

Working from home all of a sudden? You're not alone.

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Working from home all of a sudden? You're not alone. Here are 5 tips for staying productive and mentally healthy...

With the increase of the novel coronavirus affecting everything in our daily lives, it's time to turn our attention to alternatives that help keeping our routines as normal as possible.

We are facing a major lockdown here in Spain, and our company, along with the majority of other businesses, follows the recommendation of keeping our team working remotely until the virus can be slowed.

Plenty of people fantasize about working from the comfort of their own home, foregoing their commute in favor of more sleep, family or exercise time. But working remotely is a double-edge sword — sure, you get to stay home, but it can be harder to focus on actually working. Whether it's a pile of laundry that suddenly looks more appealing than your bosses' to-do list, or a quick three-hour binge of that one Netflix show you've been dying to watch, staying productive at home can take a little extra effort. Plus, the isolation can quickly become a downer for those used to socializing at work. And some people, of course, would prefer to stay in the office.

So, first thing's first: you should probably sit up straight, eat some breakfast, and put on some pants. How else can you stay focused on the job and mentally healthy while working remotely? Here are four tips from work-from-home veterans and workplace experts.

Location, Location, Location

Try to find yourself a dedicated and comfortable spot to work that you can associate with your job and leave when you're off the clock – that means get off the couch, and definitely out of bed.

Expert remote workers cannot emphasize enough the importance of creating a working niche where you can focus, productive and not get interrupted. A space where you can close the door and shut out distractions.

Local cafes and libraries can be an advantage since some background noise can actually be an advantage for your productivity. However, today's work from home recommendations are meant to prevent spreading COVID-19, heading out into a public place is likely counterproductive.

Find a Friend

You might find it easier to be productive without your most chatty colleagues constantly buzzing in your ear. But social interactions – even with coworkers – can alleviate feelings of isolation and loneliness. Studies the effects of solitude, thinks the psychological effects of working remotely for extended periods is often overlooked or ignored, despite it being an essential factor in our mental well-being and team bonding.

We're used to social interaction because it facilitates cooperation and closeness. To help fill the socializing gap while working remotely, finding a colleague you can hit up when you're feeling the need to chat with someone is extremely important. Alternatively, buddy up with a friend who works elsewhere and is going through the same experience. Hopping on a social video call instead of Slack or text isn't a bad idea, either.

Have a Plan

When working alone, you should keep a more structured daily schedule than usual.

Usually our time and the structure of our day are influenced by other people, and working remotely gives us the experience that our day lacks the normal structures that we usually have. People might have a hard time dealing with it. So one of the things that can help in this situation is that time spent alone is better if it's structured.

Includes multiple breaks throughout the day, either to play with the dog or take a long walk around the neighborhood.

Communication is Key

It's important to go beyond email and use other digital tools that can better replicate the in-person office experience and provide for clear communication.

The sense of isolation is unavoidable, and it depends on how well your team communicates, or how much they're willing to amp up communication using other tools besides face-to-face conversations. At our office, our team communicates using Slack and email still remains our main tool to pass information along.

A Harvard Business School's research on remote work found an interesting solution to boosting companionship among remote workers: pizza parties. While researching remote work habits at a company in America which implemented a more robust "work from anywhere" policy in America, researchers discovered a manager who hosted weekly lunches via

videoconferencing.

All teams would order the exact same pizza to be delivered at the same time so the team would have that bonding experience and still feel like a team. This is the future of work, so we cannot just keep doing stuff in the old familiar ways, we have to create new processes.

Furthermore, better communication while remote can help maintain your relationship with your colleagues, managers, and direct reports. It's also important for managers to encourage employees to share their opinions or concerns about a particular project so they don't feel like they're being dismissed just because they're not in the same room.

Everyone Works Differently

Managers should remember that not every employee actually wants to work from home, a shift that can be stressful for some. As companies increasingly mandate that many employees must work from home during the coronavirus outbreak, it's key they communicate as much as possible and help employees struggling with the change.

Giving employees as much information as possible can ease the burden caused by the disruption.