

Editor's comment

Improving the physical health of your workforce has clear, quantifiable benefits for both employees and employers. These range from individuals feeling more energised day-to-day, to reducing long-term chronic illness and sickness absence. As such, helping staff to look after themselves physically should be a core part of any employee wellbeing strategy.

The good news is that there is an enormous amount of support on offer. This includes public health campaigns - many of which have materials that are free to use - and employee benefits such as dental plans and health cash plans. There is also a vast array of fitness activities and ideas in the market that can be tailored to suit any budget and any workforce.

A physical health programme needs to be inclusive if it is to be really effective. It's easy to engage with individuals who are already sports enthusiasts or nutrition experts, but some of the greatest gains are from involving staff who aren't looking after themselves physically. That means inspiring workers all year round – even in the winter – and creating a programme that's sufficiently varied to offer something for everyone.

This guide is a great starting point for exploring why a physically healthy workforce is important, how you can build a strategy to support physical wellbeing – and ways that you can monitor the success of your programme over time.

Maggie Williams

Editor



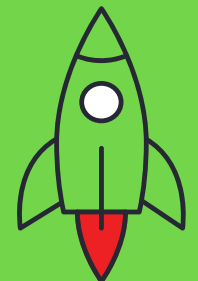
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Sponsor's comment

The benefits of looking after your employees' physical health are wide-ranging. Having a workforce that is physically healthy has a positive effect on mental health, reduction on sickness absence, boosted productivity and decreases the risk of employees developing serious, long-term health conditions like heart disease and diabetes. Being physically well underpins the overall health and wellbeing of employees.

Physical wellbeing is a key pillar within many workplace wellbeing strategies. Figures from the CIPD and Simplyhealth Health and Well-being at Work 2018 report reveal that in over three-fifths of organisations, health and wellbeing activity is designed to promote physical health.

Our research with CIPD found that businesses are encouraging good physical health in a variety of ways. Over 40% of employers provide their entire workforce with advice on healthy eating and/or living a healthy lifestyle, 39% offer access to a gym membership, 35% give employees free flu vaccinations, 32% host wellbeing days, and almost a quarter hold regular on-site relaxation or exercise classes.

Our core belief at Simplyhealth is in the power of preventative health initiatives. We work in partnership with employers to help them adopt this kind of approach, supporting them with tools to encourage their employees to proactively look after their physical health and wellbeing – rather than reacting to an illness once it has arrived.

As the CIPD and Simplyhealth report shows though, there is still more work to be done. Currently, almost half of respondents agree or strongly agree that their organisation takes a more reactive position with regards to health, for example, only taking action when a member of staff has gone off sick.

The organisations who are most successful in encouraging a preventative approach to healthcare, embed health and wellbeing into their culture. They recognise that it's a business necessity to maintain the health of their staff, not just a nice-to-have. The CIPD and Simplyhealth survey findings reveal that organisations that have a standalone strategy for wellbeing, line managers who are bought into its importance, and senior leaders who have it on their agenda, are more likely to report positive outcomes.

In an age of increasing work and life pressures, proactively supporting your employees to have good physical health truly has become a business necessity. After all, if your employees aren't well, they can't be expected to perform well at work. This technical guide to physical wellbeing will provide you with a fantastic starting point to begin improving the overall health of your employees and start reaping the benefits of having a fit, healthy and happy workforce.

Pam Whelan

Director of Corporate at Simplyhealth



Why physical wellbeing matters

Promoting physical wellbeing in the workplace is good for employees but it's also good for business, with the potential business benefits ranging from reduced sickness absence and fewer insurance claims to higher productivity from a healthier, happier and more engaged workforce.

For employees, the combination of physical activity, a balanced diet and good quality sleep can boost energy levels, aid concentration and make them happier and more confident.

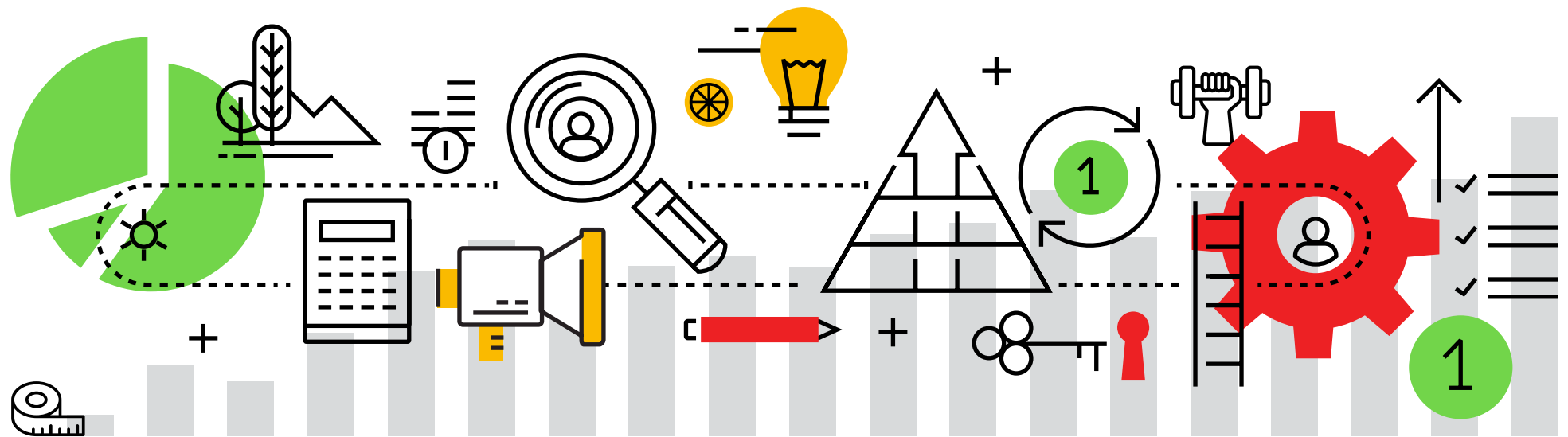
It'll also reduce the risk of both short-term and long-term illness. Cancer Research found that around 40% of the 360,000 cases of the disease each year could be prevented through lifestyle changes such as keeping active and eating healthily. Likewise, Sport England says that being active reduces the risk of developing type 2 diabetes by 30-40%.

Physical wellbeing is also good for your mental health. We all know how energised we can feel after a good night's sleep or a stroll in the countryside but there can also be longer term effects. For instance, The King's Fund's Time to Think Differently programme, warns that around 30% of people with a long-term physical health problem will also have a mental health problem such as depression or anxiety.

And the benefits associated with physical wellbeing can have a profound effect on the workplace too. With more energy, improvements in concentration and reductions in sickness absence, productivity will rocket.

It's great for attraction and retention too. Providing the tools and support to improve physical health is highly valued, especially as it can also enable employees to live life to the full outside work.

There are also longer-term benefits, with employees less likely to develop chronic health conditions such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease. As the workforce ages this can make a significant difference to an organisation.



How to build the right strategy for your organisation

From running groups and sleep pods to cookery demonstrations with celebrity chefs, there are plenty of different initiatives that can form part of a physical wellbeing programme. But, as there's no one-size-fits-all solution, finding the initiatives that fit your organisation and employees is key to success.

Some essential considerations are:

- **Practicalities**

Think about the practical requirements of any physical wellbeing initiative. Does it need space? Or a shower? Can the activity sustain demand if more employees want to participate? And does it fit with wider business objectives, such as reducing staff turnover or cutting sickness absence? Does it form a cohesive programme with other parts of your wellbeing strategy?

- **Employee needs**

It's also vital to find out what staff want. As well as asking them directly, through employee surveys or focus groups for example, it may be worth finding out more about the health of your staff to identify any problem areas.

Also factor in the demographics of your workforce. Although it's never good to generalise, a paintballing session will have more appeal with younger employees while, if there are plenty of parents in your workforce, limit after-work activities as they could feel excluded if they can't attend.

- **Budget**

Whether you've already earmarked some budget, or you're looking for new funding, you'll need to build a business case for your programme. With this, a variety of different metrics are available to support your case.

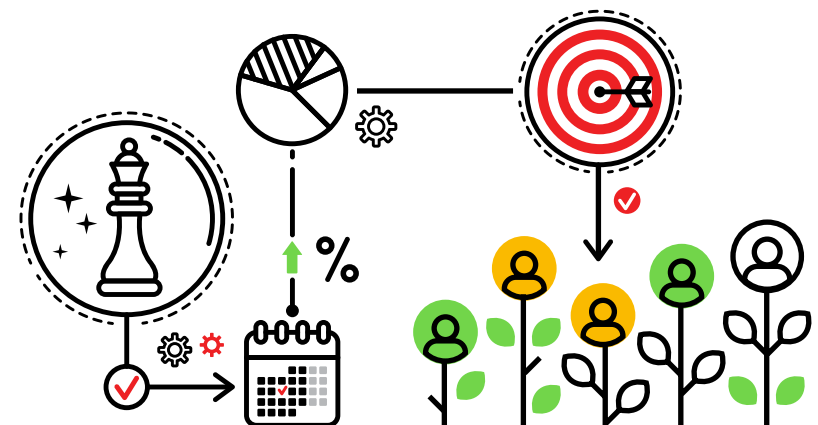
As examples, the Oxford Economics report, *The Cost of Brain Drain*, put a figure of £30,614 on replacing a single employee earning £25k+. The CIPD/*Simplyhealth Health and Well-being at Work 2018* report reveals an average of 6.6 days lost per employee in a year, which equates to an average annual absence cost of £726 per employee based on average weekly earnings of £550 (*Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2017*, ONS).

It's also worth noting that you can start small with simple changes such as walking meetings and lunchtime walking and running groups. Then, as the evidence builds up of the benefits, your business case will virtually write itself.

Being active is easy when the days are long and the sun's shining, but to maximise the benefits of physical wellbeing, you need a programme that supports employee activity all year.

These initiatives can help get you through the cold, dark months:

- **Make activity part of the working day** – simple changes such as using photocopiers on different floors and going to speak to a colleague rather than email them can aid physical wellbeing.
- **Explore indoor challenges** – stair climbing programmes are available or invest in an exercise bike or rowing machine to help employees clock up the miles.
- **Promote sleep and nutrition** – these are important elements of physical wellbeing and can make it easier for employees to contemplate exercise.
- **Support New Year's resolutions** – January is the perfect time to ramp up your programme as employees seek to make improvements to their health.



Reach the whole workforce

With any physical wellbeing programme, you'll find that the early adopters are likely to be employees that are already pretty active. However, involving individuals who are not likely to exercise will have the biggest impact on workplace wellbeing. So, your programme needs to have universal appeal.

Include a wide range of abilities and interests. It's also important to refresh the offering frequently, to make sure it's still appropriate for staff and to maintain interest.

Simple changes can also be very effective, especially when they're part of the working day.

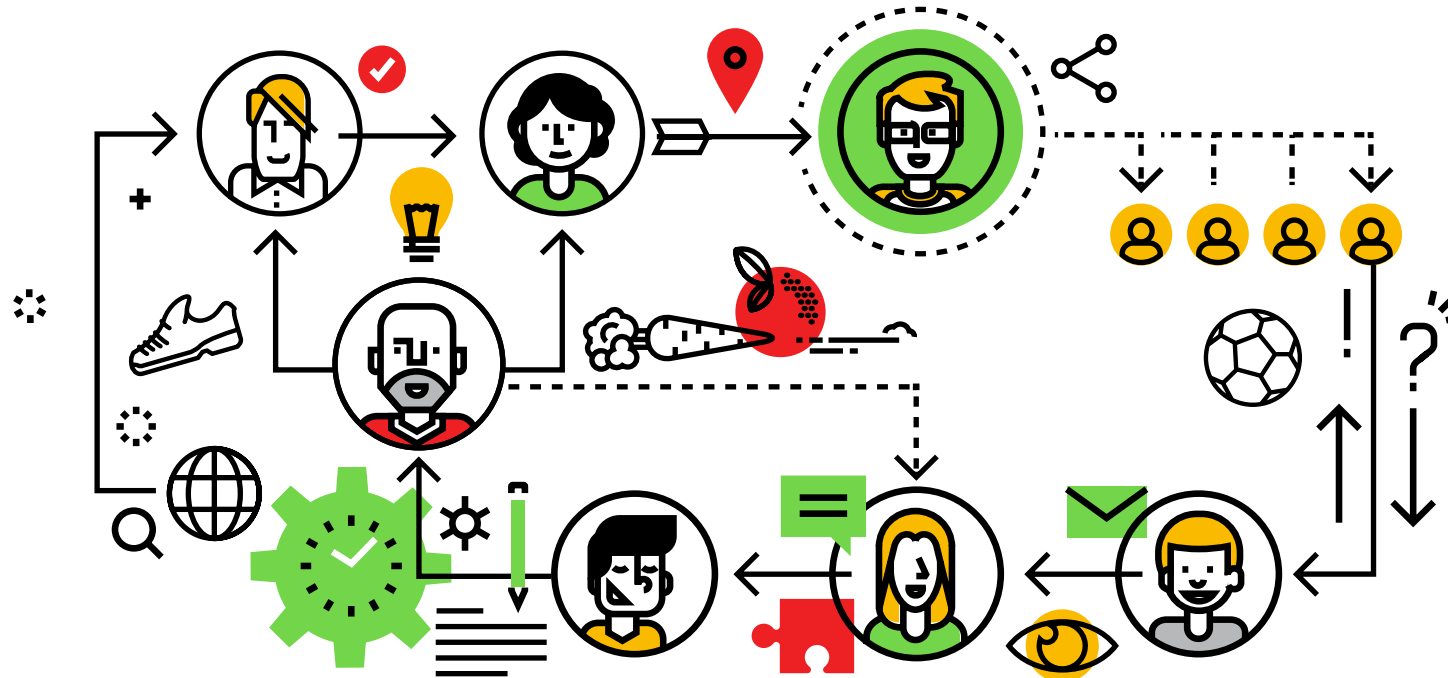
Peer pressure is powerful too. Having senior managers and physical wellbeing champions demonstrating the benefit of taking part in your initiatives can be a strong motivator.

Team activities also help, lending a social element to further motivate people. These group activities are also useful where you want to reach out to employees who may feel a bit intimidated to take part on their own.

Similarly, a competition, especially where it's team-based, can inspire employees to get involved.

It's also important to ensure that it's as easy as possible to take part. This might mean fitting a shower if you're encouraging employees to cycle to work or run at lunchtimes; or being a bit more flexible around working hours if you want them to use a gym.

And don't make it all about fitness. Nutrition and sleep are also key elements of physical wellbeing so include these in your programmes to reach out to employees who aren't comfortable donning the lycra just yet.



The building blocks of physical wellbeing

Physical wellbeing is made up of three different elements – exercise, nutrition and sleep – with health guidelines recommending adults measure their levels of each every day or week.

But, although each element is treated individually, the three are interrelated. Eat badly and it'll affect your sleep and your desire to exercise. Skip the shuteye and you'll probably feel like switching your session at the gym for some supersize snacks on the sofa.

This relationship means it's smart to include all three elements in your organisation's physical wellbeing strategy. Doing this will not only enable employees to reach optimum physical health, but it'll also help to extend the appeal of the programme.

Peak performance – NHS recommendations

Exercise – At least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity / 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity a week, plus strength exercises on two or more days

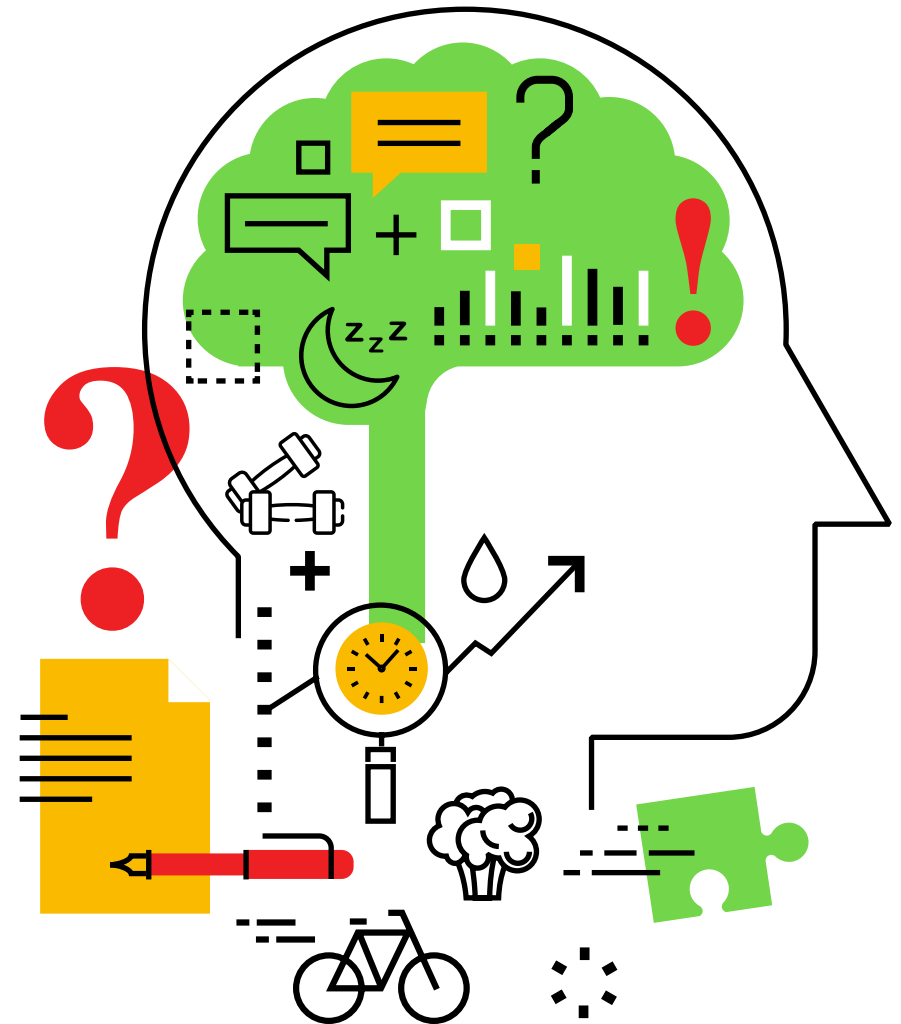
Nutrition – Around 2,500 calories a day for men and 2,000 for women, which should include at least five portions of fruit and vegetables

Sleep – Between six and nine hours a night

Broader wellbeing benefits

There are also close links between our physical and mental health, with physical health problems significantly increasing the risk of poor mental health, and vice versa.

This link is recognised by mental health charity Mind, which advocates that everyone includes some physical activity, especially individuals who have mental health problems. The relationship was also demonstrated in a YouGov survey, conducted in April 2018 on behalf of Simplyhealth. This found that 49% of Londoners who regularly exercise did this to reduce stress and/or anxiety.



Measures of success – for employees

Adopt a physical wellbeing programme and some of the signs of success will be easy for employees to measure. Alongside weight loss and increases in the distance or time that they can exercise, employees should feel more confident, happier and more alive.

Employers can also help to keep them motivated by providing tests for health factors such as blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar. Offering regular check-ups, and explaining the benefits these health improvements can bring, can really spur employees on.

Highlighting the benefits that employees will enjoy outside of the workplace can also encourage them to stick with the programme. Although the extra years they may gain by reducing their blood pressure can feel fairly intangible, being able to enjoy a kickabout with the kids or a long walk with the family can be great motivators.

Know your numbers

NHS guidelines are in place for a variety of health factors, allowing employees to see quickly whether they're healthy or potentially at risk. These include the following:

- Blood pressure – between 90/60mmHg and 120/80mmHg
- Cholesterol – 5mmol/L or less for healthy adults for total cholesterol levels (4mmol/L for those at high risk); 3mmol/L or less for healthy adults for LDL levels (2mmol/L for those at high risk). 1mmol/L or above for HDL
- Blood sugar – between 4.0 and 5.4mmol/L when fasting and up to 7.8mmol/L two hours after eating for the majority of healthy individuals
- Body mass index – 18.5 – 25
- Waist circumference – less than 94cm for men and 80cm for women



Measures of success – for employers

Unless you work for British Athletics, don't be disheartened if your workplace isn't instantly filled with lycra-clad employees heading out for a quick 10 miler in their lunch hour. It can take time for your programme to pick up momentum – remember it's a marathon not a sprint – but you should be able to measure success fairly quickly.

The obvious metrics to chart are the number of employees participating in your initiatives. Providing you promote the programme sufficiently, and you offer enough variety, this number should rise steadily.

But, while this is a quick reckoner of the success of your programme, the real business benefits come by shifting the dial on factors such as sickness absence, productivity and employee engagement.

Which of these you decide to focus on will depend on your workplace, the broader business goals you want to achieve and the benchmarks you've put in place for measuring success.

And, while participation in your initiatives will indicate success, it's also worth asking employees for feedback. This can help design future initiatives and, by showing you value their views, will also drive engagement.



Quiz

1. Physical wellbeing is made up of three elements. These are:

- A. Exercise, sleep and meditation
- B. Exercise, family time and nutrition
- C. Exercise, nutrition and sleep
- D. Exercise, nutrition and mindfulness

2. By what percentage can being active reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes?

- A. 30-40%
- B. 10-20%
- C. 20-30%
- D. 50%

3. What percentage of people with a long-term physical health problem will also have a mental health problem?

- A. Around 90%
- B. Around 50%
- C. Around 30%
- D. Around 10%

4. Approximately how many cases of cancer could be prevented through lifestyle changes such as keeping active each year?

- A. 144,000
- B. 360,000
- C. 40,000
- D. 100,000

5. Using the CIPD figures, how much could an employer with 100 employees save if it reduced average sickness absence by one day a year?

- A. £828.60
- B. £1,000
- C. £8,286
- D. £10,000

6. Which of these initiatives can help employees become more active during the working day?

- A. Taking the stairs instead of the lift
- B. Using a photocopier on a different floor
- C. Speaking to colleagues rather than emailing them
- D. All of them

7. How much sleep should the average adult get every night?

- A. Eight to 10 hours
- B. Six to nine hours
- C. Four to six hours
- D. At least two hours

8. How much exercise should an employee get each week?

- A. At least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity plus strength exercises on two days
- B. 10 minutes of moderate aerobic activity a day plus 10 minutes of strength exercises a day
- C. 300 minutes of moderate aerobic activity plus strength exercises every day
- D. One hour of moderate aerobic activity a day

9. What percentage of Londoners who exercise regularly do it to reduce stress and/or anxiety?

- A. 99%
- B. 75%
- C. 49%
- D. 40%

10. What's the NHS's normal level for blood pressure?

- A. Between 80/40mmHg and 90/60mmHg
- B. Between 50/30mmHg and 100/60mmHg
- C. Between 100/60mmHg and 200/120mmHg
- D. Between 90/60mmHg and 120/80mmHg

1. C, 2. A, 3. C, 4. A, 5. C, 6. D, 7. B, 8. A, 9. C, 10. D

Quiz: The answers

Who we are

About our sponsor: Simplyhealth

We've been providing cost-effective, accessible and manageable health cash plans for 145 years. Our market-leading products help businesses demonstrate real commitment to the maintenance of their employees' health, wellbeing and everyday performance.

What Simplyhealth does:

Our health cash plans enable businesses to look after their employees, and make it easy for people to maintain their health and wellbeing, so they can look after the business.

We offer two types of preventative health cash plans:

- Optimise: our health plan, covering a range of treatments including visits to the optician, dentist, 24/7 GP services and more
- Denplan: our dental plan, covering all clinically necessary treatments, routine examinations, hygiene treatments, plus cover for accidents and emergencies

In 2017, Simplyhealth and Denplan united under one Simplyhealth brand and today we're proud to be the UK's leading provider of health cash plans, Denplan dental payment plans and pet health plans.

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Simplyhealth is a trading name of Simplyhealth Access, which is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority.

About us: Reward & Employee Benefits Association

REBA is the professional networking community for reward and benefits practitioners. We make members' working lives easier by saving you time, money and effort through sharing experience, ideas, data and insight with each other. We help members to pursue best practice, increase professionalism in the industry and prepare for upcoming changes. REBA lobbies government on members' behalf.

What REBA does:

- Runs regular conferences and networking events
- Produces benchmarking research, insight & data reports and analysis
- Curates the information you need to know, both online and in our weekly email
- Helps with supplier shortlisting and research

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