

We are working from home (again). Seven tips to boost well-being and productivity

July 27 2022, by Libby (Elizabeth) Sander



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Telstra and Westpac are the [latest companies](#) to encourage staff to work from home, just a few months after some of them returned to the office.

Working from home for extended periods can [leave employees](#) feeling socially and professionally isolated. When people work from home, they

have fewer opportunities to interact and acquire information, which may explain why remote workers feel [less confident](#) than their office-based counterparts.

Researchers [also report](#) working from home (WFH) is linked to negative physical health outcomes such as increased musculoskeletal pain and weight gain, as well as exhaustion.

If you are still working from home or your employer has just reinstated it, the good news is there are evidence-backed tips that can help overcome the challenges. Here are seven tips to navigating the coming weeks and months.

1. Maintain your connections

A chief complaint in surveys about working from home is social isolation. We miss connecting with our colleagues and friends.

Loneliness has significant implications for our work, with [research](#) showing work loneliness can result in emotional withdrawal, which ultimately leads to deteriorating performance and well-being, as well as [poorer health](#).

Now lockdown restrictions have ended, maintaining connection is easier. Planning regular meet-ups with colleagues is an easy and effective way to overcome the social isolation felt working from home. Infection risks can be lessened by wearing respirators when you can't socially distance. You should also stay home if you're sick.

Some companies are now also implementing [walking meetings](#). As well as connecting with others, it's an easy way to get some exercise as well as the stress-reducing [benefits](#) of nature. In one [study](#), walking was shown to increase creativity by 81%.

2. Tidy up regularly

While a [messy desk](#) has helped win a Nobel prize and may be helpful for creativity, removing clutter is [recommended](#) for a lot of the other types of tasks we undertake in an average workday. A clutter-free desk may [reduce the cognitive load](#) on our brains, making us more productive.

[Researchers](#) have found clutter influences employees' thinking, emotions and behaviors. These factors affect decision-making, relationships, stress, eating choices and even sleep.

3. Limit Zoom meetings and reduce 'pings'

As technology platforms proliferate, so does the overload and distraction for our brains. After more than two years of WFH, the prospect of yet another Zoom meeting may well be uninspiring.

There are a few things we can do. Switch off notifications if possible, and ask whether each meeting really needs to happen. Using document sharing and email can sometimes replace meetings. A good old-fashioned telephone call may also be a good alternative. During a [phone call](#), we only have to concentrate on one voice and can walk around, which can help [thinking](#).

4. Ask for feedback

Wondering how we are doing on the job undermines one of the key psychological drivers of our work, a sense of competence. It might be harder to gauge how your manager thinks you're tracking with expectations, if you're socially distant.

Obtaining feedback is [vital](#) for employees to develop this sense of

competence, so make sure you ask for regular feedback.

5. Create a WFH space

[Research](#) suggests replicating what you might have in the office can be a good way to control or mark out a work space at home. Having a proper desk does actually matter.

While few of us will have something as incredible as a [musical puzzle desk](#), we can start with a desk that is both functional and attractive.

A [flat surface](#), ergonomic chair, and suitable lighting can [reduce problems](#) such as eye strain, muscular pain or stiffness and back injuries, as well as decreasing fatigue.

6. Identify restorative spaces

Spaces that promote psychological and emotional detachment from work are also important. Restorative spaces, such as lounge areas, cafes, nature rooms and meditations spaces have begun to [emerge](#) in office settings in recent years.

Such spaces have been [shown](#) to support mental and physical replenishment.

Taking a break on your favorite couch or in a sunny spot during the workday is an important part of maintaining well-being and productivity—not something to feel guilty about.

Before and after shots of the back garden. I started in July 2022 as a way to have a break from all the screen time of WFH. I replaced the lawn with natives and mulch, stone paths etc. my

biggest joy is seeing the native bees in the garden and all the lovely little birdies. pic.twitter.com/cyCdUcGjdG

— Dr. Ruth DeSouza (FACN) (@DeSouzaRN) [July 22, 2022](#)

7. Find ways to disconnect

It can be [hard](#) for employees who are working from home to switch off, particularly if we don't have a dedicated home office space.

Around [half](#) of employees increase their work hours when WFH. Not being able to switch off can have implications beyond the work day.

A [study](#) from 15 countries found 42% of individuals who worked from home had trouble sleeping and woke up repeatedly in the night, compared to only 29% of individuals who always worked in the office.

Many workers enjoy not having to commute to the office, but there is a potential [downside](#) to losing the "transition time" involved in traveling from home. We might use this time to separate private issues from work ones, to prepare for the day ahead or process the one just passed.

In addition to practical considerations such as shutting down software and finalizing tasks, [research](#) shows using defined end-of-day rituals can help achieve psychological detachment, emotional regulation of the nervous system and reduce physiological stress.

Instead of commuting, meditation, journaling, listening to music, engaging in hobbies or pleasurable activities, or undertaking exercise can [give us](#) a mental break, so we aren't still thinking about [work hours](#) later.

More than two years into a forced global experiment, we now know a lot more about the benefits and challenges of working from home.

Implementing these simple, evidence-backed strategies can make a big difference to our well-being.

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