Remote control

Take control of your wellbeing in remote working environments

This short guide gives practical advice, helpful guidance and support to anyone working remotely during the coronavirus pandemic.
Social interaction increases the spread of the coronavirus pandemic as it passes from person to person, by touch and through droplets in the air. Social distancing can dramatically slow the spread. That’s why working remotely for many businesses has become essential, in locations that are very different from normal working environments.

Staying in control, maintaining your mental and physical wellbeing can be a huge challenge in these extraordinary circumstances. That’s why we’ve published this easy-to-read guide of practical tips and guidance. Life is difficult enough right now, so we’ve kept things as light and breezy as they can be. Stay safe, stay healthy and stay connected. We’ll get through this together.

Dr Doug Wright, Medical Director, Aviva UK Health and Protection
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Mental wellbeing

We understand how challenging it feels. Here’s some useful guidance on looking after your mental wellbeing and information about some helpful apps.
Mental wellbeing
Some top tips

Stay connected and keep talking
The key message is: don’t suffer in silence. The more open everyone is about their mental health – whether they’re doing ok or struggling a bit – the better things will become. One of the most important things you can do at times like this is to talk to people and share how you are feeling. Connect with your colleagues or your manager (and if you’re a manager, don’t forget this applies to you too) and explain how changes, work allocation or the situation is making you feel.

It’s an old adage, but “a problem shared is a problem halved”, so work together to find ways to address issues. These ideas could be as unique as you are, because people are impacted differently.

Use wellbeing apps
There are many apps you can use to support your mental wellbeing, to help with mindfulness, meditation and overall mental wellbeing.

It’s essential to select the best app for the task, and that’s where NHS Digital steps in. Although health apps are not supplied by the NHS, it’s widely accepted that the NHS Digital’s Apps Library is the ‘go to’ place for reliable, objective information. It’s here you’ll find trusted mental health and wellbeing apps that have been assessed using rigorous standards. And when an app is improved or modified, it is reassessed.

Change where you work in your home
Don’t work with your laptop facing a blank wall! Your connection with the outside world begins with what you can see outside, just above your screen. It might be a back garden, it could be rooftops, it might be a not-so-busy street, but it’s your physical window on the world. So where do you work in your home? Each home is different, but what you should look for is known as a ‘command position’ that puts you in control. It’s a concept from Feng Shui, the ancient philosophy of living in harmony with your immediate environment.

Basically, choose a position in the room that you work in that is furthest from the door and that also enables you to look out of a window. You’ll feel better for it. And in a time of crisis, empowerment starts here. Try it!

Control your intake of negative news
Your home is your castle. And as you work from home, you might feel as if its walls are under siege conditions. With social media and new technology enabling a 24/7 news feed, we’re experiencing constant updates on coronavirus. While some information is useful, too much immersion to this type of news can fuel alarm and tension. As we piece together the progress of COVID-19, the result of being plugged-in to a relentless news cycle can generate negativity, fear and anxiety. In short, if you feel bad about being isolated, the news will make you feel worse.

There’s a simple answer to this: prioritise your mental health and switch off. A bombardment of negative news needs a cut-off point, and you can limit your input just as you’d do for children and screen time. Rolling news isn’t necessarily the most accurate. Take a deep breath and catch up with it tomorrow when the facts are known.
Social distancing is hard for us all, but for those of us who live alone, lockdown brought its own particular challenges. I didn’t have physical contact with another human being for weeks. Not a pat on my arm, not a hand on my shoulder and definitely not a hug. Usually, we take these small moments of human interaction for granted, maybe barely noticing them. Until they suddenly disappear.

I had to spend 100% of my time on my own. That’s hard to do. I’m lucky in that I’m comfortable with my own company, but even so there were times when it would have been heaven to hug someone. Being alone all the time meant there was no one there when you have a wobble, which we all do in these strange times. There’s nobody to nudge awake and speak to when dark thoughts crowd your mind when you’re lying awake in middle of the night. And it’s easy to feel like you’re never going to actually see anyone in real life ever again.

AVIVA COPYWRITER NICKI TAUNT SHARES HER EXPERIENCE OF SOLO ISOLATION

1. Talk to people every day
   Social distancing doesn’t mean emotional isolation, so make sure you remind yourself you’re loved by connecting with the people you care about.

2. Lose yourself in other worlds
   Dive into books, films, TV shows.

3. Crank up the tunes
   Singing and dancing are great for your wellbeing.

4. Keep your mind busy
   Do some puzzles, drawing, painting or colouring in.

5. Keep your body active
   Go out for your daily exercise slot or exercise at home to boost your endorphins.

6. Be kind to yourself
   Treat yourself to your favourite snack, a long luxurious bath or whatever you fancy.

7. Acknowledge your feelings
   It’s okay not to be okay sometimes, so give yourself permission to recognise things are hard at the moment.
When working remotely you must consider how you look after your physical health. Here are some quick tips on how to make your working environment comfortable and ways you can keep fit and healthy.
**Physical wellbeing**

**Some top tips**

**Keep in shape as best you can**
Whether you are physically distancing yourself from others, and/or in self-quarantine, you still need to maintain your physical wellbeing. You might not be able to go to your usual classes, gym or exercise activity, but don’t stop all kinds of exercise.

Do something different to get the heart rate going – it could be a skipping rope session, football kick-about or star jumps in the garden or back yard, or inside if you can’t go outside. Go for a walk or a run around the block (not getting too close to anyone else). Fresh air is still very important.

Why not use YouTube or those old exercise DVDs to do a workout? Remember the Wii Fit or Dance Mat? Is it gathering dust in the back of a wardrobe somewhere?

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**Use your laptop the smart way**

If you’re working for more than 15-20 mins at a time you should set yourself up at a desk or table and a docking station, if one is available. If you don’t have access to a docking station, try to use a laptop stand, portable keyboard & mouse.

**DO’S**

1. Take regular breaks, whenever you choose to work
2. Use **ergonomic equipment** if you’re inputting for long periods
3. Enjoy the portability of your laptop and explore different environments

**DON’TS**

1. Stay in **one position** for too long
2. **Slouch**, slump, or head-hang
3. Ignore what your body might be trying to tell you

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**Step it up in the lockdown**

If you’re new to step counting, an average stride for 2,000 steps will take you about one mile, so if you get to 10,000 steps, that’s roughly five miles. Do that every day for 2020’s leap year and you’ve walked or run 1,830 miles. If you have access to a garden and if your home is big enough, you could even walk around that. If you have children, get them to join in too. There will be a time when life starts to feel more ‘normal’ again. Until then, stay strong, stay connected and try to increase your step count.
Physical wellbeing

Sleep

Getting a good night’s sleep

How the pandemic might affect your sleep and how to stay in control.

Have you been having broken or disrupted sleep? Vivid dreams or nightmares?

It’s understandable and you’re not alone.

With such unexpected, unprecedented changes, how you sleep is so incredibly important. It plays a critical role in your physical health and an effective functioning immune system. Quality sleep is also a huge contributor in emotional responses, physical and mental health, helping deter the onset of stress, depression, or anxiety.

Whether you’ve had sleeping problems before COVID-19 or if they’ve only come on recently, there are steps that you can take to try to improve your sleep.

1. Set a routine, and keep to it

Waking. Set your alarm, a fixed time to get every day started will create that normalcy we thrive on. Bedtime. Light reading, stretching, and meditating along with your ‘normal’ preparations for bed like putting on your PJs and brushing your teeth, all prepare your brain to power down. Sleep. Pick a consistent time to turn out the lights and fall asleep. If you wake for 20 minutes or more, get up – do something non-energetic like reading in low light or stretching, and then simply try again.

2. Reserve your bed for sleep

Experts recommend that you should keep your bed for slumber only which trains the brain to focus on recharging. It becomes a warm and comforting sanctuary in which you’ll associate with sleep. ‘Working-from-bed’ or watching a movie/TV should be avoided and kept in a separate part of the home where possible. Segregate your work and activity from sleep – this means you can ‘walk away’ when you need a break too.

3. Daytime naps

Being home all day without a structured routine can make you feel lethargic. While a short power nap early in the afternoon can be useful to some people, monitor how long (just 20 minutes is recommended) you doze for as it can be detrimental to your night time sleep.

4. Stay as active as you can and try to maintain a healthy diet

While it’s advised, running, jogging or walking while maintaining social distancing is a great option. Anything to use your energy stores will assist sleep. There is a wealth of resources online (check out YouTube or social media) for all types and levels of exercise. Be cautious with your intake of alcohol and caffeine and sugar, especially later in the day, as they can all disrupt the quantity and quality of your sleep.
Physical wellbeing
Home working environments

Creating the best working environment at home

Many people already work from home some or all of the time and are well set up to do so. If you are not, there are lots of things you can do to work well at home and prevent discomfort. There are many equipment options to support people working away from the office, but these may not always be available if working from home is needed to be implemented quickly.

You are likely to fall into one of these 4 categories:

1. **Good equipment already in place**
   If you fall into this category you are likely to have a desk, adjustable chair, screen raiser/laptop stand, separate keyboard and mouse.

2. **Some equipment provided**
   You may have a screen raiser/laptop stand, separate keyboard and mouse. If this is the case, as well as the posture advice, you may also want to consider:
   - Being creative to achieve a well-supported seated position
   - Use towels, cushions, pillows or a wedge to get your seated height to the suitable level.
   - Make sure the small of your back is supported with a cushion/rolled towel.
   - If you need a footrest, use an old book, file or box.

3. **Minimal equipment provided**
   You only have a separate keyboard and mouse as well as your laptop. So additional advice you may want to consider:
   - Find a way to raise your laptop, a tin, a plastic box, books or file.
   - Please note if the items you stand the laptop on are flammable, add a mat or tray under your laptop.

4. **No additional equipment provided**
   If you only have your portable device, you can still take care of yourself and your working environment by:
   - Using the tips above to get a better position and support from a chair.
   - Perform simple exercises regularly to stretch.
   - Take a break from your screen to stretch and re-focus your eyes, every 15 minutes.

No matter the situation, you can look after yourself by regularly moving and taking breaks. Plan your day and if any tasks so not require you to be using your device move away. Tasks like conference calls, reading documents, thinking, making notes could be done on a sofa, easy chair or even lying on the floor. We all get so used to staying in one place during the day, we need to change this habit.
Team working at a distance

For some of us, working from home is nothing out of the ordinary. For others, it might be a completely new experience. Whichever applies to you, the most important thing is that you stay connected with your colleagues.
Team working at a distance
Some top tips

You can’t support the wellbeing of others if you don’t look after yourself

To stay well, you need to consider your physical, mental, financial and social wellbeing – and there’s lots of support and advice available for everyone. Take a proper lunch break, get outside if you can (keeping your distance from others), practice mindfulness and make digital connections via social media and video chats. By doing these things to support your own wellbeing, and telling your colleagues about them, it can support everyone’s wellbeing.

Don’t let the fact that you and your team might be working remotely mean that it creates an ‘always on’ culture. Create working times to suit you and your colleagues, and stick to them. Perhaps create a routine that symbolises the end of your working day. Rest and recharging (physically and mentally) is really important to your wellbeing. If you are a manager and supporting your team, then you need to look after yourself too, giving yourself time to deal with the issues you yourself are facing.

Top 6 tips to support your wellbeing whilst working from home

1. **Check in**
   - Check in with colleagues regularly – even if it’s just for a quick chat.

2. **Be flexible**
   - Be flexible and offer to help where you can.

3. **You can’t do everything**
   - Recognise you can’t always do everything – and nor can your colleagues.

4. **Take breaks**
   - Take regular breaks and a lunch break – encourage your colleagues to do the same.

5. **Be kind**
   - Be kind to each other – and try to understand each other’s unique situations.

6. **Raise concerns**
   - Raise any concerns with your manager – they’re there to help.
Team working at a distance
Digital meetings

How to lead virtual meetings

Establish virtual meeting principles with your team
- Does every meeting need an agenda?
- How often do we meet and when?
- How do we hear the voices of everyone?

Create a safe environment
By creating a few ground rules on how we interact with one another, such as not interrupting each other, accepting all ideas equally and not being judged, ‘out of the box’ suggestions are encouraged and listened to.

Be a brilliant virtual meeting host
- Try and get familiar with the technology you are using.
- Bring energy and purpose to your gatherings, be ready to be flexible and adapt to the needs of the participants.
- Try and be the first in the room so you can meet and greet your participants.
- Consider adjusting start times to allow for things like comfort breaks, and give the host space to be prepared and ready to go.

Keep the participants engaged
- Avoid the temptation to dive straight into business, a few moments of friendly chat before a meeting lightens the mood and strengthens the bonds of the group.
- Embrace check ins and check outs. Encourage everyone to contribute from the start.
- Listen out for the silence. Some characters are naturally more vocal and confident in these conditions than others. Invite contributions so everyone gets a say.
- Consider catching up 1-1 with anyone who appears to be struggling to contribute and establish a way that works for them and allows them to maintain a sense of belonging.

TOP 6 TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL TEAMS

1 Stay connected
It’s essential that teams make space and time to gather. Combining daily catch up’s to discuss the work, with weekly meetings to chat through how things are going works really well for some teams. Having cameras on keeps everyone engaged and strengthens bonds.

2 Embrace the technology
Wherever possible, take advantage of the collaboration tools to simplify communication. That way everyone can engage in discussion and share key information.

3 Take a break with a virtual coffee
These breaks keep the social bonds of teams strong. Why not do something together, collectively, as a team? e.g. virtual parties with music, drinks and nibbles.

4 Do the basics brilliantly
Having frequent and valuable conversations with your teammates should be a priority. Scheduling one-to-ones and team meetings as far in advance as possible is a great way to stay connected.

5 Trust each other
Working remotely gives everyone the opportunity to step up and take independent ownership over their tasks. It’s a great time to for everyone to embrace greater responsibility over their work and deadlines.

6 Watch out for presenteeism
Don’t fall into the trap of trying to always be available. Focus on delivering outcomes and outputs and take time throughout the day to have your lunch break and sign off from work when the day is done.

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Bringing your work home with you might be nothing new, but bringing the entire working week home is a new experience for many people.
Family matters
Work - life balance

I’ve been a permanent homeworker for around 10 years and currently work in a team with six people. Homeworking took quite a while to get used to. With the work I do, I’m not governed by particular hours. But I used to feel that I had to show I was online and would feel guilty about taking breaks. Over time, I learnt that as long as I put the work in and achieved the right outcomes, I could be flexible with my time.

My advice is: don’t feel guilty. Work as you would in the office. It’s easy to forget that in the office, someone might stop you for a chat, or a walk to make a cup of tea. It’s important to replicate that at home, so you don’t feel like you’re on your own. Get to know the technology, book in regular meetings with your colleagues and make the effort to check they’re OK. If you feel alone or that you lack support, don’t be afraid to speak to your leader.

Overall, I love it. I can fit work around what I need to do. I’m here for my child, I don’t have to wait by the front door for deliveries and I can watch the dog, who breaks up the day by barking!

ANDREA BLAKELOCK LEARNING INNOVATION CONSULTANT, PEOPLE FUNCTION, AVIVA

If you’re directly impacted by the school closures and now face juggling your job and childcare:

Be realistic about what you can achieve. Don’t try and be all things to all people; try to create a balance between looking after your children and meeting the demands of your job.

Communicate with your manager and colleagues regularly about what you can and can’t do – discuss expectations, deadlines and ways of working.

Create a structure or activity planner for you and your children, including break times and lunch time, and stick to it! Try to get outside during breaks.

If your children are old enough, agree a set time with your children when you will be able to focus on your work. Be clear about what the children will be doing during this time.

If you have the option to share childcare with a partner or other adult then agree how this will work to the maximum benefit of everyone.
Family matters
Caring for others

If your colleagues are impacted by the school closures
Be patient and supportive; if you’ve never juggled childcare and work, just know that it can be tough. Understand that you may not always have your colleagues’ undivided attention – so if you think they are distracted during a meeting offer to call back later or follow up with an email.

Think about whether you can step in to take on any of the responsibilities your colleague would normally have. Discuss with your colleague whether there is a good time for them to be contacted or a preferred communication method.

Finally, try to maintain a sense of humour. Children will not understand the complexities of what their parents and carers are doing at work and could interrupt meetings with inappropriate comments/noises.

Caring responsibilities
If you have extra caring responsibilities, be realistic about what you can achieve. Don’t try and be all things to all people; try to create a balance between looking after yourself, your caring responsibilities and meeting the demands of your job.

Phone your older relatives and friends and ask if they need anything and let them know if they do, you can help out. And while you’re on the phone, why don’t you have a chat?

You could set up a rota with other family and friends to make sure someone is regularly giving them a ring to see if they’re OK. This might also be a useful time to introduce older relatives and friends to technology that might prove helpful during this period, such as Skype or FaceTime.

Care in the community
If you’re feeling well, why not offer to pick up shopping for an older neighbour or relative who might not be able to do it themselves, or is too worried to go to the shops? If you are helping someone who is self-isolating make sure you leave the shopping on their front doorstep, knock on their door and step back 2 metres while you ensure they safely receive it.

You could help an older person who lives further away from you and isn’t familiar with technology by doing an online shop for them. It’s worth checking before you offer to do so, though, as some services have suspended deliveries due to overwhelming demand.

Why not make homemade cards (which is a great project to do with the kids), send a postcard, even post small gifts to keep people’s spirits up or just write a good old-fashioned letter to an older friend or relative?
Useful resources:
Click on the below titles to access the relevant links

- Coronavirus and your money – money advice service
- Free online education resources
- Samaritans is a registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland, often through their telephone helpline.
- The education hub - A list of free education resources
- The NHS - The NHS have some great information on common postural mistakes.
- Twinkl for school age children
- World Health Organisation
- NHS Digital Apps Library (referenced on page 5)

The Government website here also contains general information on the Coronavirus crisis.