

Tips for Working Remotely During the COVID-19 Pandemic



University
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The transition to working remotely can be difficult for some individuals. Working remotely requires a mental shift, it brings a sudden loss of companionship and socializing that are inherent in the workplace and it makes it more challenging to manage the distractions associated with home. The key to working successfully from home is to create an environment that allows you to focus on the work that needs to be accomplished while managing the distractions that are part of the new reality.

General Tips

The following are some general tips from experts to help you stay focused, productive and well:

- Find a dedicated and comfortable workspace in your home. Ideally, a place with a door to help you manage distractions while working and to leave behind work at the end of the workday.
- Keep your regular morning routine, make coffee, have breakfast, take a shower and get dressed. This may sound insignificant, but it helps to mentally prepare you for the day. The morning routine lets your brain know that it's getting ready for work.
- Replace your morning commute to work with a short walk. A 10-minute walk before you start your workday can energize you and help create a break between home and work activities.
- Structure your day like you would at the office; and before you end each workday identify the tasks/activities to focus on the following day. Use Outlook calendar to assign tasks, projects to your day, this will help you stay focused and productive.
- Identify the distractions that may impact your ability to focus and explore strategies for managing them. For instance, communicate expectations and boundaries with those who will be at home with you. Some experts suggest creating a "stoplight" for family members (Place a red paper outside your workspace to indicate to others that you can't be disturbed, a green paper to indicate that it is okay to come in and a yellow one to indicate check first). Remember that you can't always eliminate all the distractions, but planning can help minimize them.
- Set break reminders and leave your workspace. For example, get some fresh air, go for a walk and spend time with others. Breaks can help keep you energized and focused during the day.
- Avoid isolation. Use the chat and virtual meetings functionality of Microsoft Teams to stay connected with your colleagues.
- Fight the urge to multitask. Being at home may tempt you to do home chores while working. According to Daniel Goleman, an internationally known psychologist, "technically, we are able to do 2 tasks at the same time, but it is not possible to concentrate on two tasks at once".
- Resist the urge to check social media every time there is an update. Turn off the notifications and alerts feature and schedule time to catch-up with social media and news sites.
- Take care of yourself. For example, drink plenty of water, eat healthy, get up and move around and set aside time to deal with your worries. These are unprecedented times which can lead to increased stress and anxiety. Remember that supports are available through Morneau-Shepell (EFAP provider). Visit the [Human Resources website](#) for details.

Health and Safety Tips

The following are some safety and ergonomics tips for your home office:

- Select a chair with a back. Ensure that your lower back is supported (chair with a backrest) and place pillows or cushions on the seat and/or lumbar curve to help facilitate a neutral seated posture. It is recommended that you avoid sitting on a couch or bed as it could lead to back and neck strain.

- The surface that you are using to work should be of the appropriate height and sturdy enough to handle the equipment that you will be using. The keyboard should be placed at the right height to ensure that your elbows are about the height of the surface and that your wrists are in a neutral position. A table may be too high unless you are able to adjust the height of the legs or the chair. [View example and tips for an ergonomically correct workstation](#) and the [Office Workstation Self-Assessment Checklist](#).
- Ensure that the area under the worksurface (e.g. desk, table) is clear to allow you to sit squarely and get close to your keyboard and mouse.
- If you are using a laptop, use a laptop riser and a separate mouse and keyboard to ensure proper posture. Your laptop screen should be at eye level, if you don't have a laptop riser, consider using books or a box. The external keyboard and mouse should be at elbow height.
- If using a monitor, ensure that the monitor is at the right height (eye level) and at the right distance in order to maintain a neutral neck posture. For example, if you find yourself leaning forward your monitor may be too far.
- Take a break from your workstation for a few minutes at least once an hour. Change your posture and give your eyes a break from the monitor/laptop. For instance, stand-up to read a document or walk around when on the telephone.
- Practice stretching at your workstation. Working at a computer often results in very few changes in body position which could lead to muscle pain and strain. Examples of stretches can be found on the [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety Website](#).
- If using a telephone or mobile phone for a prolonged period, consider using a speaker phone or headphones.
- The room that you are using should have adequate lighting, there should not be reflections or glare on the computer monitor.
- Ensure electrical safety. For example, don't overload outlets, use power bars with surge protection instead of extension cords and have minimal clutter around electrical equipment for ventilation purposes.
- Ensure that your work area is organized, free of tripping hazards and that all furniture is free of sharp edges.
- Ensure that your home has a fully functioning smoke and carbon monoxide detector.
- Talk to your supervisor if you have any safety concerns or require additional equipment/resources to conduct your work safely.

Sources Consulted

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