7 Ways to Optimize Health While Working from Home

Today, as we adapt to a “new normal” of social distancing, an unprecedented number of people find themselves working from home for the first time—and likely for the long-term. As a follow-on to our recent feature, 6 Ways to Stay Engaged While Social Distancing, we’re digging into opportunities to enhance holistic health among remote workers. Data collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic found that only 29% of US workers were able to work at home, even occasionally, and only 15% of workers reported days when they exclusively worked from home.[1]

Many of us are finding that our current ad hoc home offices leave much to be desired. Even in the best of times, working from home is often associated with increased stress and a blurring of work-life boundaries. According to a 2017 United Nations Report, remote workers experience significantly higher stress than office workers, with 41% of remote workers reporting high stress levels compared to only 25% of office workers.[2]

Our work environment and daily routines have a profound impact on our health— influencing everything from our mental well-being to our chronic disease risks.[3] Even as communities begin gradually lifting restrictions related to COVID-19, it’s expected that remote work guidelines will remain in place for months to come. In light of this new reality, we reviewed Fitwel’s 63+ evidence-based, health-promoting workplace strategies and identified several interventions that can be readily adapted to support holistic health while working from home.

How can you build healthy routines when working remotely?

   Views of nature have a calming effect, which can contribute to reduced stress and enhanced mental health. Set up your work station near a window that offers views of outdoor nature, such as street trees or gardens. Consider adding indoor natural elements to your home office like house plants, a DIY green wall, or other home-friendly biophilic design features.

2. Prioritize Daylighting.
   Greater access to sunlight during the workday is associated with higher melatonin levels at night—which in turn contributes to diminished depressive symptoms and enhanced sleep quality. In addition to window access while you work, take the opportunity to step outside a few times each day to soak up extra sunlight.

3. Build in Regular Activity.
   Decreasing sedentary time can promote feelings of well-being and enhanced mental health, and regular walks during work hours have been shown to improve enthusiasm and relaxation, and reduce nervousness. Find ways to incorporate more physical activity throughout your day, for example by setting up a standing desk, taking a stroll during conference calls, or using mini-breaks throughout the day to get moving—try online workouts, gardening, or even a home dance party!

4. Install Shading Options.
   You may have already noticed that shading can be vital when it comes to optimizing your video call set-up. Manual blinds, curtains, or other window treatments allow for control over the amount of sunlight reaching your workspace, which can contribute to increased comfort levels and enhanced mental health.

5. Establish Cleaning Schedules.
   Regular cleaning of bathrooms and kitchens can reduce transmission of diseases while also supporting indoor air quality and improved mental health. Establish a cleaning schedule for your home, coordinating with your household to ensure that all areas are properly disinfected. Make sure hand-washing remains a collective habit, even at home.
6. **Eat Healthy and Stay Hydrated.**

The environment where we eat can influence our dietary habits. A systematic review looking at human attention in relation to food consumption suggests that eating while we are distracted can lead to greater food intake.[16] Strive for more mindful eating by stepping away from your computer at lunchtime, making sure the healthiest choices are the ones in easy reach, and keeping water at your workspace. For guidance on how to snack smart, click [here](#) to view the Fitwel Food and Beverage Standard.

7. **Integrate Fresh Air.**

Bringing outdoor air in, also known as ventilation, can help improve air exchange, and enhance indoor air quality.[17] Natural ventilation practices can be as simple as opening a window or door. As always, context is important, and in areas with high pollution levels filtration considerations may be appropriate.[18] Also, try to get outside each day, because there is nothing quite like a little fresh air to help fight off stress and anxiety, and improve overall mental health.[19]

While this is certainly not an exhaustive list, it’s a good place to start for all of us who are striving to stay healthy while working remotely. We invite you to take one step to enhance your home office today! Use the hashtag #HealthyHomeOffice to let us know how you are adapting your home to be a healthier, more comfortable working environment.

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**Additional Resources**

- **New York Times:** [New Research Links Air Pollution to Higher Coronavirus Death Rates →](#)
- **CityLab:** [Mapping How Cities Are Reclaiming Street Space →](#)
- **NPR:** [Who’s Hit Hardest By COVID-19? Why Obesity, Stress And Race All Matter →](#)
- **Center for Workplace Mental Health:** [Working Remotely During COVID-19 →](#)
- **World Economic Forum:** [How to navigate the transition to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic →](#)
- **State of the Planet:** [Earth Day: How to Celebrate While You’re Sheltering in Place →](#)
- **Earth Day 2020 Website →**

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