

Studying the phenomenon of presenteeism, in which employees continue to work when ill

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Employees who are unwell only engage in presenteeism when they have not met their daily work goals, according to new research from Trinity College Dublin.

The study, published in the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* recently, also found that working on a day when you feel ill drains mental energy that cannot be recovered the next day.

The study seeks to shed further light on the phenomenon of "presenteeism"—defined by the researchers as continuing to work when experiencing ill health. The practice has been labeled an "800-pound gorilla" by researchers in occupational health psychology because of the tremendous costs it inflicts on [employees](#) and organizations alike. These costs include burnout, impaired workability, and productivity loss.

This study led by Dr. Wladislaw Rivkin, Associate Professor in Organizational Behavior, Trinity, deepens our understanding of the harmful impact of presenteeism on employee effectiveness by demonstrating that depletion of mental resources is a key mechanism responsible for these [harmful effects](#).

The research involved 126 employees logging their daily productivity across 12 workdays, resulting in 995 daily work observations. It was conducted during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 when all participants were working from home.

Dr. Rivkin says, "It is crucial to tackle daily presenteeism, especially for remote workers. Managers should openly discourage presenteeism by reassuring [team members](#) that if they feel unwell it is acceptable to reduce their daily work goals and instead tend to their health. In light of the energy-depleting nature of presenteeism if employees engage in presenteeism they should work on tasks that are inherently pleasant rather than tedious tasks that further drain their energy.

"So while it may seem a good idea to work despite ill [health](#) to deliver on work goals our research shows that this has a knock-on effect for remote workers' performance on the next day as presenteeism drains employees'

psychological energy, which cannot be fully recovered after work."

The full paper was titled "Should I stay or should I go? The role of daily [presenteeism](#) as an adaptive response to perform at work despite somatic complaints for employee effectiveness."

Wlad Rivkin is an Associate Professor in Organizational Behavior and Work Psychology whose research focuses on [burnout](#), stress and other demands that people experience at work as well as what organizations can do to protect employee well-being and maintain their effectiveness. Other recent research projects include studies on the impact of commuting on employee well-being, the role of willpower in overcoming the negative effects of a bad night's sleep and how smartphone use during non-work time impacts on sleep quality.

More information: Wladislaw Rivkin et al, Should I stay or should I go? The role of daily presenteeism as an adaptive response to perform at work despite somatic complaints for employee effectiveness., *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1037/ocp0000322](https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000322)

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

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