



WENTWORTH
ADVANTAGE

Working From Home Guide

This week, many Australians are opting, or being ordered, to work from home as businesses try to stop the spread of coronavirus.

It is unclear how long the virtual workplace will be the new reality, but without the proper set-up, it can bring real physical and psychological challenges. In this Working from Home Guide, we explain how to overcome some of them.

Getting your WHS systems and processes in place:

What if your staff hurt themselves while working at home?

A common issue to arise is when an employee is injured at home in the course of their employment. For example, when an employee falls down the steps answering the front door or slips over in their home office.

Employers have the ultimate responsibility for ensuring a safe work environment, wherever that work is carried out.

If you're an employee and you're working for someone, then your employer has a duty of care for your health and safety.

- This includes ensuring your home workspace has a safe way to evacuate during a fire, as well as being equipped with smoke detectors and fire alarms.

If the employee is working from home, in most cases the employer's workers' compensation insurance will cover that employee.

There are several issues employers have to ensure are compliant with health and safety duties:

- Ensure there is a *working from home policy* in place that outlines the method to verify the safety of employees' home work environment.
- Develop a *'self-check' assessment* for employees to verify to the company they are working in a safe environment.
- Finally, it is recommended that both the employee and employer sign a *working from home agreement* – to ensure that all parties will commit to making the working from home arrangement a safe and viable one.
- Ergonomics: Have you got an ergonomic chair, how good's your screen, if you sit there all day are you likely to have a repetitive stress injury? See the next section for more details.

There are some easy ways employers could comply with safety obligations at short notice:



- With modern technology, an easy fix for employers is to have the employee use Facetime, Skype or Zoom to show them [their] workspace and how they will move around in it.
- If it is not safe, and often people work in non-ideal home workspaces, then employers should not let employees work in that space.
- Make sure that staff have the right equipment at home. Employers could loan or supply employees with office furniture. Further, employers could find a way to let employees salary sacrifice purchasing office furniture or provide staff old furniture that is being disposed of. Considering the timeframe confronting employers now, perhaps let employees take an office chair from work to their home to use during the pandemic on the understanding it will be returned after the crisis is over.

Ergonomics

Some ergonomic recommendations:

- Prevent neck and back pain from bad posture and a poor work set-up at home by piling boxes or books on a table.
- Put your laptop so it's nice and high on the table, using whatever you've got.
- Use a separate keyboard and mouse. This is because the laptop's keyboard and mouse will be too high if the computer is elevated to eye-line. With a separate keyboard and mouse, you can be more flexible with where your screen is.
- Alternate between sitting and standing. Use boxes or books to create a make-shift standing arrangement on a bench or high desk.
- Working from home can be a stationary experience, which can lead to adverse health effects over a protracted period of time. That's why it's important to build movement into your day, even if it's just moving around the living room or doing laps of the stairs!
- Moving, stretching and staying active through fitness apps or even just follow-along aerobic classes on YouTube is super important.
- Get up every 20 minutes or so to move and stretch your legs. You shouldn't stand all day, nor should you sit all day. Doing a mix of each is important. Our bodies are not designed to be stuck in one position for long periods of time, so moving is important.

Psychological health at home

Although some people thrive from working at home, many struggle – as some people feel a little bit lost when they don't have all the normal triggers and rituals of the workplace.

They will have to work a lot harder to achieve their goals and not fritter away the time. It's so easy to say, 'I'll get to it later, I'll just put the washing on.'

These ideas may help:

- Phone or video meetings to connect with co-workers can create a sense of structure and help to prevent feelings of isolation. Schedule them into your day.
- You may not realise it, but a big part of your day job is the social connection you get at the office. That's why it's important to make sure you stay in touch with colleagues virtually.

- Leaders should also stay in touch with their teams regularly, and maintain the usual rhythms of 1:1s and team meetings. After all, we're inherently social creatures!
- Having the radio on to create a background hum can also help those used to office buzz.
- Ensure you connect with someone after work can also reduce loneliness. Schedule something to contrast with being alone all day working. You might not be able to go to the bar for an after-work drink, but, instead have a fun get-together with your neighbour, your friend, your partner. That's a very fulfilling experience.
- If you've got a dog, a cat, a fish, it's OK to talk to them too!
- Just as important is your diet: make sure you're eating healthy and drinking plenty of water throughout your day.

Productivity at home

Consider these home productivity ideas:

- It's important to designate a specific workspace.
- Consider your optimal working rhythm. When do you do your best work? Schedule your most difficult work for then. When you're working in a place with lots of people, they can help get you through the slumps, but they're not going to be there so you have to be much more aware of your own rhythms.
- Chunk tasks into allotted spaces of time to maximise efficiency and minimise blurring of the boundaries between professional and personal lives.
- It's a good idea to have little lists with tick-offs
- Wearing work clothes can help to create separation between work and home.
- It's important to think about how you're going to structure your day. This includes plotting out snack breaks and making time to be active to replace incidental exercise from coffee breaks and public transport.
- At the end of the day, tidy the space, reflect on what did and did not work and having some ritual to say that 'the day is over'.
- You have to figure out your own way and if you review it at the end of the day and think it wasn't very productive, tweak it.

IT/connectivity issues

- Improve your home Wi-Fi. Connectivity is everything when you're working from home. The best way to take your work-from-home experience from slow-to-whoa is to improve your Wi-Fi coverage.
- You may take for granted having a whole swathe of tech available at your desk, but when you've moved into a home environment, that gear might not be at your fingertips.
- To maximise productivity, we recommend following a checklist to make sure your workspace is set up for success. We recommend:
 - Laptop;
 - Laptop power cable
 - Laptop stand (if applicable)
 - Keyboard
 - Mouse

- Headset
- Headset charger
- If you don't have access to these IT resources, we recommend speaking to your employer about purchasing these for your home environment.
- It's also important to keep in mind your organisation's cyber security standards while working from home and maintain good cyber-hygiene on your connections. Employers should therefore ensure that employees' digital environment is secure. This is easily done when an employee uses a work laptop with security systems built into it.

Don't panic

This one is the most important! It's key to recognise that social distancing and work-from-home mandates are designed as a precaution to help get ahead of things. It's important we stay flexible so that we're prepared should the issue escalate quickly.

Public health warnings and the outbreak of global pandemic like the coronavirus (COVID-19) can sometimes appear frightening. With continuous media coverage, unverified stories on social media and uncertain outcomes, it's common to feel overwhelmed and worried about you, or your family's health and wellbeing. While these feelings are understandable, if they start to interfere with your everyday life, you may be experiencing health anxiety.

During stressful times our level of resilience can help us cope when things are changing rapidly. Luckily building resilience is a process that we can develop over time by learning and using helpful techniques.

And don't forget: wash your hands frequently!

A 29 point checklist: How to get the most out of working from home

1. Get started early

When working in an office, your morning commute can help you wake up and feel ready to work by the time you get to your desk. At home, however, the transition from your pillow to your computer can be much more jarring.

Believe it or not, one way to work from home productively is to dive into your to-do list as soon as you wake up. Simply getting a project *started* first thing in the morning can be the key to making progress on it gradually throughout the day. Otherwise, you'll prolong breakfast and let the morning sluggishness wear away your motivation.

2. Create a morning routine

Deciding you'll sit down at your desk and start work at a certain time is one thing. Creating a routine that guides you into the chair is another. What in your morning routine delineates the start of work? It might be making a cup of coffee. It might be returning home after a jog. It might be getting dressed (wearing pajama pants to work is a perk for some, but a bad strategy for others). Create a morning routine that ends with you starting work.

3. Pretend like you are going into the office

The mental association you make between work and an office can make you more productive, and there's no reason that feeling should be lost when you are working from home.

When working from home, do all the things you'd do to prepare for an office role: Set your alarm, make (or go get) coffee, and wear nice clothes. Internet browsers like Google Chrome even allow you to set up multiple accounts with different toolbars on the top -- for example, a toolbar for home and a separate toolbar for work.

Get fully ready for the day and pretend you're actually going to work. Otherwise, you might find yourself back in bed.

4. Structure your day like you would in the office

When working from home, you're your own personal manager. Without things like an in-person meeting schedule to break up your day, you can be quick to lose focus or burn out.

To stay on schedule, segment what you'll do and *when* over the course of the day. If you have an online calendar, create personal events and reminders that tell you when to shift gears and start on new tasks. Google Calendar makes this easy.

Are mornings for writing while you're in the office? Use the same schedule at home. While you probably will get tasks done faster at home than at work, this structure will help keep you focused and productive.

5. Choose a dedicated work space

Just because you're not working at an office doesn't mean you can't have an office. Rather than cooping yourself up in your room or on the couch -- spaces that are associated with leisure time -- dedicate a specific room or surface in your home to work.

Have a place you go specifically to work. It could be a certain table, chair, local coffee shop - - some place that's consistently your 'work space.' It helps you get into the right frame of mind."

6. Don't hesitate to ask for what you need

If you're employed by a company or organisation that has required you to work from home, request the equipment you need as soon as you start working from home, or within a day or two when you realise you need something new. It's extremely important to set precedents early that you will ask for what you need to get your job done comfortably, including the right monitor, keyboard, mouse, chair, printer, software, and so forth. Organisations that are accustomed to remote employees often have a budget for home office equipment.

7. Socialise with colleagues & don't feel so isolated

Working from home might help you focus on your work in the short term, but it can also make you feel cut-off the larger operation happening in the office. Loneliness, disconnect, and isolation are common problems in remote work life, especially for extroverts. Companies with a remote work culture usually offer ways to socialise. For example, they might have chat

channels where remote employees can talk about common interests, meetups for people in the same region, and in-person retreats. It's important to figure out how much interaction you need to feel connected and included. Even if you're highly introverted and don't like socialising, give a few interactive experiences a try so that you're familiar with them if you ever decide you want them. If you're not at a company with a strong remote culture, you may need to be more proactive about nurturing relationships.

Instant messaging and videoconferencing tools can make it easy to check in with co-workers and remind you how your work is contributing to the big picture.

Part of what enables us to work from home so much more often now is the array of apps and tools designed to help remove distance as a barrier between team members. Finding the right tools to keep you and your team connected is important for staying productive at home.

Consider using Slack to keep conversations going remotely, Trello to keep you organised around priorities, and Zoom, Google Hangouts or Webex to make remote meetings more productive. Getting the right stack of support tools to fit your work style makes a big difference.

8. Maintain a separate work phone number

Set up a phone number that you only use for calls with colleagues and clients. It doesn't have to be a landline, second mobile phone, or even a SIM card. It can be a free VoIP service, such as a Google Voice. Similar to some of the other tips, having a separate phone number helps you manage your work-life balance.

9. "Show up" to meetings and be heard

Certainly, you'll take part in video conferences and conference calls, but it's a good idea to attend optional meetings sometimes, too. Be sure to speak up during the meeting so everyone knows you're on the call. A simple, "Thanks, everyone. Bye!" at the close of a tele/video conference meeting will go a long way toward making your presence known.

10. Keep a dedicated office space

In an ideal world, working from home employees would have not only a dedicated office, but also two computers, one for work and one for personal use. It's more secure for the employer, and it lets you do all your personal activities in private. But not everyone has a separate office in their home, and keeping two machines isn't always realistic. Instead, dedicate a desk and some peripherals only for work use. For example, when your laptop is hooked up to the monitor and external keyboard, it's work time. When it's on your lap, that's personal time. You may want to go as far as partitioning your hard drive and creating a separate user account for work, too.

11. Make it harder for yourself to mess around on social media

Social media is designed to make it easy for you to open and browse quickly. At work, though, this convenience can be the detriment of your productivity.

To counteract your social networks' ease of use during work hours, remove them from your browser shortcuts and, log out of every account. You might even consider working primarily in a private or, if you're using Chrome, an "Incognito" browser window. This ensures you stay signed out of all your accounts and each web search you conduct doesn't autocomplete

the word you're typing. It's a guarantee that you won't be tempted into taking too many social breaks during the day.

Remove all social networks from your toolbar bookmarks. Even if you don't mean to browse them, some uncontrollable impulse subconsciously clicks on them when you experience downtime. You can get sucked-in without knowing it (or even intending to), so eliminating the gateway to those networks keeps you on track.

12. Communicate expectations with anyone who will be home with you: Setting the ground rules]

Of course, you might be working from home but still have "company." So, set the ground rules with the people in your space.

Make sure any roommates, siblings, parents, spouses, and dogs (well, maybe not dogs) respect your space during work hours. Just because you're working from home doesn't mean you're home. If you have children who come home from school while you're still working, they need clear rules about what they can and cannot do during that time.

Additionally, just because you're home and can let service people into the house or take care of pets doesn't mean other family members should assume you will always do it. If that's how you choose to divide up the domestic labour, that's fine, but if you simply take it all on by default, you may feel taken advantage of, and your productivity may suffer.

If anyone else is going to be at home when you're working, they just have to be clear that when you're in your 'office' (in your case, your signal to the family may be having headphones on), you're working -- even if it looks like and feels like you're hanging out at home. It's easy to get distracted by the many things that have to be done around the house during the day.

13. Take clear breaks

It can be so easy to get distracted when you are working from home that you avoid breaks altogether. Don't let the guilt of working in the building you sleep in prevent you from taking five to relax. Rather than just opening YouTube and watching some comfort clips, however, use your breaks to get away from your desk. Go for a walk outside or spend time with others who might also be in the house.

Breaks, like making and eating lunch, can recharge you to do better work. Don't assume you need to be working 100% of the time while you're home to be more productive. Leave your home office space as your body needs to move. Talk a walk. Weed the garden. Plus, the fresh air and natural light will do you good. You get the picture.

Know your company's policy on break times and take them. It's OK to give yourself adequate time during the day to walk away from the computer screen and phone. A lunch break of 30 – 60 minutes and a couple of 15-minute breaks in the morning and afternoon seem to be the standard for most employees.

Don't short-change yourself during breaks, especially your lunch break. You can use an app, such as *TimeOut for Mac* and *Smart Break for Windows*, to lock yourself out of your computer for the required minutes. Or you can just launch a simple clock or timer on the screen when you take a break.

14. Commit to doing more

Projects always take longer than you initially think they will. For that reason, you'll frequently get done less than you set out to do. So, just as you're encouraged to overestimate how much time you'll spend doing one thing, you should also overestimate how many things you'll do during the day. Even if you come up short of your goal, you'll still come out of that day with a solid list of tasks filed under 'complete.'

It is recommended that your team has a daily online meeting each morning where you share what you're working on for the day. You may want to slightly overcommit on what you will deliver that day. It helps keep you honest, so even if you get the urge to go do something else, you know you have already committed a certain amount of work to your team."

15. Work when you're at your most productive

Nobody sprints through their work from morning to evening -- your motivation will naturally ebb and flow throughout the day. When you're working from home, however, it's all the more important to know when those ebbs and flows will take place and plan your schedule around it.

To capitalise on your most productive periods, save your harder tasks for when you know you'll be in the right headspace for them. Use slower points of the day to knock out the easier, logistical tasks that are also on your plate. These tasks are called "small acts of success," and they can help build your momentum for the heavier projects that are waiting for you later on.

For some people, the most productive times of the day are early in the morning or late at night. They recognise this and try to plan their day accordingly.

16. Save calls for the afternoon

Occasionally, some people are so tired in the morning, they don't even want to hear their own voice - let alone talk to others with it. You shouldn't have to give yourself too much time to become productive in the morning, but you *can* give yourself some extra time before working directly with others.

If you're struggling to come up with a reasonable work schedule for yourself when you are working from home, start with the solitary tasks in the morning. Save phone calls, meetings, and other collaborative work for when you've officially "woken up."

Take advantage of morning hours to crank through meaty projects without distractions, and save any calls or virtual meetings for the afternoon."

17. Focus on one distraction ... like a baby!

There's an expression out there that says, "if you want something done, ask a busy person."

The bizarre but true rule of productivity is that the busier you are, the more you'll actually do. It's like Newton's law of inertia: If you're in motion, you'll stay in motion. If you're at rest, you'll stay at rest. And busy people are in fast-enough motion that they have the momentum to complete anything that comes across their desk.

Unfortunately, it's hard to find things to help you reach that level of busyness when you're at home -- your motivation can just swing so easily. Therefore, try focusing in on something that maintains your rhythm – for example, your child.

When you work from home, your very young daughter/son is home with you, too. It seems counterintuitive, but because you have to manage taking care of her/him and keeping them happy and entertained while still getting your work done, the pressure helps to keep you focused. When they're napping or entertaining themselves, you can go into super-productive work mode.

It's the same idea for why some people work better when they have very busy schedules -- you learn how to manage your time very efficiently. The 'distraction' of my child (meant in the most loving way possible!) means you can't possibly succumb to some of the other common distractions of home -- putting in a load of laundry, turning on the TV, doing other household chores -- or else you'd never get any actual work done.

18. Plan out what you'll be working on ahead of time

Spending time figuring out what you'll do today can take away from actually doing those things - and you'll have planned your task list so recently that you can be tempted to change your schedule on the fly.

It's important to let your agenda change if you need it to, but it's equally as important to commit to an agenda that outlines every assignment before you begin. Try solidifying your schedule the day before, making it feel more official when you wake up the next day to get started on it.

19. Match your music to the task at hand

During the week, music is the soundtrack to your career (cheesy, but admit it, it's true) - and at work, the best playlists are diverse playlists -- you can listen to music that matches the energy of the project you're working on. Video game soundtracks are excellent at this. In the game itself, this lyric-free music is designed to help you focus; it only makes sense that it would help you focus on your work as well.

20. Use laundry as a work timer

You might have heard listening to just two or three songs in the shower can help you save water. And it's true; hearing a few of your favourite songs start and end, one after another, can remind you how long you've been in the bathroom and shorten your wash time.

Why bring this up? Because the same general principle can help you stay on task when working from home. But instead of three songs off your music playlist, run your laundry instead.

Doing your laundry is a built-in timer for your home. So, use the time to start and finish something from your to-do list before changing the load. Committing to one assignment during the wash cycle and another during the dry cycle can train you to work smarter on tasks that you might technically have all day to tinker with. Don't believe it...? May be worth trying!

So, do your laundry when you work from home and set mini deadlines for yourself corresponding to when you have to go and switch loads. If you're working on an activity, tell

yourself you will get to a certain point before the wash cycle ends. Then set yourself another goal for the dryer.

21. Interact with other humans

Remember: You're working from home, not the moon. Interacting with other people during the day is allowed, even if they're not your co-workers. In fact, it's a good idea to see another face during the day when most of your work day is solitary. The use of video-conferencing technology makes this easily possible given the social distancing requirements currently in-place.

22. Be Positive

Most people like succinct and clear messages, but often, the less face time you have with people, the less they know how to interpret your tone. When you work remotely full-time, you must be positive, to the point where it may feel like you're being *overly* positive. Otherwise, you risk sounding like a jerk. It's unfortunate, but true. So, embrace the exclamation point! Find your favourite emoji. You're going to need them.

23. Prepare your meals the night before

When you're in your own home, it can be tempting to spend time preparing a really nice breakfast and lunch for yourself, chopping and cooking included. Don't use precious minutes making your food the day of work -- cook it the night before.

Preparing food ahead of time ensures you can actually use your meal times to eat, and that you aren't performing non-work tasks that spend energy better used at your desk.

Cooking at home is time you wouldn't have spent meal prepping if you'd been in the office that day, and you may find the minutes can really add up in the end. To mitigate that, plan to cook and prepare your meals the night before, just like you would for a day at the office.

24. Take Personal Leave, when required

When you're ill or you need to care for a close-family member who is unwell, make sure that you still take your personal leave— as you would if you were still working in the office. Not taking personal leave when you need to - is not a good idea. You will find that you're more productive in the long run if you let your body rest when it's unwell.

25. Look for training opportunities

When everybody is working from home, you might miss out on training and skills development courses that are deferred due to the current business trauma. Your company might even forget to keep running training. There are many online training courses still accessible to you. While it might be tempting to regard this a dodged bullet, you might be missing out on an opportunity to learn something useful. You should bite that bullet and make sure you still access online learning programs. If there is a course you need for career development, ask if you can take it.

26. Don't Be Too Hard on Yourself

The most successful remote employees have a reputation for being extremely disciplined. After all, it takes serious focus to get a full-time office job done from an unconventional space. That said, everyone lets their attention drift sometimes. If you find yourself working one minute and then doing your online banking the next, don't reprimand yourself harshly. Instead, ask yourself whether people in an office setting do the same thing. If the answer is yes, cut yourself some slack, then get back to work.

27. Pick a definitive finishing time each day

You might be under the impression that working from home establishes more work-life balance, but be careful with that assumption. Working from home can also feel like being at a casino -- you can get so caught up in your activity, in a relaxing environment, that you lose complete track of time.

In lieu of co-workers, whose packing up and leaving the office reminds you to do the same, set an alarm at the end of the day to indicate your normal work day is coming to an end. You don't have to stop at exactly that time, but knowing the work day is technically over can help you start the process of saving your work and calling it quits for the evening. By working from home full-time, it's really easy to let your work life bleed into your personal life. Maintaining a boundary is important for both halves of the equation.

28. End your day with a routine

Just as you should start your day with a routine, create a habit that signals the close of the workday. It might be a sign-off on a business messaging app or an evening dog walk. You might have a simple routine such as shutting down your computer and turning on a favourite podcast. Whatever you choose, do it consistently to mark the end of working hours.

29. Make it personal

Above all else, figure out what works best for you. Sometimes the answer is apparent, but other times you might need some inspiration from other people who are in the same boat. Everyone in your office is in the same boat and they represent a supportive community – so reach out and talk!

For more information and support, please contact the friendly team at the
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