

# Working from home since COVID-19? Cabin fever could be the next challenge

January 16 2024, by Farzam Sepanta, Laura Arpan and Liam O'Brien

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Credit: Ketut Subiyanto from Pexels

As Canada opened back up after the COVID-19 lockdowns, many businesses encouraged their workers to head back to the office. Yet, despite restrictions being lifted in Canada and around the world,

teleworking as a regular working arrangement has remained [popular across different industries](#).

Different polls over the last three years show an increased interest in [teleworking](#) among Canadian workers. The polls indicated that many [Canadians prefer teleworking](#) and some [would consider changing careers to maintain their teleworking status](#).

The popularity of teleworking seems obvious enough. [It provides more flexibility](#), [reduces the need to commute](#) and can [improve productivity](#), among other indirect benefits.

However, being confined to our homes for long periods without access to different activities can expose teleworkers to cabin [fever](#), [a lack of motivation and anxiety](#).

## **Benefits and downsides of remote work**

In a [recently published study](#), we conducted extensive interviews with 14 teleworkers who moved during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. We found that remote working arrangements enabled some people to move away from [big cities](#) and economic centers to purchase homes in more affordable areas. In some cases, teleworkers were able to achieve better living standards that were not possible without teleworking.

Another indirect impact of telework was the [health benefits](#) associated with higher productivity and less commuting. Most of us have first-hand experience of exhaustion after long commutes in the morning and back from work in the afternoon. That fatigue can often leave us feeling spent. Not needing to commute means we can be more productive and accomplish more with our day.

There are other indirect benefits like having more time to cook meals at home, eating healthier, [having increased financial flexibility](#) and improved overall quality of life.

However, along with all these benefits, there are some downsides that people should consider before signing up for remote work. If you plan to move away from the city to a more affordable area, [our research shows you will probably become car dependent](#).

Moving away might also mean leaving friends and family behind. That means you either need to travel farther to visit them, resulting in higher travel costs, or you will not see them as often as you'd like.

That might be fine for some, but others might need a significant degree of [social interaction](#) while working from home. Not being able to see family and friends as often can be isolating and detrimental to our well-being.

## Dealing with cabin fever

Teleworkers might experience reduced social interactions after a while or have reduced physical activity. Being at home for extended periods of time can leave some feeling like they're experiencing [cabin fever](#). The symptoms of cabin fever include [irritability, feelings of restlessness and loneliness](#).

Habits and behaviors might change over time after moving away or working fully remotely. Behavioral changes can encompass a [broad spectrum](#), including but not limited to shifts in transportation mode, thermostat setpoints, physical activity and numerous other traits, all of which can significantly impact both the lives of teleworkers and the environment.

Some teleworkers find contentment in having more social interactions with their partners, children and family. Others might need a certain degree of social interaction with their co-workers in the office. And some other individuals might need active social interactions with their friends, family members, and co-workers.

Teleworking without social interaction or physical activity can lead to cabin fever in the long run. Most of us who worked during lockdowns experienced the urge to leave the home even for a short walk. Small actions such as short walks, exercising and social interactions can help reduce cabin fever. Teleworkers should constantly be aware of such impacts of teleworking that can impact their quality of life in the long run.

Whether moving away from the city or staying downtown, working fully remotely can trigger cabin fever if teleworkers develop bad habits and behaviors. To avoid such problems in the long run, remote workers should consider how they can maintain social interactions, [physical activity](#), and other wellness practices. Such activities can provide necessary breaks from the confines of their homes, helping to prevent cabin fever and foster healthy teleworking habits and behaviors.

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