



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

BODY & MIND EUROPEAN REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

Health and well-being are under the spotlight more than ever before. The pandemic, and its associated lock-downs, economic implications and travel restrictions, have had an enormous impact on people's mental and physical health. This is particularly true in some markets in Europe, according to this year's **Cigna 360 Well-Being Survey**, where overall health and well-being are significantly lower compared to the global average. Spain and Germany were the two exceptions, faring better than their European neighbors.

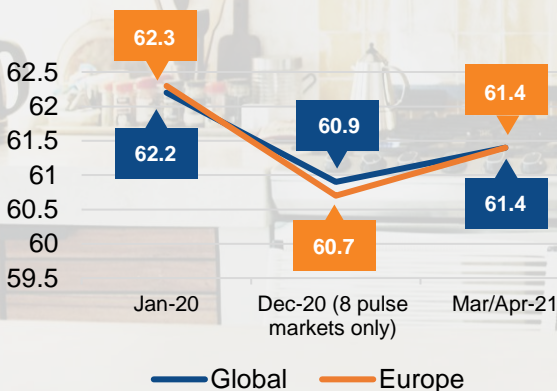
In this report, we uncover the impact of the pandemic in Europe on body and mind, as well as offer advice about how to take better care of our well-being in the future. We focus on fitness, diet, healthy sleep habits and stress, with the objective of creating good habits that have a beneficial effect on our Whole Health.



### METHODOLOGY

- Fieldwork completed in April 2021.
- 18,043 global respondents, with 3,014 respondents in the Europe.
- Regional markets included the United Kingdom (n=1002), Spain (n=1004), Germany (n=404), The Netherlands (n=203), and Belgium (n=203).
- Aged 18 or over.
- Anonymous online survey.

### CIGNA 360 WELL-BEING SCORES



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# DISRUPTION ENCOURAGES FITNESS AND HEALTHY EATING



Our research shows that people are now better at managing their diets and engaging in regular exercise than they were before the pandemic. Despite predictions that lockdowns would lead to an increase in sedentary lifestyles, it appears they have created the opportunity for people to adopt healthier habits.

However, we see significant differences between demographics in Europe, most notably between men and women. For example, while 64% of men were exercising on a regular basis, only 56% of women said the same. This was consistent across all the main elements of physical well-being, showing that women have found it harder than men to manage their physical health during the pandemic.




There are also marked differences between age groups, with the pre-retirees (50-64)

reporting the most negative scores, followed closely by those aged 35-49. In contrast, the younger generation appear to have embraced the time that the pandemic has offered to eat well and exercise.

## CIGNA 360 WELL-BEING SCORES IN EUROPE

|                    | JAN 20 | DEC 20 | MAR/<br>APR 21 |
|--------------------|--------|--------|----------------|
| <b>Belgium</b>     | -      | -      | 59.7           |
| <b>Germany</b>     | -      | -      | 62.4           |
| <b>Netherlands</b> | -      | -      | 60.6           |
| <b>Spain</b>       | 61.6   | 61.1   | 62.8           |
| <b>UK</b>          | 62.7   | 60.3   | 60.3           |
| <b>Europe</b>      | 62.3   | 60.7   | 61.4           |
| <b>Global</b>      | 62.2   | 60.9   | 61.4           |

## DIET AND EXERCISE IN EUROPE

| Good / Very Good / Excellent (%)  | Total | Male | Female | 18-24 | 25-34 | 35-49 | 50-64 | 65+ |
|---|-------|------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
|  Being at a healthy weight     | 60    | 64   | 56     | 66    | 65    | 61    | 54    | 53  |
|  Eating a balanced diet        | 61    | 65   | 57     | 72    | 71    | 61    | 52    | 52  |
|  Exercising on a regular basis | 71    | 72   | 69     | 71    | 72    | 70    | 69    | 77  |

## DISRUPTION ENCOURAGES FITNESS AND HEALTHY EATING



As the world emerges from the pandemic, it will be interesting to see if people are able to carry these newly adopted habits into their everyday lifestyles. In particular, continuing to eat healthily may be a challenge for those returning to office-based work, as the array of lunchtime takeaway food options become available again. However, with a few best practice guidelines, there is no reason why healthy eating cannot continue into the months and years ahead:

**“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



**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. Prioritize 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 to avoid boxed cereals (they can be very high in sugar). Instead, why not opt for healthier alternatives such as yoghurt, fruit, eggs, wholemeal bread, avocado etc.

# SLEEP IS SUFFERING

## SLEEP IN EUROPE

| Very Good / Excellent (%)   | Total | Male | Female | 18-24 | 25-34 | 35-49 | 50-64 | 65+ |
|---|-------|------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
|  Getting sufficient sleep at night | 31    | 34   | 29     | 32    | 40    | 29    | 26    | 32  |
|  Having good sleep quality         | 31    | 34   | 28     | 34    | 39    | 29    | 25    | 31  |

Despite positive scores for managing diet and exercise, other aspects of physical well-being have fared less well. Only 29% of respondents in Europe said they are experiencing a high quality of sleep, compared to a global average of 31%. As with exercise and healthy eating, we also see large differences between men and women: while 34% of men have good quality sleep, only 28% of women say the same.

We also see significant differences between the age groups. While those between 18 and 34, and over 65, enjoy a sufficient night's sleep, those between 35 and 64, are not faring so well. Among the 35-49 year old, 58% are parents of children under 18, which may go some way to explaining this sleep deficit. However, 77% of this group and 65% of 50-64s had also experienced stress in the past week, with at least half of those who are stressed suffering from disturbed sleep as a result.

During the pandemic, a new term was invented – coronasomnia – to describe the insomnia that many are experiencing due to the pandemic. Disruption to routines, later sleeping and waking times, increased use of electronics, stress, anxiety, depression, and isolation have all contributed to altered sleeping patterns<sup>1, 2</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>1</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>2</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.



## 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 for 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 been higher than average in all areas. They do report higher levels of stress – 79% versus the European average of 72% - 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.

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 while these connections and the resulting resilience do not entirely eliminate stress, they do take the edge off its most extreme form. Not surprisingly, the group with strong connections also fared better across all five well-being indices.

### WELL-BEING SCORES IN EUROPE

|  |  | <br>PHYSICAL | <br>SOCIAL | <br>FAMILY | <br>FINANCIAL | <br>WORK |
|--|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| Average                                | 61.4  | 57.8  | 60.2  | 66.1  | 55.8   | 69.7  |
| Working parents with children under 18 | 65.5  | 61.0  | 62.3  | 71.6  | 59.4   | 70.4  |

## COMBATING STRESS AND BUILDING WELL-BEING

The importance of strong connections 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, particularly 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. Regular sleeping patterns:** aim to go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even on weekends and avoid the temptation to stay up late. 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 would impact negatively on people's mental and physical well-being. Commentators also 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, by and large, these concerns have not come to pass, as many people across Europe have adapted their routines to include exercise, focus on sleep and eating a balanced diet.



However, we see significant differences between men and women, and also between different age groups. Women and those between 50-64, are faring worse than other demographics, highlighting the need for more support for these more impacted groups from other members of society.

Stress levels are also having a knock-on effect on sleeping patterns in Europe, with many reporting poor quality and insufficient sleep. This creates a 'catch-22' because a lack of sleep contributes to stress, which in turn impacts sleeping patterns. Arming ourselves and our loved ones with ways to deal with stress will help to make a change.

Support for others is especially important as we start to emerge from the worst effects of COVID-19 and begin steps towards a return to our pre-pandemic routine. We need to continue to harness the community spirit that united many in Europe at the height of the pandemic to support our communities, while also ensuring that the positive habits of diet and exercise are carried through into our future lifestyles.

To play our part in that journey, we have collaborated with health and well-being experts to create the [Cigna Body&Mind app](#). Packed with expert advice, insight and tools to support you on your health and well-being journey by building healthy habits and staying focused on your health goals. The Google version can be downloaded [here](#) and a version for Apple can be downloaded [here](#).

## ABOUT 360 WELL-BEING SURVEY

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.



[READ THE GLOBAL REPORT HERE](#)