

# Companies step up on employee anxiety & stress management across sectors; say it's top priority



[BACK TO TOP](#)



E-commerce companies, which have notched up record sales this festive season as India shopped online, too, are doling out mental health benefits to employees.

### Synopsis

Company executives said the need of the hour is beyond financial security, and that focusing on mental wellbeing is crucial to optimise productivity amid remote working.

India's biggest packaged foods company **Nestle** now has an internal Covid-19 management committee that meets every two-three days to help its 7,600 employees cope with pandemic-related stress. "Management of uncertainty among employees has been the most challenging task since the pandemic outbreak and it's a priority for me," Nestle India chairman Suresh Narayanan said.

From virtual engagement programmes and anti-stress-counselling to Covid-19 testing and health and fitness assistance, companies across sectors including **PepsiCo**, ITC, Tata Motors, **Mondelez**, Amway and Flipkart have taken various initiatives to keep their employees motivated even as they work to revive their businesses amid the pandemic.

Beverages and snacks maker PepsiCo has launched a resilience building app called equilibrium to help employees tackle stress, started offering free flu vaccination at the onset of winter at employee doorsteps, and rolled out daily Zoom fitness sessions and employee assistance programmes for mental health support.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

“We have issued guidelines to help set work boundaries, ensure stretch breaks in between meetings and defined ‘no-meeting’ time zones,” PepsiCo India chief human resources officer Pavitra Singh said.

Company executives said the need of the hour is beyond financial security, and that focusing on mental wellbeing is crucial to optimise productivity amid remote working.

“This level of remote working is unprecedented and, hence, emotional well-being has become one of the top priorities for us,” Amway chief executive Anshu Budhraj said.

The direct selling company has announced that irrespective of rank and tenure, all Amway employees will be rated ‘above average performance’ for the year 2020 in recognition of their work through the pandemic. Its other programmes include voluntary Covid-19 test camps and home collection of samples.

Companies said confidentiality and sensitivity to employees would pay off in the long run. Tata Motors has appointed health stewards in its plants and rolled out an employee assistance programme for confidential counselling on parenting, work-life balance, stress, anxiety and loneliness.

FMCG-to-hotels conglomerate ITC has been hosting a large number of webinars on employee wellbeing with dedicated sessions focusing on addressing stress and anxiety, its corporate human resources head Amitav Mukherji said.

India’s biggest chocolate maker Mondelez is following ‘do nothing days’, ‘line of closing’,

and ‘digital detox’ to make employees feel at ease about defining an end to their workday.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

“We encourage our colleagues to do something for themselves each day amid all responsibilities to ensure emotional wellness; we have a psychiatrist on board for counselling sessions along with tie-ups with fitness apps,” Mondelez HR director Mahalakshmi R said.

With lower-than-expected contraction in the September quarter and prospects of vaccine looking positive, some economists and rating agencies including Moody's and Goldman Sachs have revised India's gross domestic product (GDP) estimates upwards for the year ending March, and companies are bracing for a post-pandemic era that will require employees to increase productivity levels and not suffer pandemic-induced burnout.

Food delivery and search platform **Zomato** is organising mediation on Zoom for its employees every single working day. “We also have group sessions on mindfulness, positive thinking and art therapy to cope with stress and anxiety regularly,” a spokesperson said.

**RPG Group** has launched multiple programmes including home isolation packages at discounted prices and one-on-one conversations with employees to deal with stress and anxiety levels, while Hyundai

Motors has extended loans of Rs 3 lakh to employees in case they or their family members get contracted with the virus.

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Flipkart chief people officer Krishna Raghavan said the e-commerce company is equipping Flipsters (employees) with resources to help them focus on physical and mental health.

“These include regular communication

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between leaders and teams, sessions on emotional wellness, self-care and ways to manage stress and anxiety, and activities ranging from virtual comedy gigs to photography workshops to even pet parties,” he said.

Others like electronics maker Samsung and healthcare company Medtronic have rolled out extensive employee well-being and assistance programmes as well. “The health and wellness of employees continues to remain top priority. Some of the programmes we have include specialised desktop yoga courses and techniques that can be practiced in between meetings, which help employees to relax and reduce stress levels,” said Titus Arnold, director, human resources at Medtronic India.

As part of its wellness programme, Resurge, product engineering and lifecycle services company **QuEST Global** has partnered with a psychological wellness organisation, identified employees who could lead sessions on yoga, meditation and healthy eating habits, hosts weekly wellness talks and has started Covid advisory helplines. Sonia Kutty, global head – HR, QuEST Global, said: “People are coping with changes in their personal and professional lives in their ways, and if unattended, it will be beyond repair. New initiatives have been specifically tailored to address employee health and well-being under the pandemic-related circumstances.”

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BACK TO TOP

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