

WORKING FROM HOME

With the ongoing uncertainty of COVID-19 and the impact of lockdowns on workplaces, Working from Home remains a reality for tens of thousands of workers across Australia. This can be unsettling, uncomfortable or stressful for many people.

For some people, working from home can be exciting or advantageous. You may be able to avoid a long commute or feel more productive without colleagues or your boss interrupting your flow.

Other people will find working from home challenging and inconvenient. Perhaps it's because young children are around the house, maybe they share a home with other people, or they simply prefer the routine of leaving the house and working in the company of friends and colleagues.

Here are some tips for tackling a Working from Home routine that is a new or unexpected fact of life for your workplace during a COVID-lockdown.

Get Dressed

This sounds simple, but it's crucial. It might be tempting to stay in your pyjamas all day, but getting dressed for work in the morning sends a clear signal to your psyche that the day has begun.

If you don't keep this simple routine from your normal workday it can blur the lines between home and work to the point where you're slower to get started and less productive through the day.

If working from home is something you're only doing temporarily during a COVID-lockdown, you don't want to abandon your routines and make it harder to return to normal.

Designate a Workspace

Like getting dressed, having a sense of work space versus home space is an important psychological exercise that will help you 'get ready' each day and keep your attention focused during business hours on your work projects.

Ensure you have plenty of good, natural lighting, are free from distractions or household foot traffic, and use ergonomic furniture that 'feels' as much like sitting down to work as the real thing. If your work is normally done at a PC, use a full size monitor, keyboard and mouse like you would at the office. Don't try to suddenly work from a tablet or laptop if it's not what you're used to.

Keep regular, normal business hours

Because your home has become your workplace, you need to be clear with yourself and your employer about when you're working and when you're not. Even though it might be tempting to rejig your work schedule and keep odd hours, you will be most productive and settled if you keep your normal working hours. It will keep you in-sync with your colleagues too. It will also be easier to return to the office when COVID-lockdowns end.

If you find yourself putting in extra hours because you don't have anything else to do or you're tempted to keep working on something until it is finished, talk to your family or housemates about setting firm times for household activities, like a firm dinner time or going to buy groceries, that will force you to put your work down and switch off.

Make sure the other people in your house also understand and respect the need for you to work without distractions during certain hours. Focussing on work during work hours will empower you to be more present for family time and your home life after the work day has ended.

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Minimise Distractions

You've made sure to keep your usual morning routine, you've got dressed for work and set aside a designated workspace and spoken to your family about respecting the need to focus on your work, but what about your own tendency to get distracted at home - cleaning, reorganising your belongings, finishing projects around the house... all of these tasks stare you in the face and beg for your attention. The challenge is to stay focussed on your work while managing the inevitable distractions that arise when we spend all day at home.

One strategy to minimise distractions is to leave the house for a short walk when you take a break from work rather than trying to knock over small projects or housework.

Remind yourself that these tasks or projects always needed doing even when you were going to work each day, and make sure you make time to do them after you've finished work for the day.

Communicate

When you start working from home, especially if it starts suddenly and all at once, like during a COVID-lockdown, it's normal to experience teething problems.

Establish a plan between yourself, your manager and your colleagues. Decide how often you will check in on one another or show your manager what you're working on.

Don't just rely on text based communications like SMS or email. Take the time to pick up the phone or have a video-conference. This will reduce miscommunication or misunderstandings and build rapport amongst far-flung team members.

Socialise

Switching suddenly to working from home can cut you off from vital social networks - maybe it's your colleagues, or you miss out on regularly catching up with a friend of family member who worked nearby your office. Often, the simple incidental social engagement we all participate in between our front door and our desk is a vitally important part of our days.

With COVID-lockdowns, people will feel more anxious and isolated than normal.

Take the time and make the effort to engage with colleagues, friends and family in new ways to make up for the reduced opportunities for socialising now that you're working from home.

Exercise

You might not think about it much, but skipping your daily commute will mean you miss out on incidental exercise, fresh air and sunlight.

Make time to get out and about; go for a walk outside, drink your coffee on the balcony or verandah or take some reading material you need to work through somewhere outside and make up for the lost exercise and fresh air you would have got by walking to and from the bus stop or train station. Even if you used to drive to work, you were leaving the house and moving around.

It's important that working from home doesn't mean you become sedentary or inactive.

