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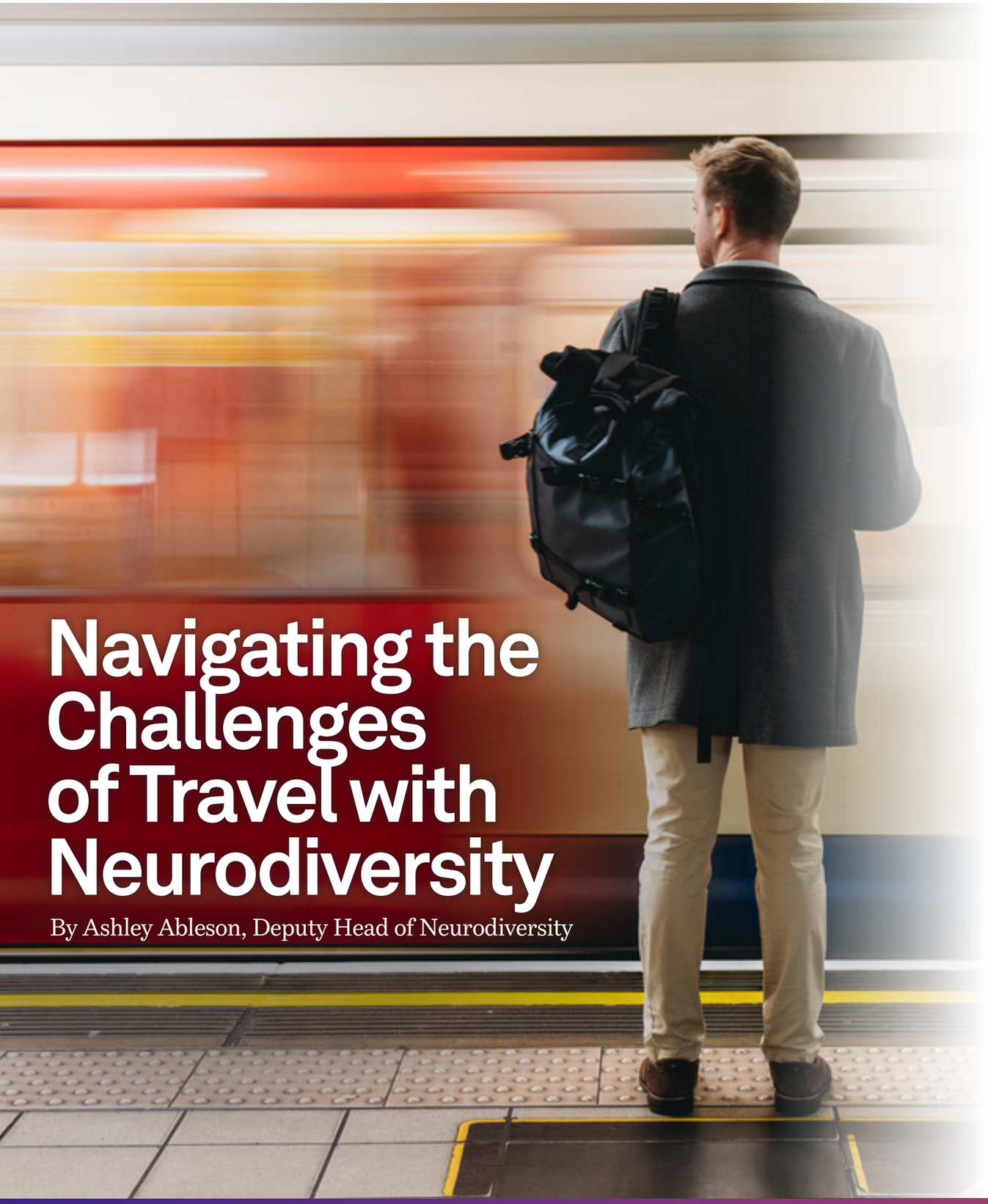
MAY 2026 NEWSLETTER

Journey to Wellness

Inclusive Travel, Mental Care & Hearing Health



Navigating the Challenges of Travel with Neurodiversity

By Ashley Ableson, Deputy Head of Neurodiversity

Imagine this: you are travelling to work, but today, the journey is different and unfamiliar.

To prepare for this unusual journey, you leave home earlier than usual, checking and rechecking the directions saved on your phone, hoping you have understood everything correctly as you get ready to set off. As soon as you step outside, your senses begin working harder.

The sounds feel sharper today. Traffic hums loudly. A sudden horn makes your body tense. At the station, announcements echo and overlap. Footsteps, conversations, doors opening, trains screeching, every sound pulls at your attention at once. You feel as though you cannot tune any of it out or focus on the sounds that you actually need.

The lights feel harsh. People move quickly around you, brushing past without warning. The space feels crowded and unpredictable. There is no clear moment to slow down and think.

Your mind is racing: *Did I read the sign correctly? What if the platform changes? Am I going the right way? What if something goes wrong?*

You are constantly planning, scanning and processing. Sequencing steps. Managing time. Interpreting information. Making decisions in real time without space to pause. Outwardly, you may hope you look calm. You keep moving. You try to appear fine. But inside, the effort is building and you worry that people can see how difficult this is for you. Now you feel embarrassed as well. The noise, the movement, the thinking, the adapting. Your body feels tense. Your mind feels full. The strain is invisible but very real.

Then you step away from the crowd. You find a quieter space. You put on your headphones. You slow your breathing. The noise softens slightly. Your body begins to settle. Your thinking becomes clearer again. You feel more in control.

The journey has not become easy, but you have adapted and created the conditions you needed to continue. For many neurodivergent individuals, this level of effort is part of everyday travel. Much of it is unseen, but it requires significant skill and energy.

Imagine your ability to carry stress as a bucket. Every stressor, big or small, adds another drop of water. Some days the drops fall in slowly; on others, they pour in all at once.

If this were your daily experience, consider how full your bucket might feel when carrying multiple demands at the same time. It becomes much easier for the bucket to overflow, leading to emotional overwhelm, shutdown or difficulty coping. This metaphor helps illustrate that overwhelm is not about weakness. It is about capacity, accumulated load and the importance of recognising when the bucket is nearing full, so that we can pause, support regulation and prevent overflow.

Why Travel Can Feel Harder for Neurodivergent People

Travel often naturally involves stressors such as:

- **Sequencing** each step of the journey into a clear, manageable plan
- **Processing** multiple sources of information, such as signs, announcements, scents
- **Managing unexpected change**, for example diversions or cancellations
- **Travelling through crowded or noisy environments** such as stations and streets
- **Maintaining awareness** of surroundings to stay safe in unpredictable settings
- **Regulating** sensory and emotional responses.

Navigating these steps can feel overwhelming for anyone, but the effort required to cope can be compounded for neurodivergent travellers as a result of the traits and differences that they experience. These include:

- **Experiencing sensory intensity:** Busy stations, loud announcements, bright lighting, strong smells and crowd density can quickly fill the bucket.
- **Challenges managing cognitive and executive demand:** Planning routes, sequencing steps, managing time and adapting to change require sustained mental effort.
- **Difficulty with uncertainty and unpredictability:** Delays, cancellations, platform changes and unclear signage increase stress and cognitive strain.
- **Masking and social pressure:** Trying to appear calm while working extremely hard internally can quietly drain energy.
- **Individual emotional and physiological responses:** Tension, anxiety, overwhelm or shutdown may occur when the bucket becomes too full.
- **Invisible effort and fatigue:** Even when a journey appears routine.

After travelling, some people may experience mental exhaustion, reduced concentration, heightened sensory sensitivity and emotional fatigue resulting in the need for recovery time.

However, neurodivergence is not one single experience. Needs vary between individuals and can change from day to day, depending on the environment, the journey and the demands involved.

Moving Towards More Accessible Travel

Recognising the hidden effort involved in everyday travel helps build empathy and reduces stigma. When we understand how quickly travel can fill someone's bucket, we can design environments, expectations and support approaches that keep that bucket balanced.

Supporting Workplace Travel & Neurodiversity

Travel is a routine part of working life for many people. For neurodivergent colleagues, the cognitive and sensory demands involved can affect focus, energy and wellbeing throughout the day. Fortunately, supportive workplace practices can help people move through the world in ways that promote comfort, regulation and sustainable performance.

Small, thoughtful adjustments often prevent the bucket from filling too quickly, such as increasing flexibility, promoting and allowing time to practice sensory regulation skills and increasing predictability.

Before TRAVEL

The Value of Predictability & Planning

Predictability helps conserve cognitive energy. When the brain knows what to expect, it processes information more efficiently and maintains better regulation. Planning cannot remove all barriers but can greatly reduce cognitive load.

The following measures may help to mitigate the impact:

- Travelling outside peak hours where viable
- Planning journeys in advance: reviewing routes, pre-booking tickets, checking maps
- Using visual aids like journey planners or printing maps
- Asking a colleague, friend or travel buddy to double check plans or assist
- Breaking travel into clear stages and noting key stops, landmarks or street names
- Allowing extra time to reduce pressure, such as setting an arrival window rather than a fixed time
- Identifying quiet or rest points along the way, such as benches, cafés or toilets
- Preparing alternatives in case of disruption, for example, knowing how to book a taxi if buses are cancelled.

During TRAVEL

Managing Sensory & Cognitive Load

Small adjustments during the journey can support self-regulation, prevent overwhelm, and help maintain balance throughout the day:

- Using noise reducing headphones or earplugs
- Choosing quieter spaces or less busy travel times where possible
- Taking short breaks away from crowds
- Using grounding strategies such as slow breathing or gentle movement.

After TRAVEL

Rebalancing & Recovering

Post travel support can make a significant difference to how sustainable the overall day feels. Helpful approaches include:

- Allowing buffer time on arrival to decompress
- Providing access to quiet spaces for short recovery periods
- Offering a brief debrief where appropriate to reflect on what worked well and what could be made easier in future.

Action for Mental Health

SMALL STEPS, BIG IMPACT

By Samuel Henderson, Clinical Psychologist

While raising awareness about mental health is an important first step, meaningful change happens when we transform awareness into action. This year's Mental Health Awareness Week theme 'Action: for yourself, for someone else, for all of us' reminds us that it's through action – big or small – that we can make a real difference. Whether it's prioritising your own mental wellbeing, supporting a loved one, or contributing to a mentally healthier workplace or community, every step matters.

But what does action look like in practice? How can we, as individuals, translate awareness into something tangible? In this article, we'll explore actionable tips and ideas to help you make an impact – starting with yourself.

Prioritising Your Mental Wellbeing

It's often said that you can't pour from an empty cup and this couldn't be more true when it comes to mental health. Taking care of yourself is not a luxury or indulgence, it's essential. By focussing on your own mental wellbeing, you build the foundation to better cope with life's challenges and support those around you.

Celebrate Small Wins

In a world that often glorifies being busy and achieving big goals, it's easy to overlook the small wins. But recognising your efforts, no matter how small, can help boost your mood and motivation. Did you take a proper lunch break today? Go for a walk? Tackle that task you've been avoiding? Celebrate it!

SAM'S TOP TIP
The concept of self-compassion – treating yourself with the same kindness you'd show to a friend – can make a huge difference. Instead of criticising yourself for what you haven't done, focus on what you have achieved.

Set Healthy Boundaries

Boundaries are a vital form of self-care, aimed at protecting your time, energy and mental health. Even with a busy schedule, you can create space for yourself

If switching off work emails isn't feasible, depending on your role, you can set blocks of time to focus, and check emails once tasks are finished.

SAM'S TOP TIP
This approach is rooted in time-blocking, a technique often used to improve productivity and reduce overwhelm. By dedicating specific times to certain tasks, you can manage your energy more effectively and avoid the constant interruptions that come with multitasking.

Foster Healthy Habits

Physical health and mental health are deeply connected. Regular exercise, a balanced diet and quality sleep are not just good for your body, they're essential for your mind too. For example, start small: swap one caffeinated drink for water, take the stairs instead of the lift, or go to bed 15 minutes earlier.

SAM'S TOP TIP
Exercise doesn't have to mean hitting the gym. Activities like gardening, dancing or even a brisk walk support your fitness as well as releasing endorphins, which can help reduce stress and improve mood.

Schedule 'Me Time'

Life can be hectic and mental health often takes a back seat to endless to-do lists and responsibilities. Scheduling time for yourself – whether it's 10 minutes of mindfulness, a quick walk or even just sitting quietly with a cup of tea – can help you recharge and refocus. Think of it as a non-negotiable appointment with yourself.

SAM'S TOP TIP
Research shows that mindfulness practices, such as breathing exercises or guided meditations, can reduce stress and improve emotional resilience. Apps like Headspace or iBreathe can be great tools to help you incorporate mindfulness into your routine.

Supporting Others
with Kindness & Care

While looking after your own mental health is important, extending support to others can also be incredibly rewarding. Small, thoughtful actions can create ripples of positivity, making a big difference in someone else's life. Below, we are sharing these actions alongside everyday examples to help you implement them in a way that feels natural and manageable.

Be a Compassionate Listener

One of the most powerful ways to support someone is simply to listen. If a colleague, friend or family member opens up about their struggles, resist the urge to jump in with solutions. Instead, focus on being present, empathetic and non-judgemental.

EXAMPLE
If someone says, "I've been feeling really overwhelmed lately" you could respond with, "I'm so sorry to hear that – do you want to talk about what's been going on?". Try to avoid phrases like "Cheer up" or "It'll be fine" as these can feel dismissive.

Perform Small Acts of Kindness

Kindness doesn't have to be complicated or time-consuming. Sometimes, the smallest gestures, like checking in with someone or offering to lend a helping hand, can make a big difference to someone who's struggling. However, it's also important to practise kindness in a way that aligns with your own capacity and boundaries.

EXAMPLE
If a colleague seems stressed, you could say, "I've noticed things seem quite full-on at the moment, how are you managing?", "You don't seem your usual self" or "I'm here if you need to talk." Alternatively, a simple gesture like offering to grab them a coffee or sending a kind message, can show you care without overextending yourself.

Be Mindful of Your Words

Language matters. Avoid using dismissive or stigmatising phrases like, "They're just being dramatic" or "Everyone feels like that sometimes, don't they?" Instead, focus on validating their experiences.

EXAMPLE
Phrases like, "That sounds really tough" or "I can't imagine how hard that must be for you" can help someone feel heard and supported.

Building a Mentally Healthier Community

Mental health is a collective concern. Creating a culture that supports mental wellbeing benefits everyone, and we all have a role to play in fostering environments where people feel safe, valued and heard.

Normalise Conversations About Mental Health

One of the most effective ways to reduce stigma is to talk openly about mental health. Share your own experiences (if you feel comfortable), check in with colleagues and friends and create spaces where people feel safe to express themselves. You don't need to have all the answers; just starting the conversation can be powerful.

EXAMPLE
At work, you could suggest adding mental health topics to team meetings or creating a wellbeing moment where everyone shares one positive action they've taken that week for their mental health.

SAM'S TOP TIP
The more we talk about mental health and where we can receive support from in everyday settings, the more we normalise it. This makes it easier for people to seek help when they need it.

Volunteer or Advocate for Change

Consider volunteering with a charity or advocating for change in your community. This could be anything from organising a fundraiser to lobbying for better mental health policies in your workplace or local area.

SAM'S TOP TIP
Research has shown that helping others can boost your own mental health by increasing feelings of purpose and connection. It's a win-win!

Promote Work-Life Balance

Burnout is a growing concern in workplaces and creating an environment that supports work-life balance plays a key role in maintaining mental wellbeing. For employees, this might mean finding ways to manage time and energy effectively, such as prioritising tasks and scheduling moments to recharge throughout the day. For employers, it's about fostering a culture that encourages open dialogue around workloads and recognises the importance of mental health.

EXAMPLE
As an employee, try setting aside dedicated time for focused work and stepping away from your desk for a few moments when you need to recharge – even a short walk can help clear your mind. Getting outdoors for a lunchtime walk is an excellent way of creating healthy separation from work. As a manager, consider checking in with your team to ensure they feel supported and empowered to manage their workloads effectively, or acknowledge their efforts to build a positive and balanced team culture.

Create Safe Spaces

Whether in the workplace, at home or in your community, fostering a safe and inclusive environment is key. This means recognising that everyone's mental health journey is different and avoiding judgement.

Helpful Resources

NHS EVERY MIND MATTERS
www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters
A hub of practical tips and resources to help you manage stress, improve sleep and take care of your mental wellbeing.

MIND
www.mind.org.uk
A leading mental health charity offering information, advice, and support for a wide range of mental health concerns. Includes resources for individuals, workplaces and communities.

MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION
www.mentalhealth.org.uk
The organisers of Mental Health Awareness Week, offering accessible information and resources to help improve mental wellbeing.

Looking After Your Hearing

SIGNS, SUPPORT AND PREVENTION

By Kevin Harper and Samatha Denyer, Workplace Needs Assessors

Have you found yourself turning up the television more than others would like?

Or asking people to repeat themselves in busy or noisy environments?

Hearing changes are common, particularly as we get older. In the UK, over 18 million adults are deaf, have hearing loss or experience tinnitus. This includes approximately 12 million working-age adults, and over half of people aged 55 + live with some degree of hearing loss.

For many, hearing loss develops gradually. As the change can be subtle, it is not always immediately noticeable. Recognising the early signs can help you take action sooner and protect your long-term hearing health.

Signs Of Hearing Loss

Hearing loss can present in different ways. You might notice that you:

- Increase the TV or radio volume more than others prefer
- Find it difficult to follow conversations in pubs or restaurants
- Struggle to hear clearly on the phone
- Frequently ask people to repeat themselves
- Feel that others are mumbling
- Are told by loved ones that you do not seem to be listening.

If any of these feel familiar, it may be worth checking your hearing. An online hearing check, such as the free three-minute test offered by RNID, can be a helpful first step. If the results suggest changes to your hearing, you can share them with your GP.

The only way to confirm hearing loss is through a full hearing assessment. An audiologist will examine your ears, accurately measure any hearing loss and discuss appropriate treatment or management options. There are some types and causes of hearing loss that may be treatable. This may include perforations of the eardrum, blockage of the ear canal with wax, or infection. Damage to hearing as a result of ageing or noise damage is not treatable, but hearing may still be improved with the use of a hearing aid.

If You Hear Sounds That Others Cannot

Some people experience ringing, whistling, buzzing or whooshing sounds in their ears or head. This is known as tinnitus.

Tinnitus is often, but not always, linked to hearing loss. For some, it comes and goes. For others, it may be constant. The intensity can vary widely — from a mild background sound to something more intrusive and difficult to ignore. Those who struggle with severe and persistent tinnitus can be very disabled by this. Their mental health is often impacted and suicidal ideation is more common.

If tinnitus is affecting your wellbeing, support and information are available through organisations such as Tinnitus UK. Although most tinnitus is not amenable to treatment, there is support, including hearing aids, and talking therapies that can make it easier to cope with it.

If You Have Hearing Loss

Sharing your communication preferences can help you feel more confident and in control. Let others know what is helpful for you. Advocating for your needs is a positive and practical step towards maintaining connection and inclusion.

Sudden Hearing Loss: When To Seek Urgent Help

If you experience sudden hearing loss in one or both ears, seek urgent medical advice by contacting NHS 111 or your GP.

While sudden hearing loss is not always serious, in some cases it can be a medical emergency. There is often only a short window in which treatment can help restore hearing, so early assessment is important.

www.healthpartnersgroup.com

How To Help Protect Your Hearing

Although not all hearing loss can be prevented, there are practical steps that can reduce risk and support long-term ear health.

- **Protect your ears from loud noise:** Use earplugs or ear defenders in noisy environments such as concerts, clubs and construction sites or when using power tools.
- **Keep personal device volumes safe:** The 60/60 rule is a useful guide: listen at no more than 60% volume for no longer than 60 minutes at a time.
- **Take breaks from continuous noise:** If you are in a loud environment for an extended period, regular quiet breaks can help reduce strain on your ears, though this will not prevent noise-induced hearing loss.
- **Address infections or blockages promptly:** Repeated ear infections, sudden changes in hearing or persistent wax build-up should not be ignored. Seek advice from a health care professional for concerns and ask a pharmacist about options to help you to reduce or remove ear wax.
- **Get checked:** Your employer may offer hearing checks as part of a health surveillance programme, or you can visit your GP.

Supporting Someone with Hearing Loss

If you are concerned about a friend or family member that you think is struggling with their hearing, raising the topic can feel sensitive. Choosing the right moment helps - a relaxed setting, such as during a walk or over a cup of tea, often makes conversations easier.

You might find it helpful to mention how simple an online hearing check is as a first step. Some people prefer to explore this privately before seeking medical advice. You could even complete the check together.

It is important to remember that acknowledging hearing changes can feel daunting. If someone is not ready to act immediately, gentle support and patience go a long way.

In day-to-day communication with a person with hearing impairment, simple adjustments can help:

- Face the person when speaking
- It can also be helpful to alert the person first that you are speaking to them
- Good lighting is helpful so that facial expressions are visible
- Speak clearly not loudly at a natural pace
- Reduce background noise where possible.

Small changes can significantly improve clarity and reduce listening fatigue.

Hearing Loss in The Workplace

Inclusive communication benefits everyone. Employers and managers can support colleagues with hearing impairment by:

- Providing meeting agendas and slides in advance
- Ensuring good lighting for lip reading in meeting areas and workspaces
- Managing virtual and in person meetings by encouraging one person to speak at a time
- Using live captions in platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom
- Building in regular breaks during longer meetings
- Checking workers with hearing impairment can hear all workplace alarms and providing an alternative mechanism to alert them if not.

Hearing loss may be classed as a disability recognised under UK equality legislation for some employees, meaning that employers have a duty to consider reasonable adjustments where needed. A workplace assessment can help identify practical solutions tailored to the individual role, working environment and communication preferences.

Resources

- Travel and transport | MindMate
- How to support neurodivergent employees with travelling | HR Magazine
- Mental Health Awareness Week | Mental Health Foundation
- Mental Health Awareness Week | Mind
- Hearing loss | NHS
- Workplace adjustments for deaf people and people with hearing loss | RNID
- How Hearing Loss is Misunderstood at Work | iOH

Our Services

At Health Partners we deliver a wide range of workplace health services. In this article we discuss neurodiversity, stress and mental health and hearing loss. Each of these areas are covered by our expert clinicians, who are available to help individuals and their employers tackle these important issues.

Find out more about our full range of services and how businesses can harness them, on our website: www.healthpartnersgroup.com