choose the actions that fit best, and build gradually.



What is covered in this guidebook?

This guidebook explains the connection between nutrition and mental health and makes a business case for employers to take action. It focuses on three practical workforce nutrition pillars: Healthy Food at Work, Breastfeeding Support, and Nutrition Focused-Health Checks, showing how they can be incorporated into existing mental health and wellbeing programmes. Employers will also find practical strategies and guidance on how to adapt actions to suit the specific needs of their workforce and organisational context.



2

Evidence of impact

TURNING INSIGHT INTO PRACTICE

BUSINESS CASE

The evidence of impact

The connection between mental health and nutrition

Nutrition and mental health are more closely connected than many employers realise. The food people eat each day provides the fuel and nutrients their brains need to function. When diets are poor, employees are more likely to feel tired, stressed, or distracted. On the other hand, with balanced diets, workers are more likely to focus, feel energetic, resilient, and positive. In the workplace, this means nutrition does not just influence physical health, but also mental health, overall wellbeing and productivity .

A note on mental health

Mental health is a state of mental wellbeing that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It holds value in itself and is also essential to our wellbeing.

Mental health conditions include mental disorders and psychosocial disabilities as well as other mental states associated with significant distress, impairment in functioning or risk of self-harm.

Mental disorders are conditions that affect an individual's thinking, emotional regulation, or behaviour. There are different types of mental disorders with anxiety and depression the most common. Other related mental disorders are bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and schizophrenia. Some of the symptoms of mental disorders are fear, worry, mood swings, poor concentration, disrupted sleep, hallucinations, loss of interest, and appetite changes.

World Health Organisation, 2022¹

A recent systematic review conducted by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), examines nutrition and mental health in high-income countries and highlights several clear links between nutrition and mental health outcomes. To offer a practical way of viewing these connections, the four pillars of Workforce Nutrition including Healthy Food at Work (HFAW), Breastfeeding Support (BFS), Nutrition Education (NE) and Nutrition-Focused Health Checks (NFHC) will be used. These pillars provide a structured foundation for effective programmes that are aimed at improving workers' nutrition and wellbeing.

The evidence is strongest for the HFAW and BFS pillars, showing how dietary practices in the workplace and support for working mothers can directly shape their mental health and wellbeing. For NFHC, the evidence is comparatively weaker, but employers should note that when nutritional screening and counseling are complemented with HFAW initiatives, they can improve employee's knowledge of nutritional needs, promote healthier eating behaviours, and build confidence in managing their personal health – fostering a sense of self-efficacy that reduces stress and strengthens resilience. Therefore, the HFAW, BFS and NFHC pillars anchor the recommendations in this guidebook. The fourth pillar, NE, remains valuable for raising awareness and improving health, though current evidence indicates a less direct impact on mental health outcomes.

Mental health and nutrition focus

This guidebook focuses its recommendations on Healthy Food at Work, Breastfeeding Support and Nutrition-Focused Health Checks, as these are the workforce nutrition pillars with the strongest relevance to mental health.

How healthy food at work can impact mental health in the workplace

Diet quality plays a critical role in worker's health and cognitive functioning. Evidence shows that people who consume more fruits and vegetables, including berries, citrus, and green leafy vegetables, have reported greater optimism, self-efficacy, lower levels of psychological distress, ambiguity, and depressive symptoms.² Following a Mediterranean-style diet, rich in fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds, whole grains, legumes, healthy oils like olive oil, and fish and low in red meat and saturated fats, has been shown to improve processing speed, cognitive function³, increased attention and alertness.⁴ Additionally, combining dietary counseling with Mediterranean-style diet consumption produces even stronger cognitive benefits³. A balanced diet that includes both plant and animal foods, rich in nutrients that support mental health⁵ and tailored to one's age and activity level, is essential for overall wellbeing.

Regular eating patterns are equally important, as they help stabilise energy and mood. Skipping meals, especially breakfast, has been associated with higher stress, depression, and psychological distress across age groups.⁶ In essence, enabling workers to take proper meal breaks is therefore a simple but powerful mental health strategy. At the same time, overeating poses an additional risk and should not be encouraged. Maintaining a healthy weight for height supports resilience and reduces the added stress linked to being overweight and obesity. Individuals with increased weight status including those living with overweight and obesity are associated with an 18–55% higher likelihood of developing depression, underscoring the importance of supporting healthy weight management as a resilience-building measure.⁷

On the other hand, intake of ultra-processed foods is linked with increased risks of depression^{8,9}, anxiety and poorer concentration.⁹ This is due to its poor nutrient profiles and the non-nutritive components used or produced during food ultra-processing. Diets with a higher inflammatory potential (one that promotes inflammation in the body such as refined carbohydrates and sugars, saturated and trans-fat, red and processed meats) were found to be associated with an increased risk of cognitive impairment, impacting a person's thinking, memory, learning, and judgment.¹⁰ Therefore, employers have a critical role to play in shaping their workplace food environments to promote healthier dietary patterns that support both physical and mental health.



Breastfeeding and mental health

Recent evidence shows that mothers who did not exclusively breastfeed were about twice as likely to develop postpartum depression (PPD), compared to those who breastfed exclusively.¹¹ For working mothers, workplace breastfeeding support has clear mental health benefits. Women who are supported with time, facilities, and policies for breastfeeding, report fewer mental health symptoms.¹² In contrast, a lack of support can worsen stress and mental health outcomes.

Good practices

CASE 1

Fruit and vegetable consumption improves mental wellbeing (2019)¹³



Country

United Kingdom



Population

General population



Study and outcomes

A longitudinal study analysed data from the UK Household Longitudinal Survey (2010–2017), covering over 50,000 individuals. This survey followed the same individuals over multiple years, allowing for stronger insight into cause-and-effect relationships. The study examined the relationship between fruit and vegetable consumption and mental wellbeing using two standard measures: the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) and life satisfaction scales.

- Mental health improved steadily as people ate more fruits and vegetables, both in quantity and frequency.
- Eating vegetables daily had a stronger impact on wellbeing than less frequent intake.
- People with higher fruit and vegetable intake reported improved mental wellbeing and life satisfaction.

CASE 2

Ultra-processed food consumption increases depressive symptoms among adults (2020)¹⁵



Country

United States



Population

General adult population



Study and outcomes

Using nationally representative data from the US National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) (2011–2016), researchers analysed 13,637 adults to investigate the relationship between ultra-processed food (UPF) consumption and depressive symptoms. Dietary intake was assessed through 24-hour recalls, and depressive symptoms were measured using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9).

- Adults who got most of their calories (over 73%) from UPFs had a 35% higher risk of experiencing depressive symptoms compared to those with healthier diets.
- For people with little or no physical activity, the link between UPFs and depression was even stronger. Sedentary employees on UPFs were predisposed to experience depressive symptoms.
- Food additives and neo-formed contaminants (harmful substances that develop when food is exposed to high temperature processing) derived from processing may also contribute to depressive symptoms.
- Diets high in UPFs meant less intake of protective nutrients (like fiber, omega-3 fatty acids, and vitamins C & E, folate, calcium, zinc which are known to support mood, resilience, and overall brain function) and high levels of sugars, saturated fat, and energy, contributing to poor diet quality.
- The more UPFs consumed, the greater the risk of depressive symptoms.

Good practices

CASE 1

Breastfeeding intentions and postpartum depression (2015)¹⁶



Country

England, United Kingdom



Population

Postpartum women



Intervention and outcomes

Using the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) survey data, researchers examined 14,541 women whose children form the core sample of ALSPAC to investigate how breastfeeding intentions, and actual breastfeeding practices influence postpartum depression. The study grouped women by whether they intended to breastfeed, and whether they actually breastfed, to assess differences in depressive symptoms.

- Women who intended to breastfeed and successfully did so, reported the lowest levels of postpartum depression.
- Mothers who intended to breastfeed but were unable to, had the highest risk of depression, highlighting the emotional toll of unmet intentions.
- Those who had no intention to breastfeed showed no increased risk of depression, regardless of their actual feeding practice.
- Supporting women with breastfeeding facilities and policies have the benefit of improving their mental health outcomes.



3

Why employers should act

BUILDING YOUR PROGRAMME

GET GOING

Business case

Poor mental health remains one of the biggest challenges facing today's workplaces. Conditions such as stress, depression, and anxiety cause employees to miss work, lose focus, and struggle to perform at their best. Globally, these impacts amount to 12 billion lost working days annually, resulting in productivity losses exceeding US\$1 trillion.¹⁷

With over 80% of the global mental health burden affecting individuals of working age¹⁸, employers feel these impacts directly. At the same time, this positions employers to play a powerful role in mitigation – specifically by making nutrition part of their mental health efforts.

The benefits of nutrition-focused mental health programmes include



Improved employee wellbeing
Better diets support resilience, energy, and mood.



Reduced absenteeism
Healthier employees take fewer sick days.



Increased productivity and efficiency
Good nutrition fuels focus and performance.



Lower healthcare costs
Prevention reduces spending on healthcare and treatment.



Higher retention and morale
Employees who feel cared for are more engaged and more likely to stay.



Alignment with ESG and SDGs
Nutrition and mental health investments show leadership on sustainability and social impact.



Stronger reputation
Companies are seen as responsible employers that care.



Practical pathways to integration

Many workplaces already invest in mental health through counselling, resilience training, awareness campaigns, or employee assistance programmes. Nutrition can strengthen these efforts by fueling the brain, improving mood, and reducing stress. This can be achieved by exploring four practical pathways:

- Link nutrition and breastfeeding to your mental health and employee wellbeing policies.
- Provide healthy food at work to support mental health.
- Offer nutrition-focused health checks to strengthen both physical and mental wellbeing.
- Support breastfeeding mothers to protect maternal mental health.

Together, these pathways support one another to create a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to mental health and employee wellbeing. Before exploring the practical pathways, it's useful to take a moment and reflect on where your employer currently stands.

GET GOING

Self-assessment

Part 1

Employer's quick check

Policy check

- Do our mental health or wellbeing policies explicitly mention the role of food and nutrition?
- Do our HR or wellness policies include protected time for staff to take meal breaks?
- Do we have clear policies that support breastfeeding mothers with facilities, breaks, and flexible arrangements?
- Is nutrition included as part of our company's broader wellbeing or ESG commitments?

Food provision

- Do employees have daily access to fruits, vegetables, and balanced meals at work (canteens, catering, or vending)?
- Do we provide healthier snacks and drink choices (e.g., fruit, nuts, water, unsweetened beverages) daily, especially during meetings and events?
- Do we create an environment where employees feel comfortable taking meal breaks as part of their self-care?
- Are healthier food and drink options made visible and affordable compared to less healthy ones including UPF?

Communication

- Do we communicate simple, positive food–mood messages to staff as part of wellbeing campaigns?
- Are nutrition tips included in mental health awareness weeks, stress management sessions, or HR newsletters?
- Do leaders and wellbeing champions model healthy eating behaviours (e.g., not skipping meals, choosing balanced options)?

Health checks

- Do our regular employee health checks include nutrition indicators such as BMI, blood pressure, or anaemia screening?
- Do employees receive confidential feedback and counselling after their nutrition checks?
- Do we track (anonymously) general trends from health checks to inform wellbeing actions?

Breastfeeding support

- Do we provide maternity leave duration for at least 18 weeks to working mothers (International Labour Organisation recommendation 191)?
- Do we provide private, safe, and hygienic lactation rooms for breastfeeding or expressing milk?
- Are mothers given flexible breaks to breastfeed or express milk during working hours?
- Are breastfeeding policies communicated clearly to all staff and managers?

Part 2

Employee experience reflection

Alongside checking your company's policies, food provision, communication and breastfeeding support, it's just as important to understand the day-to-day reality for employees. Policy may look good on paper, but staff experience tells you whether it's working.

This reflection tool is designed to be quick, anonymous, and safe. It can be run as a short pulse survey, added into existing wellbeing checks, or facilitated by a trusted third party. Responses should only ever be shared in aggregate, not linked to individuals.



Example reflection questions for employees

- I sometimes skip or delay meals because of heavy workloads or deadlines.

- When busy, I often grab unhealthy quick snacks or drinks, even if I'd prefer something healthier.

- I rely on sugary snacks, energy drinks, or extra coffee to push through tiredness.

- When I have deadlines to meet, I often end up eating the same quick meals over and over, which leaves me feeling unsatisfied.

- I feel frustrated when work pressures make it difficult to maintain healthy habits.

- I feel discouraged when there aren't enough healthy food options available at work.

- As a breastfeeding mother, I sometimes struggle to find time, space, or support to feed or express milk at work.

- I haven't had a nutrition health check in the past year because it is either not accessible or available.

If many of these ring true, it suggests a gap between policies and everyday practice. The next section of this guidebook provides practical ways to bridge that gap by weaving nutrition into your mental health programme.



4

Incorporating nutrition into a mental health programme

PUTTING YOUR PLAN INTO ACTION

FOUR PATHWAYS

Pathways to incorporate nutrition into a mental health programme

PATHWAY 01

Link nutrition and breastfeeding to your mental health and employee wellbeing policies

Policies give clarity and set the tone for what is valued, so including food/nutrition and breastfeeding into your mental health and employee wellbeing framework could create a culture where daily eating choices and practices are beneficial for wellbeing and directly support resilience, focus, and morale. Make nutrition a visible and intentional part of your company's mental health and wellbeing policy. Practical commitments could include:



Food accessibility

Provide calm, clean dining areas where staff can eat without rushing. Relaxed environments improve recovery.



Meal breaks

Guarantee proper meal breaks and make healthier food and drink options the default in canteens, vending, and meetings.



Meal subsidies or allowances

Employers can make healthy meals more affordable in several ways either by subsidizing canteen meals, offering meal vouchers or providing a small monthly allowance earmarked for nutritious food. This reduces food costs and ensures employees can access balanced meals daily.



Breastfeeding support

Provide maternity leave, facilities, breaks, and flexibility as a mental health protection measure. These eases return to work, and reduces maternal depression and anxiety.

By embedding nutrition and breastfeeding, employers not only reduce stress and absenteeism but also build a healthier, more resilient workforce.

PATHWAY 02

Provide healthy food at work to support mental health

“You are what you eat” is a well-known adage, and growing evidence confirms that healthy diets support both optimal physical and mental health.¹⁹ Ensuring access to healthy food at work is therefore essential for employee wellbeing. When employees can eat balanced meals and healthy snacks during the day, they have more energy, better focus, and stronger resilience to stress. See a number of practical steps employers can take below.



Workplace actions

Consumption: Prioritize healthy choices

- **Increase fruits and vegetables**
Ensure canteens, vending machines, and catering include diverse fresh fruit, salads, and vegetables daily.
- **Menu choices**
Menus should include whole foods including whole grains, nuts, legumes, healthy oils like olive oil, and fish into regular canteen meals.
- **Prioritize brain boosting foods**
Prioritize foods that contain specific nutrients that support brain function and help protect against depression. See *table 1*.
- **Provide clean, free drinking water**
Provide clean, free drinking water in visible, accessible areas to encourage hydration.
- **Offer healthy snacks**
Offer healthy snacks in vending machines (nuts, fruit bars, yoghurt).
- **Replace sugary drinks**
Swap sugary drinks with infused water, tea, or sugar-free alternatives.

Highest ranked antidepressant foods that support mental health function

Foods	Type	Nutrients
Vegetables	Watercress, spinach, mustard, various beet greens, lettuces (red, green, romaine), swiss chard, chicory greens, pumpkin, cauliflower, red cabbage, butternut squash, kale, collards, tomatoes	Folate Iron Long chain omega-3 fatty acids Magnesium Potassium
Fruits	Pummelo, papaya, lemon, strawberry, blueberries, cherries, and oranges	Selenium Thiamine Vitamin A
Nuts and oil	Almonds, walnuts, olive oil	Vitamin B6 Vitamin B12
Organ meat	Liver, spleen, kidneys or heart, poultry giblets	Vitamin C
Seafood	Oysters, clams, mussels, crab, tuna, salmon, mackerel, sardines	Zinc
Meat	Goat	

Source: LaChance & Ramsey, 2018²⁰ and [Harvard Health Publishing](#)²¹

Frequency: Eat regularly, don't skip

- **Leave time for meals**
Protect time for lunch and meal breaks; skipping meals (especially breakfast) is linked to stress, fatigue, and low mood.
- **Support shift workers**
Provide balanced meals, especially at night, to reduce fatigue and stress.
- **Encourage balance**
Promote moderate portions and remind staff that physical activity is part of wellbeing, especially in sedentary roles.

Limit: Ultra-processed foods

- **Limit availability**
Reduce availability of refined carbohydrates, processed snacks, fried foods, red/processed meats, and sugar-sweetened beverages in canteens and vending.
- **Offer alternatives**
Replace with balanced, appealing alternatives (whole grains, fruit, yoghurt, nuts, water).
- **Favourable pricing**
Keep pricing and visibility in favour of healthier options so they become the most attractive choice.

Takeaway for employers

Make these healthy foods visible and available in canteens, catering, and vending, and integrate food messages into mental health activities.



Programme-aligned actions

Communication

- **Integrate food–mood tips into mental health programmes**
Weave simple messages into resilience training, stress workshops, or counselling materials (e.g., “Balanced meals fuel focus” or “Don’t skip meals when stressed - recovery starts with food”).
- **Make healthy the default during wellbeing events**
Offer fruit, nuts, or water during Mental Health Days, Wellbeing Weeks, or staff appreciation events, showing that healthier food is part of how you “walk the talk.”
- **Use existing communication channels**
Share quick nutrition and mental health tips through HR newsletters, intranet banners, or stress awareness campaigns - keeping messages short, practical, and non-technical.
- **Role-model healthy breaks**
Encourage leaders and managers to be visible in taking lunch breaks and choosing balanced options, signaling that recovery time is valued.
- **Create joint campaigns**
Link nutrition to mental health themes, such as “Food & Mood Week”, “Hydration for Focus”, or “Breakfast and Balance.” These campaigns make the connection tangible and engaging.



Healthy Food at Work

For more detailed implementation guidance see our guidebook on Healthy Food at Work.

[Download](#)

PATHWAY 03

Provide nutrition-focused health checks to support mental health

Nutrition-focused health checks give employees a personalised view of how their diet affects both body and mind. Poor nutrition contributes to fatigue, low concentration, stress, increased risk of depression, anaemia and hypertension. Thus, early detection alongside individualised nutrition counselling empowers employees to take action before these issues affect their focus, morale and productivity. See a few practical steps employers can take below.



Workplace actions

- **Integrate nutrition indicators**
Integrate nutrition indicators into annual health checks (indicators like Body Mass Index (BMI), blood pressure, anaemia, cholesterol, glucose).
- **Make it free**
Make the health checks free or at subsidised cost to encourage employees to participate.
- **Confidential counselling**
Provide confidential one-to-one nutrition counselling as part of health checks.
- **Follow-up**
Arrange follow-up sessions so staff can track progress and support lifestyle/behaviour change.
- **Data and outcomes**
Aggregated data from nutrition checks can highlight company-wide nutrition and health gaps and guide employers on where to focus nutrition education or support.
- **Privacy**
Ensure data privacy to build employee trust.



Programme-aligned actions

- **Embed in nutrition checks**
Position nutrition checks as part of mental health services (e.g., stress surveys, resilience training) so employees see the link.
- **Celebrate prevention**
Celebrate prevention: Share aggregate results with staff (e.g., “This year, 70% of employees BMI is within normal range”), reinforcing a culture of proactive care.
- **Highlight trends**
Share anonymised, aggregated results with leadership to highlight trends (e.g., fatigue linked with anaemia or poor diet) and build the business case for action.



Nutrition-Focused Health Checks

For more detailed implementation guidance see our guidebook on Nutrition-Focused Health Checks.

Download

PATHWAY 04

Support breastfeeding mothers to protect mental health

Breastfeeding is often overlooked in mental health programmes, yet evidence shows it is directly linked to maternal mental wellbeing. Not breastfeeding is associated with increased risk of post-partum depression. Therefore, workplaces that support breastfeeding reduce maternal stress and depression risks, while lack of support increases them.



Workplace actions

- **Maternal and parental leave**
Ensure there is maternal and parental leave and employees take advantage of it.
- **Provide practical aids**
Where feasible, supply small fridges for milk storage, comfortable seating, and clear signage that normalizes private, safe and hygienic lactation rooms as part of wellbeing facilities.
- **Normalize support through management**
Equip line managers and supervisors with guidance on how to support breastfeeding staff without stigma, helping reduce awkwardness and silence around the issue.
- **Allow flexible hours and breaks**
Support mothers to breastfeed or express in peace.
- **Educational materials**
Develop educational materials around nutrition in pregnancy and breastfeeding.
- **Monitor uptake**
Monitor uptake, retention of returning mothers, and satisfaction feedback.
- **Support groups**
Encourage peer mentoring or mother support groups to reduce isolation.
- **Build data into wellbeing dashboards**
Track breastfeeding support alongside other wellbeing indicators to show leaders the business case and spot gaps early.
- **Celebrate role models**
Share positive stories of employees who successfully combined breastfeeding with their return to work. This reduces stigma and encourages uptake.



Programme-aligned actions

- **Awareness and culture change**
Celebrate World Breastfeeding Week, share success stories, and run short campaigns that normalise support.
- **Holistic alignment**
Link breastfeeding facilities and policies with wider employee assistance or mental health services, so support feels joined up rather than separate.



Breastfeeding Support

For more detailed implementation guidance see our guidebook on Breastfeeding Support.

[Download](#)

ADVICE FOR ACTION

Cross-cutting enablers for actions



All-round advice

- ✓ **Co-design with staff**

Every workplace is different. Involve employees when shaping nutrition–mental health actions so that the solutions fit your workforce. Co-design makes programmes more relevant and more likely to succeed.
- ✓ **Messaging on mental health**

Develop key nutrition-related mental health messages.
- ✓ **Communicate simply**

Use clear, positive messaging to link food and mood. For example, “Better food, better mood” or “Fuel your brain for focus.” Simple messages help employees connect nutrition to mental health in everyday life.
- ✓ **Use champions**

Empower HR, occupational safety and health colleagues, or mental health champions to model healthy behaviours and share tips. Champions make programmes visible and relatable to staff.
- ✓ **Evaluate risks**

Be mindful that nutrition and mental health are sensitive areas. Issues like eating disorders or cultural food norms require careful handling. Gather staff feedback to ensure actions are safe, respectful, and inclusive.
- ✓ **Run joint activities**

Make nutrition part of wellbeing events like resilience workshops or World Mental Health Day. This keeps the link visible.
- ✓ **Respect diversity**

Offer inclusive options across cultures, religions, and dietary choices, so that no employee feels excluded.
- ✓ **Implementation tips**

Start small, demonstrate impact, and scale gradually.



5

Monitoring and learning

MONITOR YOUR PROGRESS

TRACKING CHANGE

Monitor your progress



Monitoring is an important part of making workplace programmes successful. In the case of mental health and nutrition programme, it shows whether your efforts are reaching employees, helps identify areas for improvement, and provides evidence to share with leadership. Monitoring can remain simple and light, focusing on just a few areas. Below are the areas you could start your monitoring activities.

Consumption

Monitoring what employees eat at work helps assess whether they are consuming foods that support good mental health. It's not about tracking individuals, but about seeing overall patterns. Example of indicator:

- ✓ *Percentage of meals or snacks purchased that are healthy option.*

Access

This tracks whether healthier and safe foods and drinks are available for workers. Also, it measures the supportive facilities that promote better working environment. Examples of indicators:

- ✓ *Number of days per week fruits and vegetables are offered.*
- ✓ *Number of worksites where health checks include nutrition indicators (e.g., BMI, blood pressure, anaemia).*
- ✓ *Number of breastfeeding/lactation rooms per 20 female employees (or recommended number) across worksites.*

Uptake

Making available resources for workers use is good but more importantly, it is better to track whether employees are making use of the support provided. The examples below are good areas to track:

- ✓ *Number of mothers with children less than 24 months of age using breastfeeding facilities each month.*
- ✓ *Percentage of employees reporting they take regular lunch break.*
- ✓ *Percentage of employees participating in nutrition-focused health checks annually (disaggregated by gender).*

Employee satisfaction

Measuring what employees think or feel about the nutrition-mental health support can provide feedback on how to improve it.

- ✓ *Percentage of employees who say healthier food options improve their energy, focus, or stress levels.*
- ✓ *Percentage of new mother employees who return to work after maternity leave.*
- ✓ *Percentage of employees who report health checks motivated them to improve dietary or health-related behaviours*

A woman with glasses is smiling and holding a book. She is in a classroom setting, with a whiteboard visible in the background. The image is overlaid with a yellow filter.

5

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TOOLS TO LEARN MORE

LEARN MORE

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