Supporting your health & wellbeing while working from home

Over the next few weeks, staff who can do, are advised to work from home. Some people may be used to working at home but for others it will be new territory.

Here are some tips on working from home, to stay efficient and keep your spirits up. Included are ways to support your mental and physical health, reduce feelings of isolation, and feel connected with colleagues while working remotely.

Get set up

Waking up

Although you may have some extra time in bed without a commute, aim to wake up around the same time every day. This helps stabilise your internal clock and improve your sleep overall. You'll feel less tired, more refreshed, and find it easier to concentrate throughout the day.

Getting ready

Keep to your established morning routine if you can – get ready, washed, and dressed as if you are going to the office. This will help you get into the mind-set that you are at work. Try and distinguish your day between work and home mode. Make a conscious routine for your day, e.g. working in 30/60 minute chunks followed by a short-break away from your screen to have a stretch or grab a snack. Make sure you take a lunch break and try eat your meals away from your work station. It's important that you work flexibly around family life, but also set boundaries around work time and non-work time.

Be realistic

Set yourself some goals for what you want to achieve each day. It's better to feel a sense of accomplishment over what you have achieved, rather than feeling disappointed you didn't do everything. We recognise that for some it's going to be challenging balancing home-life with working from home, so we encourage you to focus on outputs rather than time spent working – we don't expect you to work late into the evening just to reach your hours if you've achieved what you need to that day.

Remember people are not all set up with offices at home. People will be working from home with families or pets in the background. Be understanding of this and be patient!

Setting up your workspace

Try to set aside a work area separate from your sleeping area, as this will help to prepare you for work mode and make it easier to switch off at the end of the day. You don't need a home

office to do this – a small desk set up in a corner of your room, or a laptop at the end of the kitchen table can do the trick.

If you're working with a small space, you could try setting up temporary 'zones' by hanging blankets or screens to visually separate your work area from your bed or living area.

Clear your work surface of clutter and set up your equipment to avoid physical strain – do a self-check using the guidance at NHS Live Well. If you don't have a chair with back support, you could add a firm pillow. Avoid sitting on the sofa each day with the laptop on your lap.

At the end of a working day, it's best to switch off your computer and tidy away papers and other items. If the documents contain sensitive information, ensure they are left somewhere secure.

Get moving

Including some movement into your work from home routine will help maintain your physical and mental health. You'll feel more awake and alert and your concentration and sleep will improve.

Outdoors

If you're not self-isolating, try going for a walk or a jog down the street before you start work for the day – this can help you to feel like you have mentally 'arrived' at work. Doing the same when you finish your working day can help you to leave your work mind-set behind and switch off.

Indoors

If you're indoors, look online for an activity that suits you, such as a home yoga video or a fitness class, you can find thousands on YouTube. Some gyms are now live streaming their classes, so you could even join a fitness community in your local area. No matter what exercise you choose, try to take regular screen breaks and stretch throughout the day. **Find some home workouts put together by our fitness advisor Sam Bottomley here.**

Get connected

Social support

Unless you're self-isolating, working from home shouldn't mean that you don't leave the house at all or don't see anyone for two weeks – make sure you still keep up social interaction and stay connected.

Adapt your working style

Make sure you keep communication open with your team, as often and frequently as appropriate. Could you have a video or phone calls instead of emailing? Can you have short check-in and check-out calls between managers and teams?

Virtual social sessions

If you usually schedule time in the workday for an activity or exercising with your colleagues, continue to make time for this over webcam, FaceTime or phone. Here are some ideas that colleagues may enjoy:

- Turning your morning or afternoon coffee break into a virtual coffee break
- Sharing photo updates of your lunchtime run
- Daily online quiz session

Got kids

We appreciate that some of our staff will need to balance looking after children with working from home.

Wear them out in the morning

Can you create some interruption-free work time by wearing out your kids in the morning? If you can safely take kids outside – to the park, the countryside or your garden – for exercise and fresh air, then why not try it. If not, get them doing some indoor exercises perhaps.

Break the day into chunks

Consider creating a rota that splits the day across two parents or helpers if possible. You could have two uninterrupted blocks e.g. early start to lunch and then post-lunch to evening.

Let the children know what to expect

Plan the day so your children know what to expect. Kids often respond well to the structure of school, so you can look to recreate this together at home. Schools will likely provide you with a timetable. Look to turn that into a poster they can stick up. Where you can, keep play times too, morning and afternoon ideally outside.

For younger children, could they stay connected with friends by doing some artwork and sharing with classmates via parents on email or social media?

Create a 'do not disturb' zone

Where possible create a work area at home end ensure your children understand that it's a do not disturb zone. May be get the kids to create a "Mummy / Daddy is working" sign that gets put up during any important calls.

Practise family mindfulness

This may be a great opportunity for the whole family to take up mindfulness or meditation to help all remain calm. See here for some tips.

Be kind to yourself

Now is not the time to be holding yourself to the highest of no-screen time parenting standards. Remember many colleagues are in a similar situation. A child wanting to be entertained during a conference call is all ok. Look at your priorities with your line manager and focus on what matters most. If you need help don't be afraid to ask.

Get support

During times of stress it helps us to stay connected. Keep in touch with friends and family where you can. Pick up the phone or use messenger apps to communicate with your colleagues if you are feeling out of the loop or need to talk to someone.

Look after yourself and set aside time to prioritise self-care – **find some simple self-care tips here**.

For information about mental health and Coronavirus visit:

- Mental Health Foundation's **tips for looking after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak**
- Mind: **Coronavirus and your wellbeing**

If you're feeling anxious or isolated, remember that support is out there. You can raise concerns with your line manager.

The **SYFR Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)** – is available 24/7/365 for support on mental health and many other of life's issues or problems. To access please call the **FREE & CONFIDENTIAL HELPLINE on 0800 030 5182**. Or visit www.healthassuredeap.com (username: SYFR, password: EAP).

The **Occupational Health team** is also here to advise. You can contact them on extension: 2273, or by emailing occhealthadmin@syfire.gov.uk

Samaritans offers free, confidential support 24 hours a day on 116 123.