

# DISTANCE WORK & WELL-BEING

Rachael Jones-Chick  
rachael.jones-chick@smu.ca  
CN Centre for Occupational Health & Safety  
Saint Mary's University



Working from home can be convenient because it provides flexibility in where and when you do your work<sup>1</sup>. During the Covid-19 pandemic, however, many people are working from home when:

1. they may not typically choose to work from home due to personal working preferences;
2. their work may not be well-suited to working from home (e.g. teachers without resources to prepare for online instruction; jobs dealing with sensitive information that cannot be accessed at home), or
3. they may have other responsibilities that could interfere with work (e.g., caregiving for children or parents).

Life during a pandemic can be a stressful time, because there is a lot of uncertainty which can make it difficult to be as productive as usual during the workday.

Even if working from home has never been an option for you (or not your first choice for doing your work), there are certain steps that you can take now to reduce the stress that you may be experiencing during this temporary and unexpected shift to remote work.

## Top 5 Telecommuting Tips!

### 1. Social distancing without social isolation

Social distancing (being physically distanced from other people) can be challenging. Working from home also may make people feel that they are lacking support<sup>3</sup>. These feelings can be caused by social isolation, experiencing high levels of technical difficulties, or feeling a loss of control or confidence in work tasks<sup>3,4</sup>. This perceived lack of support can result in frustration, worry, irritability, loneliness, and stress<sup>3,4</sup>.

- Remember, however, that it is good to keep in contact with your leaders and coworkers, as well as your family and friends.
- Zoom meetings may be useful for discussing urgent work tasks, but in general, working from home can cause lower frequency and lower richness of communication between you, your coworkers, and your leaders<sup>2</sup>. The reduction in face-to-face interactions can make it difficult to maintain both working and social relationships, so it is a good idea to check in, just like you would during your breaks if you were at your usual workplace.

- Checking in with coworkers and leaders frequently is one way to help others feel more supported, and also provides opportunities for you to gain support and feel more connected to your workplace.

## 2. Sick days still apply

It is common for people who work from home to take fewer sick days than employees who do not work from home<sup>3</sup>. However, remember that sick days still apply!

- Even if you are working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic and don't have to worry about infecting other people by going to work while sick, it is still important to take care of your body and your mind.
- Self-isolation can be a stressful time and stress can severely impair your immune system<sup>5</sup>, so make sure to take sick days if you are overly stressed or if you are feeling unwell to allow yourself to recover.

## 3. Build in boundaries

If you like to separate your 'work life' from your 'home life', the shift to working from home may be especially challenging<sup>3</sup>. If you do prefer to have boundaries between your work and your home, a lack of boundaries can cause conflict with your family, mental health difficulties, and physical health problems<sup>3</sup>.

- There are many ways to create physical boundaries (see ["CREATING A HOME WORKSPACE" resource article](#)). Having a designated workspace can help to create a physical boundary between your work and the rest of your life.
- You can also create 'psychological boundaries' while working from home:
  - If you can, try to set a schedule that works for you and your workplace and stick to them. Don't forget to plan coffee and lunch breaks into your schedule to help you stay on track and give yourself time to relax and recover throughout the day (and get up and move around).
  - Share your work schedule with family and friends to reduce work disruptions.
  - If you are feeling isolated, use your break time to 'socialize' with your family or friends through technology.
  - Keep your to-do list, goals, and deadlines in your space to help focus you during the day.

## 4. Coping with conflict

Even though working from home can increase flexibility and control and reduce conflict between work and home for some people (under normal circumstances)<sup>2</sup>, for workers who have been suddenly forced into working from home, there may be increases in conflict resulting from boundary issues (as discussed in Tip #3 above).

The sudden shift to working from home (and lack of boundaries) may cause increased conflict and challenges in balancing all of your work and non-work roles (e.g., homeschooling, elder care) and as a result of having to share spaces and resources with family and roommates.

- Decide on how chores and tasks are going to be divided.
- Clearly communicate your schedule with your family/roommates and plan schedules with everyone involved.
- Use apps or online scheduling to integrate everyone's schedules (e.g., Google calendar colour-coding options or other scheduling apps<sup>6</sup>).

## **5. Find fun**

Participating in leisure activities can improve your well-being and help you to feel happier<sup>7</sup>, which is especially important during this pandemic as you may be experiencing increased stress both at work and at home.

- Even though you are working from home, your home should not always feel like your work. Remember to end your workday and 'go home' just like you would if you were working from an office.
- When you are finished work for the day, try to do something that is just for fun and is not something that you are required to do.

## **Take-home messages**

It is important to recognize that this is an unusual circumstance, and everyone will react differently to this temporary new way of life. Do your best to complete what you need to do while working from home, but look for ways to reduce stress, have fun, and take care of yourself. Let others know if you need help, and if you can, check in with others to offer support.

## References

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