

The Olbas Winter Recovery Report

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Foreword

With thanks to the Groves family of Lanes Health, Dr Roger Henderson* for his valuable insights and the healthcare professionals across the NHS, pharmacy teams and retailers who support our rest and recovery.

*Please note healthcare professionals named do not endorse Olbas or its products.



The Winter Recovery Gap

Many of us think we should slow down when we're unwell. So, what drives us to keep going?

When we experience the symptoms of coughs, colds and congestion, life does not stop simply because we are under the weather.

There are deadlines to meet, meetings to join, people who rely on us, and often, a lingering feeling that perhaps we are simply not 'ill enough' to take a break.

New research¹, commissioned by Olbas, has identified a Winter Recovery Gap – the difference between what we know we should do when we experience an illness, compared with what we actually do.

Nearly three quarters of adults (74 per cent) believe that staying home when ill is the most responsible thing to do for themselves and those around them.

However, **86 per cent of those who have experienced a common short-term illness while employed have continued working while feeling unwell.**

Even when thinking they would benefit from resting², more than a third of adults (38 per cent) admit they sometimes carry on as normal.

86%

still struggle into their workplace when suffering from a cold³



This report makes sense of the pressures that keep us going, how attitudes differ between different generations of adults, the things people turn to when they're under the weather and what might help us feel more confident about knowing when to rest, manage our symptoms or ask for advice.

About Dr Roger Henderson

Dr Roger Henderson* is a senior GP with more than 35 years' medical experience.



He is known for translating complex health information into practical, accessible advice for the public and regularly contributes to national health campaigns and discussions.

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¹ Among people who had experienced a common short-term illness while employed.

² For the purposes of this report, resting is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as 'being in a state of relaxation, inactivity, support, or dormancy'.

³ Qy Base = n=1,955.



Our survey suggests...

Have continued working while feeling unwell.



Believe staying home when ill is the responsible thing to do for themselves and others.



Are concerned about passing an illness on to colleagues if they work while unwell.



Feel at least some pressure to continue working when they have cold or flu-like symptoms.



Sometimes carry on as normal even when they know they would benefit from resting.



Say their most likely response to a common short-term illness is to take an over-the-counter medicine or remedy and continue working.



To power through, or to hit pause?

When we experience the symptoms of seasonal illnesses, including congestion, colds and coughs, we all have our default response to start the recovery process.

Some of us head straight for bed; curtains closed, with a hot water bottle in hand and stacks of tissues ready to ease sniffles.

Some of us log on from home, with hot drinks at the ready and a constant repeat of *'I'll keep my camera off today'* between joining virtual meetings.

And plenty of us reach for something to help with our symptoms.

In fact, the most common response to a short-term illness is to take an over-the-counter medicine or remedy and continue working, selected by more than a quarter of workers (27 per cent).

Almost a quarter (23 per cent) would work from home if possible, while 18 per cent would go into work and carry on as normal.

Only 14 per cent say their most likely response would be to stay home and rest until they feel better.

27%



take an over-the-counter medicine or remedy and continue working

So, while staying in bed might sound appealing when we're feeling rough, for many adults, the reality is quite different.



Dr Roger Henderson:

"The Winter Recovery Report highlights just how common it is for people to push through a cough, cold or other short-term illness rather than pause and rest. While only 14 per cent of workers say their most likely response would be to stay home and recover, many are more inclined to continue working, whether that's from home, in the workplace, or by using over-the-counter remedies to help manage symptoms.

"One reason for this is that people often don't feel their illness is serious enough to warrant stepping back. We can think, 'It's only a cold', and assume that because we're still able to function, we're well enough to carry on. However, managing symptoms and being fully recovered are not necessarily the same thing. **The report found that 29 per cent of people who worked while unwell said feeling better after taking an over-the-counter medicine was one reason they continued.**

"Appropriate symptom relief certainly has an important role in helping people feel more comfortable, but temporary relief shouldn't be mistaken for recovery. It's important to pay attention to how you're actually feeling. If you're exhausted, feverish, struggling to concentrate or don't feel well enough to carry out your normal activities, those are signs your body may need rest.

"There isn't a hard-and-fast rule for every cough, cold or short-term illness. Rather than asking, 'Am I ill enough to stop?', a more helpful question is, 'Am I well enough to do what I normally do, and is carrying on sensible for me and the people around me?' Managing symptoms appropriately, while also giving yourself permission to rest when needed, remains an important part of recovery."



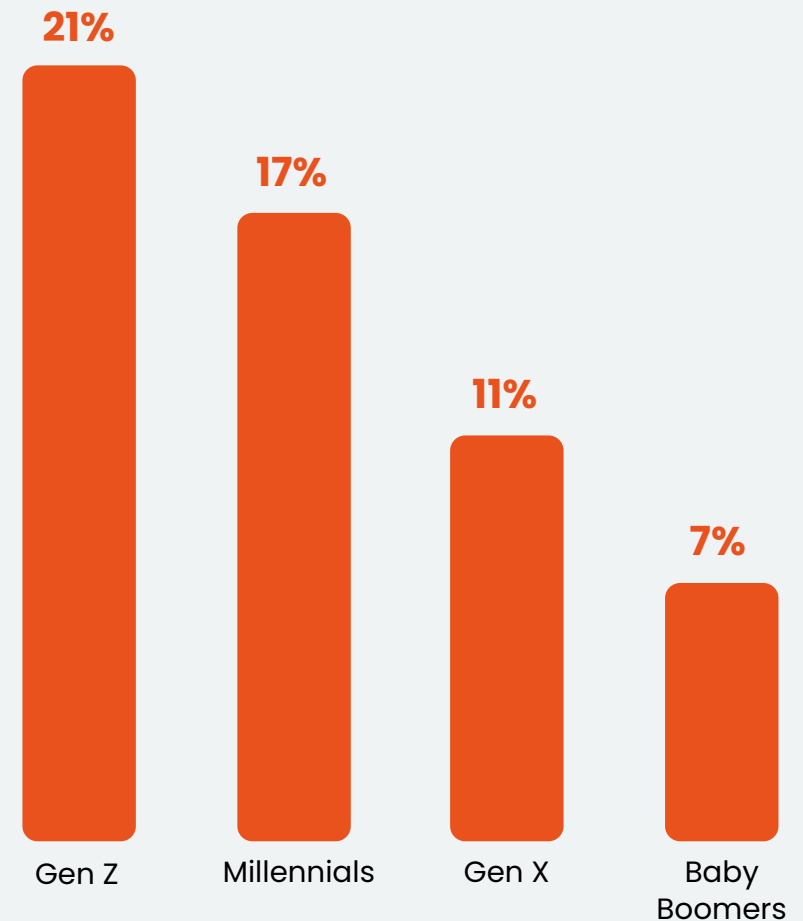
Gen Z rests up, while older workers push through

Every generation has a nuanced approach to recovery. Gen Z is more likely to take time out when they're unwell, while older generations are more inclined to 'keep calm and carry on'.

More than one in five Gen Z workers (21 per cent) say that they would stay home and rest when they have a common short-term illness.



Likelihood of staying home and resting during a short-term illness



As expected, each generation follows a similar trend when it comes to 'carrying on as normal'.

Just seven per cent of Gen Z say they would go into work and carry on with their usual day when unwell.

This isn't just what workers *suggest* they would do.

The last time they were unwell, 59 per cent of Gen Z took at least some time off work, compared with 40 per cent of Millennials, 22 per cent of Gen X and 16 per cent of Boomers.

Meanwhile, 58 per cent of Boomers carried on working as normal, compared with 48 per cent of Gen X, 30 per cent of Millennials and 22 per cent of Gen Z.

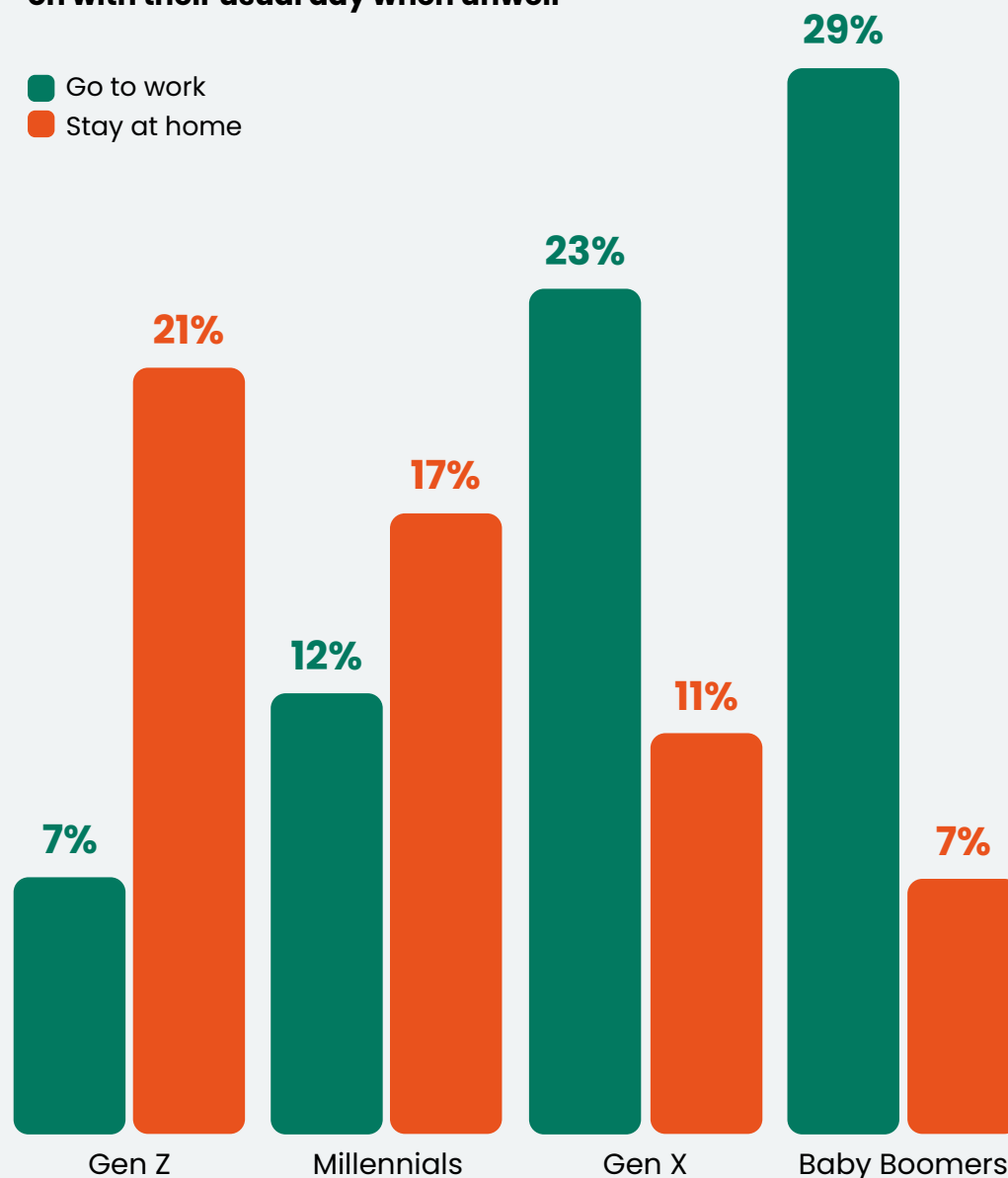
That difference is recognised between colleagues across the generations as well:

Two in five workers (41 per cent) think Gen Z is most likely to take sick leave when ill. Meanwhile, Baby Boomers are the generation most commonly associated with dismissing symptoms as 'not serious' and carrying on working (26 per cent).

And seven in 10 (70 per cent) agree that older generations were under more pressure to work through illnesses, suggesting the traditional '*stiff upper lip*' mentality may be retired, particularly as Baby Boomers begin to exit the workforce in the coming years.

Likelihood of going into work and carrying on with their usual day when unwell

Go to work
Stay at home





Dr Roger Henderson:

"The Winter Recovery Report suggests that attitudes towards taking time off are changing, particularly among younger workers. For example, 21% of Gen Z workers say their most likely response to a common short-term illness would be to stay home and rest, compared with 7% of Baby Boomers. When asked about their most recent illness, 59% of Gen Z workers took at least some time off work, compared with 16% of Baby Boomers.

"I think being more willing to rest when we genuinely need to is a really positive shift. That doesn't mean we should automatically stay at home every time we have a cough or cold, but being able to recognise when your body needs a break, without feeling guilty about it, is an important part of looking after yourself. **The fact that 61% of workers say they feel guilty about taking sick leave shows there's still work to do in making rest feel like a legitimate part of recovery.**

"The traditional 'keep calm and carry on' attitude is something many people will recognise, particularly among older generations, and this research reflects that generational difference quite clearly. Fifty-eight per cent of Baby Boomers say they carried on working as normal the last time they were unwell, compared with 22% of Gen Z. Seven in ten workers also believe older generations were under more pressure to work through illnesses.

"However, it's important not to turn this into a judgement about one generation being right or wrong. People have different attitudes towards illness, different working circumstances and different expectations placed upon them. The report itself suggests that the more useful lesson is to recognise that 'powering through' isn't necessarily a measure of resilience or recovery. One of the key messages I'd take from this research is that functioning and recovering aren't necessarily the same thing."

Taking a sick day isn't always easy

Even when we know we could do with some rest, actually taking time off can be difficult. For workers of all ages, the majority (61 per cent) say they feel guilty about taking sick leave.

While data shows that Gen Z may be more prepared to hit pause and recover, that doesn't necessarily mean they feel completely comfortable doing it.

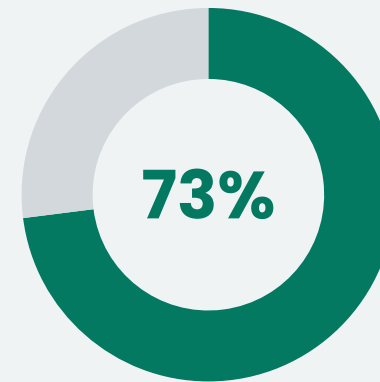
Baby Boomers report the least pressure to continue working when they have cold or flu-like symptoms (47 per cent), while Millennials report the greatest pressure of all generations (61 per cent).

Attitudes in the workplace differ too.

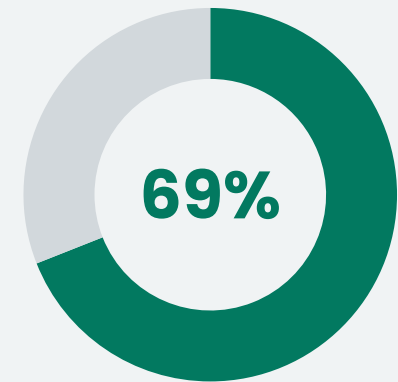
Overall, 60 per cent say it is acceptable to take sick leave for cold or flu-like symptoms where they work.

Although taking a sick day may be becoming more accepted in some workplaces, the guilt around taking one hasn't disappeared.

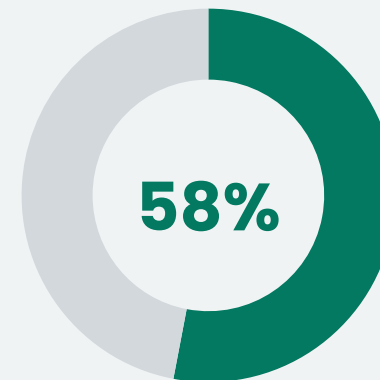
Workplace acceptability of taking sick leave for cold or flu-like symptoms



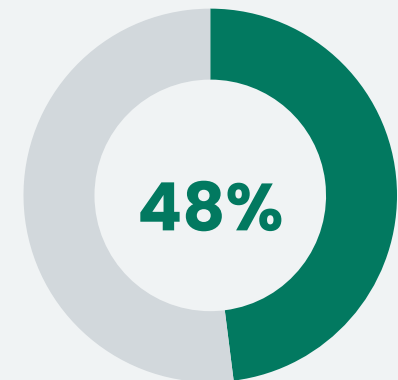
Gen Z



Millennials



Gen X



Baby Boomers



But we still power through

For many people, the decision to keep working comes down to one central belief: *"I'm not really ill enough to stop"*.

Among those who have continued working while unwell, 57 per cent say they did so because they felt their illness wasn't serious enough. More than half (54 per cent) thought they could manage their symptoms and keep working, and almost three in 10 (29 per cent) said feeling better after an over-the-counter medicine was a reason to carry on.

Recovery is more than treating symptoms, yet 18 per cent of workers didn't think resting would make much difference, and 17 per cent weren't sure whether they needed to rest at all.

Often, the pressure comes from us.

More than half of workers (58 per cent) feel at least some pressure to keep working with cold or flu-like symptoms,

and the most common source is themselves.

Even when nobody tells us to log on or turn up, many of us expect it of ourselves.

74%

agree staying home when ill is the most responsible thing to do



Nearly three quarters of workers (74 per cent) agree that staying home when ill is the most responsible thing to do, and 72 per cent worry about passing an illness on to colleagues. The most common view on how others should respond is to stay home if symptoms could affect people around them (31 per cent), while 19 per cent say people should rest if it would help their recovery.

Where does the pressure come from?



Dr Roger Henderson:

"I think the most useful question here isn't necessarily 'Am I ill enough to be in bed?' but 'Am I well enough to carry out my normal activities?' There isn't a single threshold that applies to everyone. A mild cold may leave you feeling a little under the weather but still able to function normally. However, if you're feeling exhausted, feverish, significantly unwell, or simply don't feel capable of doing what you would normally do, that's a good indication that it's time to slow down.

"The Winter Recovery Report shows why this can be difficult. Just 22% of workers say they already feel confident knowing when to rest and recover, while **38% admit they sometimes carry on as normal even when they know they would benefit from resting.** The key thing is about listening to the signals your body is giving you rather than automatically pushing through regardless."



The ritual of relief

When we're feeling under the weather, it is natural to want something that helps ease the symptoms that are bothering us.

Over-the-counter medicines and remedies are already a familiar part of many people's winter routine. More than a quarter (27 per cent) say their most likely response to a short-term illness is to take an over-the-counter medicine or remedy and continue working.

But what do we reach for?

Three in 10 (30 per cent) of workers use a decongestant when congested; 26 per cent select medicated health products; and 22 per cent opt for nasal spray products.

30%

**workers use a decongestant
when congested**



The way each generation seeks relief varies too, as 31 per cent of Baby Boomers say they would take an over-the-counter (OTC) remedy and continue working when unwell, compared with 28 per cent of Gen X, 24 per cent of Millennials and 22 per cent of Gen Z.

Over half (55 per cent) of Baby Boomers believe that OTC cold and flu remedies can be important in helping them feel better or recover, compared with 50 per cent of Gen X, 43 per cent of Millennials and 35 per cent of Gen Z.

Finding relief is an important part of how people cope with a seasonal illness, and the data shows that easing symptoms is one reason some people continue working while unwell.



Dr Roger Henderson:

"Over-the-counter medicines and remedies can have a really useful role in helping people manage the symptoms of common winter illnesses. If you're dealing with congestion, aches, a sore throat or other uncomfortable symptoms, then appropriate symptom relief can make you feel more comfortable while your body recovers. The Winter Recovery Report shows just how much people already rely on these products. **More than a quarter of workers (27%) say their most likely response to a short-term illness is to take an over-the-counter medicine or remedy and continue working**, while among those experiencing congestion, 30% say they use a decongestant and 22% opt for a nasal spray.

"The important point is that medicines should be viewed as part of managing symptoms, alongside sensible measures

such as rest and hydration, rather than as a reason to ignore how you're feeling. I think it's a really important distinction that a medicine may relieve a particular symptom, but that doesn't necessarily mean the illness itself has gone away.

"So, if a medicine eases symptoms such as a headache, aches and pains or a high temperature, or helps clear congestion, that is useful. However, it is still important to consider how you feel overall. Symptom relief can make an illness more manageable without meaning that you have completely recovered.

"Ultimately, OTC medicines can be a really valuable tool for managing winter symptoms, but they're just one part of recovery. **The key point is to combine appropriate symptom relief with listening to your body and giving yourself the time you need to recover."**



A better way to recover this winter

While Gen Z may be more willing to stop when they're poorly, data shows they are less confident than older generations when it comes to managing common symptoms themselves.

Just one third (34 per cent) of Gen Z feel confident managing common cold or flu-like symptoms, compared with 40 per cent of Millennials, 47 per cent of Gen X and 59 per cent of Baby Boomers.



34%

Gen Z



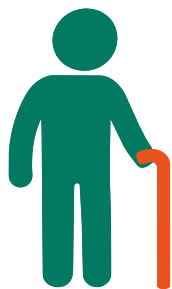
40%

Millennials



47%

Gen X



59%

Baby Boomers

In fact, for the Gen Z respondents who had continued working while unwell, 30 per cent said they weren't sure about whether they needed to rest or could carry on.



A better way to recover this winter: Dr Roger Henderson's advice



1. Keep hydrated

"When you're feeling under the weather, keeping hydrated is one of the simplest things you can do to support your recovery. Keep fluids to hand and drink regularly, particularly if you're experiencing a temperature or aren't eating and drinking as you normally would."



2. Give yourself time to recover

"Don't underestimate the value of rest. If your body is telling you that you need to slow down, give yourself permission to do so. Recovery doesn't necessarily mean spending the whole day in bed, but it does mean recognising when you're not well enough to carry on at your usual pace."



3. Manage your symptoms appropriately

"Medicines and other remedies can have a useful role in making common winter symptoms more manageable, but the important thing is to use products appropriately, follow the instructions, and remember that feeling better doesn't necessarily mean you've fully recovered."



4. Don't overlook simple or natural remedies

"There are also simple, non-medicinal ways of making yourself more comfortable when you're unwell. Warm drinks, rest, staying hydrated and creating a comfortable environment can all play a part. Natural remedies can have a place too, but remember that 'natural' doesn't automatically mean a product is suitable for everyone. If you're considering a herbal remedy, particularly alongside other medicines, it's sensible to check with a pharmacist first."



5. Know when to ask for advice

"You don't have to work everything out yourself. If you're unsure how best to manage your symptoms, a pharmacist can be a useful first point of contact, advising on suitable treatments and whether you need to speak to another healthcare professional."

"If your symptoms are severe, persistent, getting worse, or you're concerned about how unwell you feel, seek advice from your GP or pharmacist."

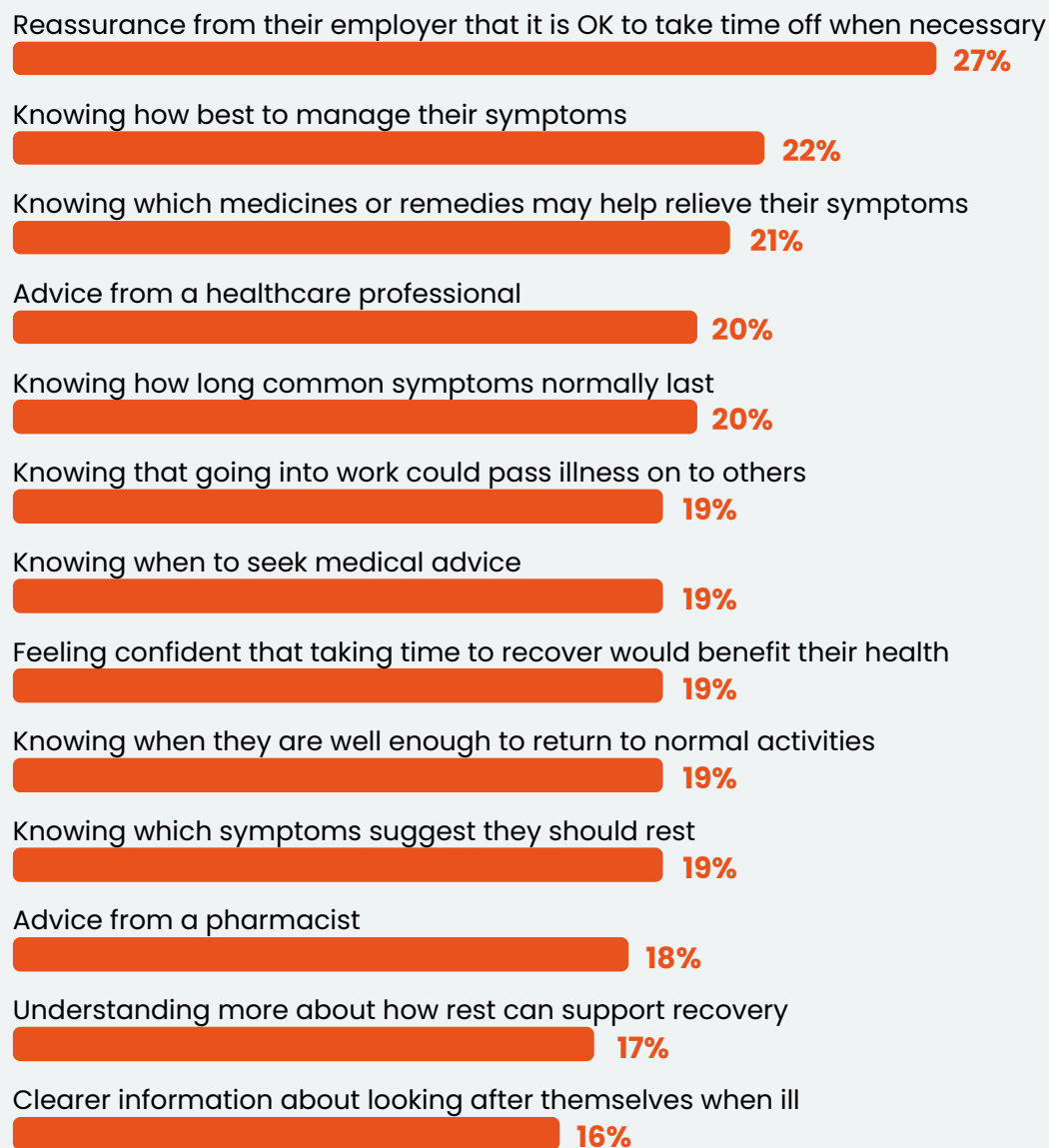
Rest as a form of recovery

Just 22 per cent say they already feel confident knowing when to rest and recover.

While resting is important for many, closing the **Winter Recovery Gap** is about more than simply taking a sick day – there needs to be a deeper understanding about what to do when we're experiencing seasonal illnesses.



What would help people feel more confident about recovery?



Dr Roger Henderson:

“What stands out most to me about the Winter Recovery Gap is that it’s not necessarily about people not knowing what to do, but more about the gap between knowing and actually doing it. The report shows that 74% believe staying home when unwell is responsible, yet 86% of employed people who have experienced a common short-term illness continued working while unwell. This contrast shows how easy it is to keep pushing through, even when we know our bodies may benefit from rest.

“Listening to your body is important, but there isn’t one hard-and-fast rule for when everyone should rest – how you feel, the symptoms you have and what your energy levels are all matter. Simple measures such as getting enough sleep, resting and staying hydrated can support recovery where medically appropriate. At the same time, **managing symptoms appropriately can help you feel more comfortable and OTC medicines and remedies can have a role in symptom relief here, but feeling better doesn’t necessarily mean the illness has passed.**

“Common winter illnesses are usually something we can recover from, and giving your body the time and care it needs is all part of that process.”



About the Olbas Winter Recovery Report

The Olbas Winter Recovery Report explores how Britain responds to common short-term illness – from the pressure to keep going and changing attitudes to sick days, to the ways people manage their symptoms, rest and seek advice.

About Olbas

Olbas has an established role in helping people find relief from congestion. With the newly launched **Olbas Pelargonium Herbal Cough & Cold Relief Tablets**, the range expands to include a naturally derived ingredient of Pelargonium, a traditional herbal medicine that is used to relieve symptoms of upper respiratory tract infections including coughs, sore throats and blocked or runny noses.

The Olbas range includes **Olbas Oil**, **Olbas for Children**, **Olbas Inhaler Stick**, **Olbas Nasal Spray**, **Olbas Menthol Pastilles**, **Olbas Bath**, **Olbas Breathe Easy Patches**, **Olbas Shower Gel**, **Olbas Anti-Allergy Nasal Spray** and **Olbas Pelargonium Herbal Cough & Cold Relief Tablets**.

Olbas Oil, Olbas for Children and Olbas Inhaler are licensed medicines for the relief of congestion. Olbas Oil for adults and children from 3 months. Olbas for Children from 3 months. Olbas Inhaler Nasal Stick for adults and children from 6 years. Keep all medicines out of the sight and reach of children. Always read the label. Olbas Nasal Spray and Olbas Anti Allergy Nasal Spray are suitable for adults and children from 6+ years. Olbas Breathe Easy Patches is suitable from 3 years. Olbas Pelargonium Herbal Cough & Cold tablets is a traditional herbal medicinal product used to relieve the symptoms of upper respiratory tract infections including the common cold exclusively based on long-standing use as a traditional remedy. Always read the label.

Olbas products are distributed by **Lanes Health**, a family-owned business based in Gloucester.

Please note healthcare professionals named in this report do not endorse Olbas or its products. [Olbas.co.uk/help-and-advice](https://www.olbas.co.uk/help-and-advice)





Research methodology

The research was conducted by market research company **OnePoll** among **2,000 UK adult workers** between 14th and 17th September 2026, and in accordance with the Market Research Society's code of conduct and is an MRS Company Partner, has corporate membership of ESOMAR and is a member of the British Polling Council.

For the survey, respondents were asked to think about common short-term illnesses, for example, a cold, flu-like symptoms, a stomach bug, vomiting or a migraine.

Generation definitions

Gen Z: born after 1996

Millennials: born 1981–1996

Gen X: born 1965–1980

Baby Boomers: born 1946–1964

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