



# 2021 CIGNA 360 WELL-BEING SURVEY: ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

**BODY & MIND**

SEPTEMBER 2021



## INTRODUCTION

Health and well-being are in the limelight more than ever since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Markets across the world were impacted at different times and to varying degrees, however, the global nature of travel restrictions and economic impact mean that nowhere was left untouched.

In the latest *Cigna 360 Well-Being Survey*, we uncovered the impacts on body and mind, and provide advice from our clinical and wellness experts on how we can take better care of our health and well-being in the evolving pandemic. We focus on fitness and healthy eating, healthy sleep habits and stress, all of which have an amplifying effect on our overall health and well-being.



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Defying most expectations, including the media who predicted reduced movement and increased comfort eating during lockdown<sup>1, 2</sup>, our latest research shows an improved ability to manage diet and engage in regular exercise.

Since 2018, physical health has experienced the biggest drop of all five of our health and well-being indices, dropping down from third to fourth place from 2019 onwards. However, when we look at the trend from the beginning of 2020, through the **COVID-19 Global Impact Study** reports, outlook around physical activity and healthy eating are one of the few upsides of the pandemic.

We have seen a revolution in at-home fitness following the lockdowns that led to the closure of gyms, public sporting facilities and the cancellation of sports events for much of 2020. The growth of sports brands such as Peloton shows how people have moved the gym into their living rooms, while the use of fitness trackers and apps is up as people take on challenges against work colleagues and family in an effort to find new and inventive ways to stay fit and healthy<sup>3</sup>.

**“Over the course of the pandemic, we’ve seen employers push out fitness and wellness programs to encourage employee engagement. In the transition back to the office, these programs will prove more important than ever.”**

Michelle Leung, HR Officer, Cigna International Markets

Our research also shows that more people report eating a balanced diet and being at a healthy weight than pre-pandemic or even early 2019, indicating that the disruption caused by restrictions, lockdowns and widespread working from home has created the opportunity for people to adopt healthier habits.

Not surprisingly, 25–34-year-olds appear to be in the best physical shape, with more positivity in every element. In fact, 69% of this group feel good, very good or excellent about being at a healthy weight and eating a balanced diet, compared with 62% and 67% on average. They were also more likely to get regular exercise, with 61% saying they felt confident about this compared to the average of 56%.

<sup>1</sup> Study: In U.S., Lockdowns Added 2 Pounds per Month. WebMD. <https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20210323/lockdown-weight-gain-study#:~:text=March%2023%2C%202021%20%2D%2D%20Americans,year%2C%20the%20study%20authors%20said,Updated March 23, 2021. Accessed June 29, 2021.>




<sup>2</sup> Almost a third of us gained weight during lockdown as snacking took its toll. **The Telegraph**. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/28/one-third-population-suffer-lockdown-weight-gain-snacking-takes/,> Updated July 28, 2020. Accessed June 29, 2021

<sup>3</sup> Wearable devices market resilient during Covid-19 pandemic. **Verdict**. <https://www.verdict.co.uk/wearable-devices-market-covid-19/,> Updated September 30, 2020. Accessed June 25, 2021.



## DISRUPTION AND LOCKDOWNS ENCOURAGE FITNESS AND HEALTHY EATING

### PHYSICAL WELL-BEING INDEX

Good / Very Good / Excellent (%)	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+
 Being at a healthy weight	62	65	60	69	69	60	56	58
 Eating a balanced diet	67	69	65	65	69	66	66	76
 Exercising on a regular basis	56	60	52	55	61	55	52	53

Women track lower than men against every element of physical well-being, but the gap is particularly noticeable for getting enough exercise, with only just over half of all women (52%) saying this was good, very good or excellent, compared to 60% of men.

As the world emerges from the pandemic, the challenge will be seeing how people are able to carry these newly adopted habits into their post-pandemic lifestyles. Key to this is making sure that exercise and healthy eating become part of a daily routine.

For example, adults should aim for 30 minutes of moderate exercise five times a week. This does not have to be done all in one go and could be split into three shorter sessions such as cycling to the shops rather than taking the bus or, if you are able, walking with your children to and from school.

Keeping healthy eating on track will likely be a challenge for those returning to office-based work. At home, it is easy to keep track of what you are eating, but meetings, conversations in the kitchen and other distractions mean it is all too easy to eat more than you planned. However, using a few basic guidelines, there is no reason why

healthy eating cannot continue into the months and years ahead:



**1. Packed lunches:** whenever you can, aim to take your own lunch to work. It is much easier to keep track of calories that way and will also save you money



**2. Create a snack swap:** a small handful of almonds will keep you fuller for longer than a bag of crisps, so make sure you carry some healthy snacks with you at all times

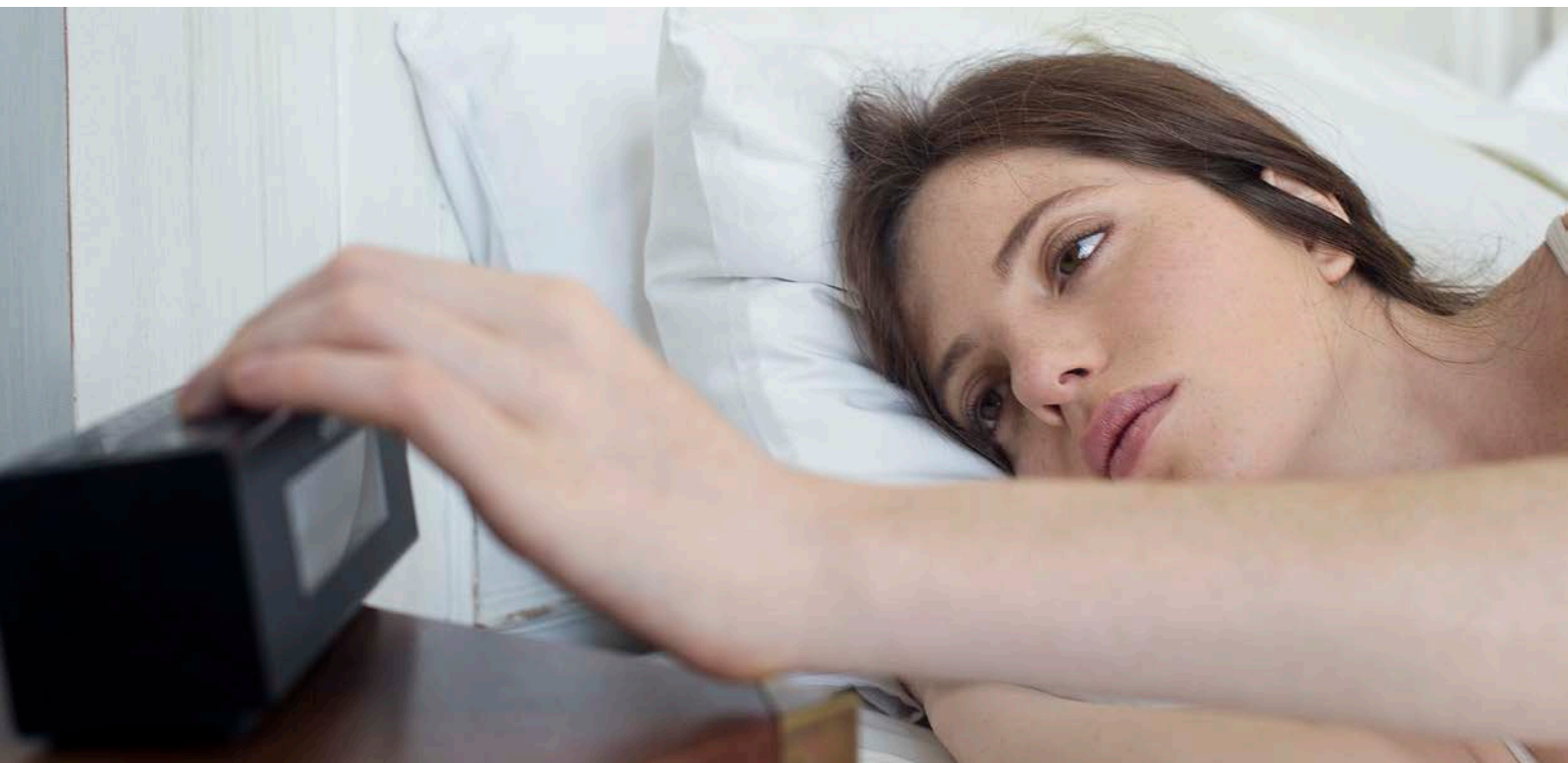


**3. Prioritise lean protein:** protein is filling and is also critical for our immune system. Make sure you have sufficient protein – animal or plant-based – in your diet



**4. Breakfast like a king:** a proper breakfast, either at home or your desk, will set you up for a successful day. Try not to have boxed cereals too often (they can be very high in sugar) and ring the changes using healthy ingredients such as yoghurt, fruit, eggs, wholemeal bread, avocado, among others.





Despite improvements in managing diets and engaging in exercise, other aspects of physical well-being have fared less well. In particular, we have seen a marked decline in people who feel they are getting sufficient sleep. Only 30% of people say this was very good or excellent, compared to 34% in early 2020.

Disruption to routines; later sleeping and waking times; increased use of electronics; stress, anxiety, depression; and isolation all contribute to altered sleeping patterns<sup>4, 5</sup>. The term “coronasomnia” has even been coined to reference the insomnia suffered by many as a result of the pandemic<sup>6</sup>.

There is a close relationship between lack of sleep and mental health issues, with a lack of, or poor quality of sleep, having a negative impact on mental health and creating difficulty in coping with daily life.

This could continue to have an effect beyond the pandemic as people return to a more office-based working environment but continue to struggle with

poor sleep. Therefore, getting into good habits now will make sleeping patterns easier to maintain as working life changes over the coming months. Here are four steps to a better night's sleep:



**1. Sunlight affects our rhythms:** our circadian rhythm – our internal body clock – responds to light and dark so give it some stimulation with a short walk at lunchtime



**2. Quit the caffeine:** research shows that caffeine can significantly affect sleep for up to six hours, so a final cup of coffee at 3pm will make sure the effects have worn off before you head to bed



**3. Turn off:** TVs, mobile phones, laptops and tablets all emit a blue light which can trick the brain into thinking it is daytime. Make sure you turn everything off at around 9pm to give your body a chance to turn off too



**4. Deep breaths:** if you have trouble falling asleep, try doing some breathing exercises before you turn out the light. The calm effect will help your body relax and fall asleep faster

<sup>4</sup> Sleep Guidelines During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Sleep Foundation. <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-guidelines-covid-19-isolation>. Updated December 17, 2020. Accessed May 27, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Sleep Neurologists Call It 'COVID-Somnia'—Increased Sleep Disturbances Linked to the Pandemic. Neurology Today. [https://journals.lww.com/neurotodayonline/fulltext/2020/07090/sleep\\_neurologists\\_call\\_it\\_1.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/neurotodayonline/fulltext/2020/07090/sleep_neurologists_call_it_1.aspx). Published July 9, 2020. Accessed May 27, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> COVID-19 is wrecking our sleep with coronasomnia – tips to fight back. UC Davis Health. <https://health.ucdavis.edu/health-news/newsroom/covid-19-is-wrecking-our-sleep-with-coronasomnia--tips-to-fight-back-/2020/09>. Published September 23, 2020. Accessed February 08, 2021









## HUMAN CONNECTION REDUCES STRESS AND ENHANCES OPTIMISM



**With numerous lockdowns around the world, the inability to travel and the need to socially distance, we have been more isolated from broader society than almost any period in modern history. However, we have seen a significant strengthening of the family bond, especially those with young children at home.**

There has been an expectation that working parents with children were highly stressed during 2020 due to the need to juggle work, school and children, leaving them little time for themselves. However, in contrast to this expectation, well-being scores for this group have actually improved in many areas. They do report higher levels of stress, but it seems that they have been able to enjoy more time with their children. This has perhaps given them more opportunities to bond and develop a sense of closeness, with an 'us vs the rest of the world' mentality, which reinforces the family unit and gives a sense of purpose during these confusing times.

		 PHYSICAL	 SOCIAL	 FAMILY	 FINANCIAL	 WORK
Global average	61.3	58.2	61.6	65.5	54.1	67.9
Working parents with children under 18	66.2	62.4	65.5	70.8	59.5	70.1

We can actually draw a correlation between strong relationships and resilience, with the former having a direct relationship with the latter. In fact, those with weaker family and community connections are four times more likely to suffer from unmanageable stress than those with strong bonds. Showing that this connection, or resilience, does not entirely eliminate stress, but it does take the edge off its most extreme form. Not surprisingly, the group with strong connections also fared better across all five well-being indices.



## HUMAN CONNECTION REDUCES STRESS AND ENHANCES OPTIMISM

This demonstrates the need to invest time in human relationships, both within and beyond the family unit, as part of a broader well-being and stress management plan. There are, of course, some simple tips we can all follow to reduce our stress levels which are likely to spike as we start to alter our working patterns back to pre-pandemic routines:



**1. Take time out:** If something is causing stress, taking even 10 minutes away to spend with friends or family, for example, will help. It sounds obvious, but so many of us have felt the need to be 'always-on' while we have been working from home; we have not always felt empowered to take even these little steps



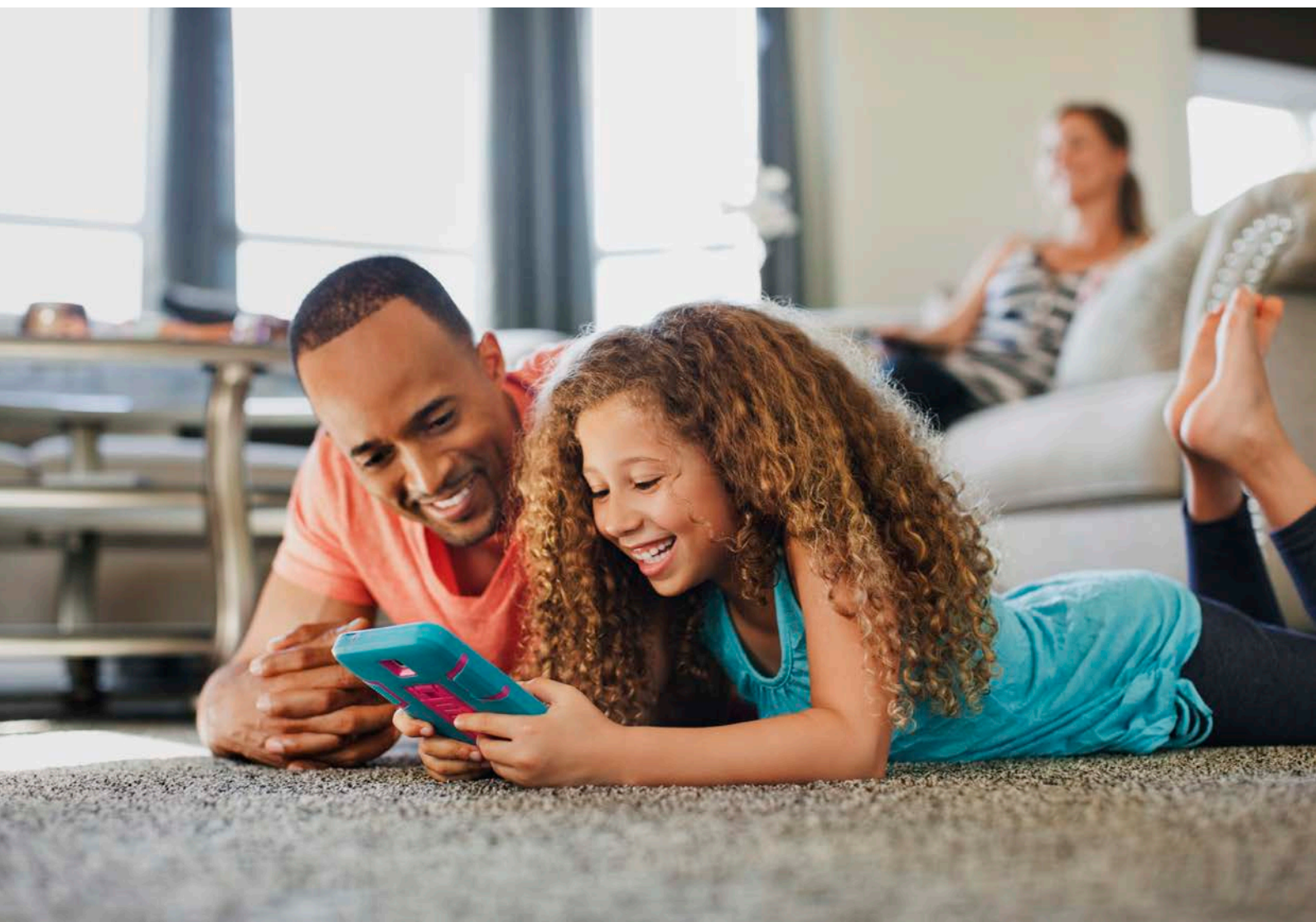
**2. Exercise regularly:** you do not have to run a marathon to experience the positive effect of endorphins; moving for 30 minutes a day will help reduce your stress levels and give you a positive uplift



**3. Food, glorious food:** watching what we eat can have a very positive effect on stress levels. Wheat and gluten, for example, are difficult to digest and can cause spikes in insulin, in turn raising stress levels. Reducing our intake of biscuits, cakes, bread, and even pasta can have a positive effect on our ability to manage stress



**4. Eat, sleep, repeat:** as we have already seen, many of us are missing out on sleep and that can be a major cause of stress. A good routine, starting with ensuring your bedroom is dark (blackout blinds or an eye mask), quiet (or white noise to cancel out extraneous noises) and the right temperature, will give you the best possible start to your night's sleep



## CONCLUSION

**As market after market entered lockdown, there was a well-grounded fear that it could be catastrophic for mental and physical well-being across the globe. Commentators worried that it would lead to an epidemic of obesity as people were less able to exercise and more likely to make poor food choices.**

Our research shows that, by and large, these concerns have not come to pass. With some adaptations to routines, people have been able to exercise regularly, albeit at home or outdoors rather than in the gym. Even more notable, is that more people report that they are eating a balanced diet and are able to maintain a healthy weight.

Clearly, the pandemic has left some residual effects, in particular in relation to the stress people feel. As we can all attest, there has been plenty to worry about, and our research points to isolation being a cause of stress, although those feelings are noticeably reduced for those with families – even with young children and the attendant challenges that come with lockdown.

Stress levels are having a knock-on effect on sleeping patterns, with many reporting that they are sleeping less now than before the pandemic started. This creates a ‘catch-22’ because a lack of sleep contributes to stress which in turn impacts sleeping patterns.

As markets start to emerge from the worst effects of COVID-19 and many return to their pre-pandemic routines, it is time to consider the lessons we have learned and apply the most positive ones for our lives ahead. There are many small, easy-to-apply lessons that will help us live healthy lives in the years ahead.





## ABOUT CIGNA AND THE REPORT

### ABOUT CIGNA INTERNATIONAL

Cigna's mission is to improve the health, well-being, and peace of mind of those we serve by making health care simple, affordable, and predictable.

We make it easy to get care – letting you choose how, when, and where you want it – from virtual health, to specialist consultants.

We make health care more affordable by partnering with providers who provide quality, cost-effective care.

Our goal is to provide you with health care coverage that is predictable – every step of the way.

### ABOUT THIS REPORT

To monitor and track the annual evolution of well-being, the *2021 Cigna 360 Well-Being Survey – On the Road to Recovery* looked at five key components- family, financial, physical, social, and work. In partnership with Kantar, a leading data, insights and consulting company, Cigna International has analyzed the findings to uncover the latest trends and challenges for health and well-being.

We surveyed 18,043 people aged 18 or above, in 21 markets around the world, asking them to complete an anonymous 20-minute online survey covering our key themes. The markets covered were Australia, Belgium, China, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, The Netherlands, Turkey, UAE, UK and USA.

The fieldwork for this survey was completed in April 2021, prior to the surges in COVID-19 cases in India and Taiwan. The data collected for those markets was true to their situation at the time, but given the evolving nature of the pandemic, we understand perceptions are likely to have changed.



### METHODOLOGY

Online sampling used respondents recruited from panels that undergo rigorous quality control. The panel composition is representative of the adult population in each of the surveyed markets. Depending on population size and complexity, a sample size of either 500, 1,000 or 1,500 respondents was surveyed to provide statistically significant findings which can be extrapolated to the general population. In addition, age and gender quotas were set based on their respective proportion of the population.

