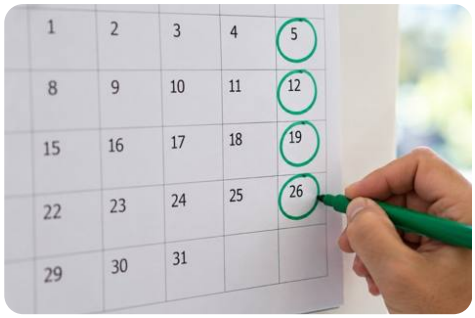
NEWS LESSON

What Has to Change for a Four-Day Week?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you choose a free Friday or shorter days all week?
2. What task at work takes more time than it deserves?
3. Could a team finish the same work with fewer meetings?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**salary**	☐	A	the amount of work you have to do
2	**burnout**	☐	B	how much work is done in a certain time
3	**cooperation**	☐	C	feeling very tired and unwell because of too much work
4	**wellbeing**	☐	D	people who look after someone who is old or ill
5	**workload**	☐	E	working together with other people
6	**retailers**	☐	F	the state of being healthy and happy
7	**productivity**	☐	G	the money you receive for your job each month
8	**carers**	☐	H	businesses that sell things to the public

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Across 141 organisations, staff reported less burnout and better health after six months. Care workers, retailers and small businesses may find that timetable much harder to copy.

1 What would you do with an extra day off every week? Learn a language, see friends or simply recover from work? For many employees, the idea of receiving the same salary for a four-day week sounds almost too good to be true. Yet a large international study suggests it may be a realistic option for some organisations.

2 Imagine finishing on Thursday with a whole extra weekday ahead of you. You might finally sort out appointments, spend time with family or simply wake up without an alarm.

3 Research published in Nature Human Behaviour in July 2025 followed 2,896 employees. They worked at 141 organisations in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the UK and the United States. Companies introduced shorter working weeks without cutting pay, following a period in which they tried to improve efficiency and cooperation.

4 Over six months, participants reported improvements in job satisfaction, burnout, mental health and physical health. These changes were not seen in the same way at twelve comparison organisations that maintained their usual schedules. The results suggest that reducing working time can support wellbeing, rather than merely shifting the same problems into a different timetable. The organisations had chosen to take part, so the results may not apply to every workplace.

5 However, the changes required planning. Businesses had to reconsider meetings, communication and responsibilities. There is also an important difference between genuinely reducing weekly hours and squeezing forty hours into four exhausting ten-hour days. Employees need a realistic workload, not just a new timetable and an expectation to catch up at night.

6 Certain industries may face greater difficulties. Care workers, transport staff and retailers provide services across the week, and reducing hours could mean taking on additional employees. Small businesses may also struggle if customer demand and staffing costs remain unchanged.

7 A four-day week would also change how working and family responsibilities are organised. An extra day away from paid employment might allow parents to spend more time with children or carers to support relatives. For other employees, it could mean recovery, education or greater participation in community life. These benefits are difficult to capture through a narrow measure of company productivity.

8 On the other hand, businesses operating across seven days may need staggered shifts, while smaller organisations could face higher staffing costs. A successful policy would need to distinguish reduced hours from compressed schedules and consider workers who already have limited control over shifts. The debate is therefore about the distribution of time as well as the efficiency of work.

9 The study does not prove that every employer can increase productivity while reducing time at work. Nevertheless, it provides substantial evidence that the traditional five-day schedule is not the only practical model. The real question is how companies can distribute work fairly while protecting services, salaries and employees' health.

Sources: Nature Human Behaviour. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The researchers compared the results with organisations that kept their usual schedules. T F NG
2. All 141 organisations in the study were in the same country. T F NG
3. The participating organisations made higher profits during the trial. T F NG
4. The writer warns that the findings may not apply to every workplace. T F NG
5. Fitting forty hours into four long days counts as genuinely reducing working time. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

capture	demand	distribute	maintained	persistent	realistic	reconsider	Staggered

1. After the complaints, the board agreed to _____ its decision.
2. Despite the cuts, the firm _____ its high standards.
3. _____ lunch breaks stop the canteen from getting too crowded.
4. A single score cannot _____ how employees really feel about their jobs.
5. Higher _____ for tickets meant the railway ran extra trains.
6. Setting a _____ deadline helps staff avoid unnecessary stress.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time the trial ended, most firms _____ their meetings. (REDUCE)
2. The results _____ in a scientific journal last year. (PUBLISH)
3. If the trial had been longer, shops _____ extra staff. (NEED)
4. Several firms _____ their schedules since the study ended. (CHANGE)
5. The small firm refused _____ extra staff. (HIRE)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Decide if the linking word shows contrast, result or condition. Then check what grammar follows it.

despite	instead	nevertheless	provided	therefore	unless	whereas

1. The trial was short. _____ , the results were encouraging.
2. The firm was small. _____ , it could not afford to hire extra staff.
3. Some employees enjoyed the change, _____ others found their workload heavier.
4. Staff will struggle _____ they receive enough support.
5. _____ the extra day off, many parents still struggled with childcare.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What would have to change before a shorter week felt genuinely easier?
2. Would you accept longer days in exchange for a three-day weekend?
3. Who might find a four-day week harder to arrange?

9 Role-play: a four-day week for our team

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the manager

Your shop is open seven days a week. An employee wants to try a four-day week with the same pay. Ask at least two questions before you decide. You can say yes, no, or yes with a condition.

Student B · the employee

You'd like a four-day week with the same pay. Explain why it would help you and how the work will still get done. Suggest a trial.

Useful phrases

I'd like to ask about a four-day week.
I'd still finish all my tasks.
Who'd look after the customers on that day?
We're open seven days a week, so that's a problem.
Could we try it for three months?
I'm happy to say yes if the results are good.

Afterwards, tell the class: did the manager agree, and was the plan fair for the rest of the team?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 G · 2 C · 3 E · 4 F · 5 A · 6 H · 7 B · 8 D

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 reconsider · 2 maintained · 3 Staggered · 4 capture · 5 demand · 6 realistic

6 Verb forms

1 had reduced · 2 were published · 3 would have needed · 4 have changed · 5 to hire

7 Language focus

1 Nevertheless · 2 Therefore · 3 whereas · 4 unless · 5 Despite

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