Staying mentally healthy when working from home

(Adapted from SAMH resource)

Working from home, especially during extended periods can be difficult to adjust to. For many of us, it means learning how to manage our different areas of work under new circumstances. Here are some top tips on how to get the most out of working from home while looking after yourself and your mental health.

1. **Creating your morning routine**

Create a morning routine that brings you up and helps you begin work for the day. It may sound trivial, but this helps you mentally prepare for the day ahead and get into the "I'm going to work" mindset.

You could get up at the time you normally would for work, shower, get dressed, make a cuppa, have breakfast……. something like your routine for 'going' to work previously.   If you do have some time before starting work maybe you could go for a walk, jog or try some mindfulness sessions.

2. **Establish boundaries**

It is easy to lose track of time when working from home, so set a schedule and stick to it…where you can. Having clear guidelines for when to start and finish work can help maintain your life-work balance. Aim to start and finish at your normal working times. This may be more challenging if you have childcare or other caring responsibilities and some flexibility will be needed.

3. **Create your own workspace**

Although it's tempting to head to your sofa with a laptop, you may find setting up a work area helps you stay focused. If you can, try to set aside a specific area or space where you can work.

Besides making you feel like you're at an "office", this helps you maintain good posture, avoid distractions, and mentally leave your work behind at the end of the day.

4. **Find some balance**

There may be other people in your home when you are working during these exceptional times.   Some of them may be working from home too or self isolating, and/or you may be looking after children or have other caring responsibilities.   The need to balance work time, quiet time and time for personal responsibilities is really important – plan this well with your household to help each other's wellbeing.

Alternatively, you may be living alone, and balance may be more focussed on ensuring you connect each day with colleagues (see below), family and friends.

5. Take breaks

Remember to take normal breaks including your lunch break – away from your workstation. Get up and move about, go for a short walk or make a cuppa. Try setting an alarm on your phone or other device to remind you to take a break.

6. Connect with colleagues

Loneliness, disconnect, and isolation are common problems in remote work life, especially in the current uncertain and worrying situation. Making the effort to speak to your colleagues regularly can make a difference whether by telephone or a video call through e.g. Microsoft Teams.

7. Get some fresh air when you can

You're likely going to need to spend a lot of time indoors during these challenging times. For those who need to self-isolate, opening the window may help you get as much fresh air as possible. Try to choose a spot with a lot of natural light to work if you can.

Follow Government advice and do some exercises, outside once a day, even a short walk can benefit you both mentally and physically. Make sure to keep a distance from others when outside and be sure to wash your hands as soon as you return home.

8. Drink plenty of water

People get dehydrated when they sit, and if your heating is still on in your home, then you'll need extra water to keep yourself physically and mentally healthy.

To ensure that you are consuming enough water, keep refilling your water bottle or glass to make sure you drink your recommended 6 – 8 glasses per day.

9. Stand up and stretch

Sitting all day isn't healthy even if you're at the office, but working from home means you skip your commute and have fewer reasons to get up from your chair throughout the day.

If it's possible in the area you have set up for home working, try standing up to do your work for a change of pace. Standing uses more muscles and burns more calories than sitting and it's good for your back and posture.

If you can't stand and work, stretching is a vital for maintaining good posture, especially when working at a desk for several hours a day. Try standing up every 30 minutes or so to stretch your chest and extend your spine to reverse the hunched position of sitting.

Standing and stretching can also help to reduce back and neck pain. Here are some suggestions to help you move and be mindful:

- Seated yoga workout: from the NHS
- Desk workout: 10 stretches to help ease aches and pains

10. Listen to music

If you find working from home to be a little too quiet, you miss the buzz of your workplace and find it difficult to focus – put some music on, turn on the radio or have TV on in the background.

11. End your day with a routine

Just like you should start your day with a routine, create a habit that signals the close of the workday. You might have a simple routine such as shutting down your computer and turning on a favourite podcast, or writing the next days' to-do list. Whatever you choose, do it consistently to mark the end of working hours. Put your work away, so you know you are back in your personal home time and place.