

ACTION PLANNING TOOL

KEEPING INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS
TRAVELLERS HEALTHY, HAPPY AND
ENGAGED AT HOME AND AWAY



BUSINESS TRAVEL CAN BE AN ISSUE FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

As a business traveller you are highly likely to work longer hours when you are away than you do at home. There appear to be at least four factors which contribute to this: i) pressure to complete work from the trip in addition to your usual workload; ii) expectation of networking and socialising with colleagues outside office hours; iii) lack of usual routine and cues around work/life boundaries; and iv) technology enabling 24/7 online connectivity. Longer hours result in poorer quality sleep, less contact with family and friends, and issues with mental health.

It is also likely that whilst away on business you may:

- Experience higher levels of stress than you would normally do at home. This can also lead to more conflict back home and lower quality sleep.
- Attend networking events or take part in other social activities with your colleagues or clients more frequently than at home. Often, these events provide opportunities to consume more alcohol than you may normally do at home. This could affect your sleep, as alcohol has been found to decrease quality of sleep.
- Be less likely to exercise, eat a balanced diet and stay in contact with friends and family. This could have implications for your wellbeing, because a healthy diet exercise and social support have been found to protect mental health.

WHAT CAN HELP IN TERMS OF MAINTAINING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH WHILST TRAVELLING FOR BUSINESS?

- Be aware of your mental health – take time to reflect on what causes your mood to decline and find ways to address it
- Take a balanced perspective – consider the positive aspects and benefits of international business travel, as well as the more challenging issues
- Set boundaries between work and non-work time (this includes the use of technology such as work email, work mobile phone etc.)
- Maintain as many ‘home’ routines and habits when away as possible
- Make space for down-time, rest and recuperation
- Actively take breaks throughout the working day
- Adopt healthy sleeping habits (e.g. wind down an hour before bedtime)
- Eat a well-balanced diet and minimise alcohol consumption
- Take exercise (e.g. gym, running, yoga etc.)
- Schedule in time to connect with family, friends and colleagues
- Communicate effectively with your travelling colleagues





THIS TOOL HELPS YOU TO:

- Become more aware of your behaviours, ... habits and work patterns while you are away on business trips
- Identify what contributes to stress/ negative experiences as well as positive experiences while you are away
- Take action and plan activities that improve your mental health, while minimising stressors

THIS TOOL CONSISTS OF TWO COMPONENTS:

1. Activity diary

The Activity diary has been designed to help you become more aware of your behaviours and working habits. You are asked to fill in the relevant information every day, whilst you are away. As business travel often can lead to additional work pressures, with less opportunity to recuperate, tracking your activity can help you identify where to take action. The Activity diary also asks you to provide an overall entry with the average number of hours worked etc. for the week before and after your business trip. This is to explore how your behaviours and work habits may change as a result of your business trip.

2. Action Planning

Once you have gained awareness of your habits, behaviours, preferences and what you would like to avoid, the next step is to increase those aspects of business travel

which you find enjoyable, whilst decreasing the ones that affect you negatively. Reflecting on your entries in your Activity diary, extract the three aspects of your business trip which you enjoyed the most or made you feel better, and think of ways in which you can increase these going forward on your future business trips. Record commitments of what to do and consider any additional support you may need to make this happen. Do the same for the three aspects you enjoyed the least, looking at ways to reduce them.

Please note: If you are already aware of your behaviours and working habits on business trips, you may choose to progress straight to the action planning stage of this toolkit.

WHAT TO DO NEXT?

When you have completed your Action Plan, it would be a great idea to share this with your manager in order that they can talk through your ideas for change with you, offer alternative suggestions you may not have considered and support you in ensuring the changes are implemented. If you are not able to do this, consider meeting with an HR representative, or a trusted colleague.

DURING THE TRIP

ACTIVITY DIARY	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	AVERAGE FOR TRIP
How many hours did you work?						
How many breaks did you take?						
How many hours did you sleep?						
What was your diet like?						
How much alcohol did you consume?						
How much did you exercise?						
How much contact did you have with friends and family?						
How much time did you have for leisure activities and what did you do?						
What did you enjoy the most?						
What did you enjoy the least or find most stressful?						

ACTIVITY DIARY	THE WEEK BEFORE THE TRIP (average of all the measures)	THE WEEK OF THE TRIP (average of all the measures)	THE WEEK AFTER THE TRIP (average of all the measures)
How many hours did you work?			
How many breaks did you take?			
How many hours did you sleep?			
What was your diet like?			
How much alcohol did you consume?			
How much did you exercise?			
How much contact did you have with friends and family?			
How much time did you have for leisure activities and what did you do?			
What did you enjoy the most?			
What did you enjoy the least or find most stressful?			

ACTION PLANNING	What aspects of business trips make you feel better?	What could I do to increase these?	What will I commit to do?	What do I need to support me in making this change?
Example	<i>I really enjoyed taking some time out of my busy schedule to go sightseeing</i>	<i>Making sure to factor in sightseeing on my next business trip, potentially take some leisure time at the end of my trip to see more</i>	<i>Plan in at least a couple of hours on my next trip. Check with HR on leisure time policy</i>	<i>I could check with my manager if it would be possible to tag on some holidays when I'm done with my meetings</i>
1.				
2.				
3.				
	What aspects of business trips make you feel worse?	What could I do to decrease these?	What will I commit to do?	What do I need to support me in making this change?
Example	<i>I felt quite lonely when I was away on my last trip, leading me to feeling a bit down.</i>	<i>Having more contact with friends and family</i>	<i>Book in 30 min to 1 hour slots every day I am away with different friends and family members</i>	<i>Having a well-functioning internet connection. Agreeing with people in advance, so that they will be available when I am free</i>
1.				
2.				
3.				

We are most grateful for the support from all the participating organisations and individuals who were involved in this research.

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