



Wellbeing Trends 2026

Exploring health and wellbeing hot topics and search trends to help businesses get a head start on workplace wellbeing in 2026.



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Introduction

In some ways, 2025 carried a sense of déjà vu. Many of the challenges facing the country this time last year are still on our plate today. But even though the themes are similar, our response to them is always developing, and our expectations are changing, too.

NHS wait times and long-term sickness absence are hot topics yet again. With half of UK people considering [paying for private healthcare](#), there's an opportunity for businesses to not only provide support for their people, but to be part of the much-needed [prevention economy](#).

AI continues to grip the nation, promising more than perfectly crafted emails — users are now asking ChatGPT for diet plans, gym routines and even free therapy. While helpful on the surface, our ever-growing use of AI also raises questions about ethics, bias, and the limits of technology in addressing complex human needs.

[Burnout](#) is another well-worn topic for HR teams, but could a new approach to recovery help our worn-out workers thrive? Maybe 2026 will be the year we finally agree that 'rest is best'.

Explore all these topics and more, in this report that brings together fresh insights from Google search data, national statistics, social media conversations and consumer research to highlight the themes shaping how organisations support their people.

Private healthcare: a big opportunity for UK businesses



523,000

people left the UK last year to seek healthcare abroad – a 50% rise in just two years.

NHS wait times leave people needing alternatives

Employee benefits such as private healthcare, cash plans and mental health support are increasingly valuable to workers.

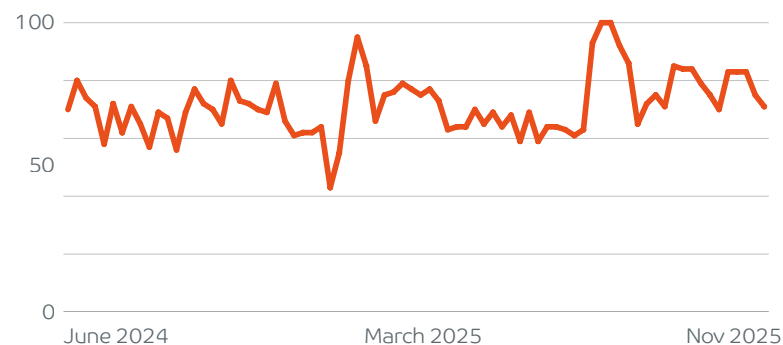
There are 7.4 million people currently on the waiting list for NHS hospital treatment, with approximately 2.89 million of these waiting over 18 weeks.

Four in ten people have accessed private healthcare in the past 12 months as demand rises.

Private healthcare can offer faster diagnosis and treatment, helping prevent conditions from escalating - yet access is uneven for UK employers and self-pay options have financial barriers.

The total UK insurance market grew by 6.8% in 2025.

‘Private health insurance’
Google search trend over 18 months



Job hugging: is it safety or satisfaction?

With the job market looking tough for employees, many are 'job hugging' to keep their security and benefits in place.

One in three people want to leave their jobs — but 54% are staying put out of fear of losing benefits, wanting job stability, or waiting for signs of sustained labour market growth.

Vacancies have dropped to their lowest point in five years, continuing a three-year decline. In this climate, it's natural for employees to prioritise a steady wage and benefits, even if that means putting career growth on hold.

While loyalty offers short-term stability for businesses, it can also lead to long-term stagnation. In 2026, employer support could be the deciding factor in securing — or keeping — top talent. And with private healthcare usage trending upwards, there's a big opportunity for employers to use workplace benefits to retain their best people and make them feel valued, without breaking the bank.



Job hugging verb

Job hugging is when someone stays in their current job, mainly because of fear and desire for stability, even if they're not satisfied or growing in the role.



Healthier employees = happier workplace

With private healthcare usage trending upwards, there's a growing opportunity for employers to use workplace benefits as a tool to retain talent and support wellbeing.

Employees with high wellbeing report half as much absence and two-thirds less presenteeism than those with low wellbeing. This highlights how access to timely treatment and preventative care can directly impact productivity and team resilience.



7,400,000

people are waiting for NHS hospital treatment, with 2.9 million of them waiting over 18 weeks.



34% of people who are worried about access to the NHS say it's impacting their mental health.



Financial worries are still ranked the leading cause of anxiety from 2024 to 2025.

As NHS wait times continue to stretch, businesses that offer private healthcare, mental health support and cash plans are better positioned to attract and retain top talent.

These benefits aren't just nice-to-haves — they're becoming essential tools to reduce burnout, improve productivity and create healthier, more engaged teams.

Key insights for businesses

As concerns continue for financial wellbeing and the job market, companies that provide private healthcare, mental health resources, and cash plans are better equipped to retain talent.

Business leaders can contribute by:

- ✓ **Taking ownership of employee health**

Moving beyond reactive measures to embed wellbeing into the company culture.

- ✓ **Ensuring preventative support is accessible to all**

Providing early intervention options like health screenings, mental health check-ins, and lifestyle support to reduce long-term risks.

- ✓ **Tailoring employee benefits to their people's needs**

Using data and feedback from your employees to design packages that reflect diverse demographics, life stages, and priorities.

This year, employers should reassess their employee health benefits to make sure they're having an impact. It requires more than a tick-box approach. The time invested in getting it right pays off — it's not just the right thing to do, it makes good business sense as well.



Meet your new
therapist: ChatGPT





“ChatGPT has helped me more than 15 years of therapy.”

In previous years we’ve discussed the rise of online therapy, and in 2026 this theme will take on another twist, with AI engines such as ChatGPT and Gemini being used as de facto counsellors.

More than a third of people (37%) are now [using AI](#) for mental health support, rising to 64% in the 25-34 age group. Research published in [Digital Health](#) shows that users utilise ChatGPT to:

- Manage mental health problems
- Seek self-discovery
- Obtain companionship
- Gain mental health literacy

A quick Google search shows how popular this phenomenon is, with Reddit users posting about their positive experiences with using AI chat bots to talk out their problems — without the cost of in-person therapy.

“ I love ChatGPT as therapy. They don’t project their problems onto me. They don’t abuse their authority. They’re open to talking to me at 11pm.

– Reddit user [Big_Significance6949](#)

”

Can AI replace your counsellor?

While users are generally impressed with AI's ability to talk them through their problems, there are notable risks to relying on chatbots instead of a qualified therapist.

The research reveals that users have little concern for the ethics of AI therapy, and a general misconception that ChatGPT is objective and impartial, when in reality it often has biases.

Users seem to be seeking therapy that is emotionally available, without being critical or negative in its judgement.

This points to a lack of understanding of mental health services and the role that a qualified therapist can play.

If ChatGPT only reinforces a user's own perceptions and beliefs, it risks creating an echo chamber where their views go unchallenged, which is uncondusive to successful therapy.

**echo
chamber**
noun.

An environment in which a person only encounters beliefs that coincide with their own, so their existing views are reinforced and alternatives are not considered.



AI workouts and training plans

As well as a substitute therapist, Chat GPT is popular as a virtual personal trainer, with people using it to generate workout plans and gym advice.

With the right prompt, users can generate a running plan, strength routine or diet tips tailored to their needs. This is especially appealing to those who lack the funds to hire a coach — or simply prefer to take things at their own pace.

Apps like [Runna](#) promise personalised coaching based on data from your running watch or fitness tracker, with plans that adjust as it learns more about your performance and training level.

As with any AI tool, it should be used with caution. Creating a suitable plan requires some existing knowledge, so it's not ideal for beginners or those carrying injuries.

Reddit threads back this up, with many of the top-ranked searches asking “is this workout any good?”, suggesting that inexperienced gym goers are looking for reassurance from real people, rather than relying solely on AI to coach them.

Searches for ‘AI coach’ saw a spike in October 2025.



Tips for your ChatGPT-generated workout plan

- ✓ Tell AI to act as a coach, prompting it to ask questions about your lifestyle and create a personalised response.
- ✓ Be specific about your goals and capabilities to make sure your plan is realistic — the more detail, the better.
- ✓ AI is not a substitute for professional advice, so seek guidance when dealing with an injury, training for a sport or trying a new exercise for the first time.



Recovery:
rest is best





88% of Britons believe that spending time in nature is the best way to recharge, yet more than half admit to 'bed rotting'.

What types of rest truly restore us?

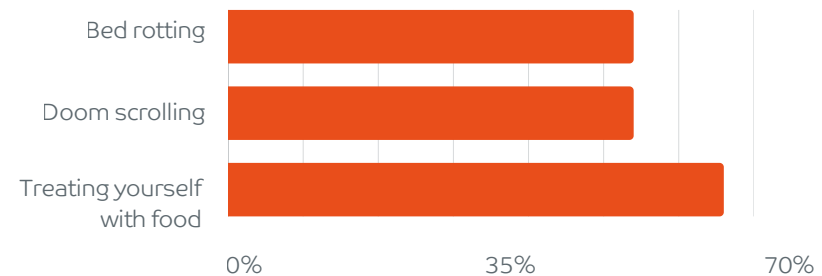
Rest is no longer just about doing nothing — it's about a clear shift toward intentional recovery. This means activities that actively restore mental and physical energy rather than simply offering temporary comfort.

Modern lifestyles, constant connectivity, and rising stress levels have made passive habits like scrolling social media or lying in bed less effective for true rejuvenation.

Recent research reveals that 88% of people in Britain consider spending time in nature the most effective way to recharge. Whether it's wild swimming, hiking, or simply taking a mindful walk outdoors, these activities provide a deeper sense of renewal than traditional downtime.

On the flip side, common relaxation habits like bed rotting (54%), scrolling social media (54%), and treating yourself with food (66%) were rated least effective. These activities may feel comforting but don't deliver the same mental reset as intentional recovery.

Common poor relaxation habits



Train smarter, not harder

Physical fitness is still on the rise, via gymfluencers, home workouts and [record-breaking London Marathon](#) entries. But rest days are having their moment too, especially for those most dedicated to their physical wellbeing journey.

The average gym-goer now takes around [2.5 rest days per week](#). That's a big shift from the old 'no days off' mentality. People are starting to see rest as a tool, not a weakness, and its role in our overall health is now well recognised.

Physical adaptations from training happen when we're at rest. Instead of collapsing on the sofa for a day (passive rest), active recovery means gentle movement — like yoga, walking, or light cycling — that keeps blood flowing and helps muscles repair faster. It's the sweet spot between doing nothing and going full throttle seven days a week.

This shift is helping people train smarter, not harder. Instead of risking burnout or injury with back-to-back intense sessions, recovery days support sustainable progress and overall wellbeing.



[88% of brits](#) said spending time in nature or going for a walk are the most effective restorative activities.



[83% of people](#) who walk regularly report lower levels of anxiety compared to those who were sedentary.





Deep sleep is self-care

Hand-in-hand with intentional rest comes good sleep. For years now, Britons have been tracking their sleep via smartwatches and fitness bands, and it seems to be [improving our sleep quality](#).

When you sleep well, your body repairs, your brain consolidates memories, and your mood resets. Poor sleep? It impacts everything from immunity to productivity. With 58% of people feeling [more health-conscious](#) than they did five years ago, is sleep finally becoming a bigger priority?

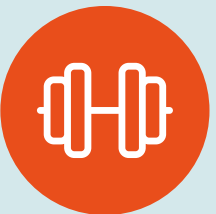
From SAD lights to sleep-boosting glycine supplements, tools and techniques are gaining traction to ensure we have enough deep and REM sleep. The average person goes through around [four to six sleep cycles per night](#), so how do these sleep cycles work?



The UK [glycine supplement](#) market is set to nearly double by 2035.



40% of people say their [sleeping patterns](#) are a key aspect of taking care of their mental wellbeing.



[68% of gym-goers](#) said improving sleep quality was a key motivator to attend.

Stage 1

5% of overall sleep.

Occurs when a person first falls asleep, breathing is the same as when awake.

Stage 2 (light sleep)

45% of overall sleep.

Each cycle makes this stage progressively longer.

Stage 3 (deep sleep)

25% of overall sleep.

Helps repair and regrow tissue, builds muscle and strengthens the immune system.

Stage 4 (REM sleep)

25% of overall sleep.

Dreaming occurs during this stage and [experts believe](#) it's vital for emotional regulation.

Rest in the workplace: tips for employers

✓ Create dedicated spaces for recharge

Provide spaces where employees can take short breaks away from their work stations to reset during the day.

✓ Encourage micro workouts during the workday

Support the trend of short, energising exercises, such as stretching or quick cardio sessions. Just 5–10 minutes of movement can boost productivity, improve mood and reduce physical strain from prolonged sitting.

✓ Integrate movement into meetings and team activities

Promote outdoor walking meetings or active team-building exercises that prioritise wellbeing and movement. Movement stimulates creativity, enhances communication, and breaks the monotony of traditional meetings.

✓ Offer flexible schedules for recovery and balance

Autonomy over time reduces stress and increases job satisfaction, leading to better performance and retention. It can allow employees to take regular breaks, have a good work-life balance and even fit in fitness sessions outside of peak hours.



Active Space

A flexible space away from desks, where employees can take a break, recharge, focus on their mental wellbeing, or even fit in some light exercise.

Preventative health gets personal



By Dave Capper,
CEO, Westfield Health



One in five working-age adults, over 9 million people, are now economically inactive.



Almost three million cite long-term sickness as their reason for being out of work.

Prevention is the missing link in the UK's growth plan

Charlie Mayfield's government review, [Keep Britain Working](#), made the scale of the UK's long-term sickness problem clear: millions are falling out of the workforce not because they want to, but because their health won't let them work.

Many of these cases could have been prevented with early intervention — before sickness became long-term and livelihoods were lost. Yet our system is designed to react to illness, not prevent it. NHS waiting lists dominate headlines, but they are a symptom, not the root cause.



£85,000,000,000

Estimated economic cost of the UK's long-term sickness crisis:

The NHS's own strategy calls for a fundamental shift towards prevention - moving care from hospitals into communities and workplaces. But that shift can't happen unless the Treasury, the NHS and business policy are joined up.

Right now, they're not. And that's why we're stuck treating the symptoms while the underlying crisis deepens.

Why businesses must drive the solution

Over the past year, in conversations with business leaders across the UK, we've heard a consistent message: employers want to invest in the health and wellbeing of their people, but it's becoming harder to do so.

They understand their people better than any central system can. Through education, access to preventative services, and supportive workplace cultures, they can stop employees becoming part of the long-term sick cohort.

This isn't just theory. Major employers — from Google to Sainsbury's to British Airways — are already involved in initiatives like the Keep Britain Working Vanguard, proving that large organisations want to be part of the solution.

In their Autumn Budget, the Government announced 250 new Neighbourhood Health centres, but this falls short of what's needed to truly shift the dial.

While measures may help reduce pressure on hospitals in the short term, they don't join the dots between Treasury policy, businesses and the NHS - and without that alignment, waiting lists will remain a visible symptom of a deeper sickness crisis.



[Read more about preventative health](#)





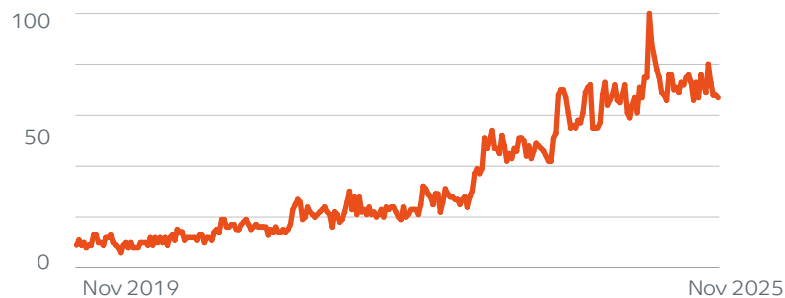
The dopamine debate



Can you detox from dopamine?

‘Dopamine detoxes’ have been trending for years, with everyone from fashion brands to app developers and interior designers jumping on the bandwagon. But despite the hype, there’s still a lot of confusion about what dopamine actually does and how these so-called detoxes work.

‘Dopamine’
Google search trend over the past six years



Dopamine is often oversimplified. It’s not just a ‘feel-good’ chemical, it plays a complex role in motivation, reward and learning. Triggering short bursts of dopamine is already the foundation of social media design, addictive app features and consumer products. So, can we really hack this complex neurological system for our own benefit?

Science suggests it’s not that straightforward. The idea of detoxing from dopamine is misleading. Instead, what people are really doing is reducing overstimulation — taking breaks from constant digital ‘hits’ and instant gratification to reset focus and improve mental clarity.



Research shows that interactive experiences generate **53%** higher engagement than static content.





Diaries over doom-scrolling

Millions of people are trying to break free from the cycle of doom-scrolling and endless notifications, and one current trend in this vein is the 'dopamine menu'. It's touted as a practical way to take control of addictive habits such as scrolling on social media.

Dopamine is the brain's way of rewarding progress and keeping us motivated. Completing even small, meaningful tasks triggers a natural dopamine boost, reinforcing positive habits.

The idea is to create a personalised diary of positive actions that give you a boost, reinforcing the brain's reward system away from your phone. A well-rounded dopamine menu might include:



Wellbeing actions

A walk, journaling, yoga or mindfulness break.



Creative outlets

Cooking, drawing, playing music.



Quick wins

Finishing a small task, organising a drawer.

This trend reflects a growing desire for intentional wellbeing, choosing habits that support mental health and productivity rather than passive or poor relaxation habits. People are swapping scrolling for active engagement, creating routines that feel good.



The average Brit spends 4.5 hours online each day, up by 10 minutes from last year.



Only a third of adults (33%) said they feel the internet is good for society.

Dopamine décor

In 2026, the dopamine décor trend is coming back to redefine homes. This approach uses design as a way to boost mood and support emotional wellbeing. Every choice is intentional. From the colours you pick to the textures you layer, the goal is to create spaces that feel energising and joyful.

34% of people redecorate mainly to improve their mood, with the main methods being changing a colour scheme (31%) or switching up their interior design style (18%). The most popular changes include updating colour schemes or completely shifting interior styles. This tells us that home design is no longer just about function; it's about feeling good.

What can dopamine décor look like? Bold patterns, shapes, colours and layered textures. Statement pieces such as curved sofas, colourful chairs, and unique lighting are turning living rooms into spaces full of personality.

By embracing vibrant colours, playful patterns, and aesthetically pleasing furniture, people are turning their homes into mood-boosting, dopamine hot spots.



110,000 Instagram posts and over 10 million TikTok views feature the hashtag #DopamineDecor





Dopamine debunked

While popular dopamine trends can have a positive effect on our wellbeing, the role of the neurotransmitter remains misunderstood. It's time to debunk some common myths.

✗ **Myth:**

Dopamine makes us feel good.

✓ **Reality:**

Dopamine impacts our motivation and cravings but doesn't actually make us feel happy.

✗ **Myth:**

A 'dopamine detox' replenishes our dopamine stores.

✓ **Reality:**

Reducing addictive behaviours is a positive step, but not because it creates more dopamine — rather it helps us build healthy habits instead.

✗ **Myth:**

Quick fixes can boost our dopamine.

✓ **Reality:**

Sort of. Some dopamine trends can certainly have an impact, but what works best is a healthy diet, exercise and good sleep.

Ones to watch: microtrends



Rethinking bad habits

Whilst drinking, smoking and fast food are still around, they're slowly being replaced by alcohol-free, nicotine-free and DIY 'fakeaways'. This trend looks set to continue into 2026 and beyond.



Socialising is becoming less alcohol-infused, as signalled by a [600% sales spike](#) in no- and low-alcohol products since 2022.



Data from Vape Superstore found a [46% surge in sales](#) of nicotine-free e-liquids over the past six months.



On TikTok and Reddit, [#fakeaway](#) has millions of views as UK consumers take to their kitchens instead of ordering on their apps.

Beyond smoothies: the liquid nutrition movement

Everything from matcha and mushroom coffee to hormone balancing powders and extra protein have been taking a step into the forefront for 2026 wellbeing trends.



Almost 10% of UK consumers are spending more than £20 per month on functional drinks.



Sales of matcha drinks in UK cafés [more than doubled](#) in June and July this summer compared with last year.



[Tastewise](#) data found that the number of mushroom coffees on UK coffee shop menus has grown 30% over the past year.

The momentum behind this trend isn't slowing, with 38% of consumers ready to pay more for beverages that offer purported health benefits, and [31% planning](#) to boost their intake over the next 6–12 months.

Probiotics: going with your gut

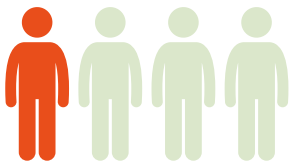
Gut health is still in the spotlight as the UK leans further into holistic wellness. While probiotics and fermented foods were once niche, the awareness of the gut-brain connection and its impact on mood, immunity and energy is becoming a daily health focus.



The UK's digestive health sector is experiencing rapid growth, forming part of a global wellness industry projected to reach £57 billion by 2027.



Reports forecast the global kombucha market to increase by 15.6% from 2022 through 2030 due to its potential gut-health benefits.



25% of Brits purchase products specifically for improving gut-health.



#GutTok has reached over one billion posts on TikTok.

From the inside out: NutriSkin routines

Skin rituals and ingestible care are merging into a new beauty trend: beauty from within. Focused on routine and consistency, this shift moves beyond surface-level fixes to create lasting results that align with self-care.

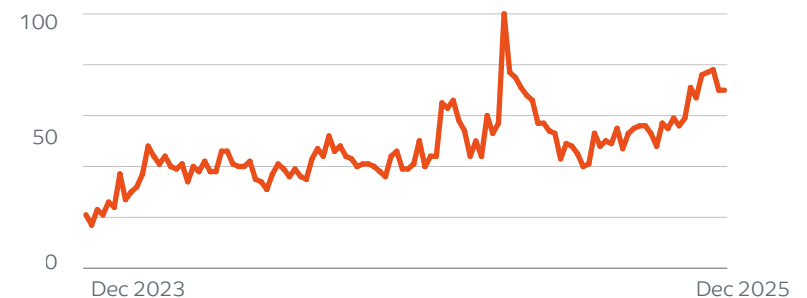


There was a 12% increase in hair, skin, and nail supplement launches from April 2020 to March 2025.



Online interest in “marine collagen” has surged by 227%, while collagen product sales have increased by 62%.

‘Korean skincare’
Google search trend over the past 2 years



Further reading

[CIPD — Health and wellbeing at work 2025](#)

A report with strategies for preventative healthcare and impact of early intervention against long-term absence.

[Liven — Dopamine and productivity](#)

This blog discussing dopamine's role in motivation, reward anticipation, and long-term productivity strategies.

[Great Place to Work — Wellbeing at Work in the UK](#)

This report explores lingering effects of covid, economic uncertainty and AI-driven influence workplace wellbeing.

[Platinum Spas - The Rest & Relaxation Report](#)

A report highlighting the most restorative activities and comforts that are detrimental to our wellbeing.

Our resources

[Health cash plans and private health insurance](#)

These two in-demand health benefits work together to support your people's everyday needs.

[Westfield Health Yearly Wellbeing Survey](#)

Our yearly insights report summarise the need-to-know findings from our annual survey of 2,000 UK workers.

[Corporate Fitness Services](#)

Our scalable and flexible spaces help get your workforce moving or relaxing — whichever they need most.





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