

Make Remote Work Healthier: Ideas for Employees and Families

Overview

Working remotely from home is an ever-increasing phenomenon accelerated by the COVID 19 pandemic. As more people either choose or are required to work from home, they may lose some of the natural wellness supports they may have benefited from such as a healthy snack station, an onsite fitness center, wellness promotional bulletins, and walking partners at work.

A new work environment calls for new approaches. Keep in mind the importance that policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes serve to support sustainable behavior change and think how you might PSE your home.

Create Healthy Policies

Policies can come from HR/work norms or create your own “personal policies” to create daily structure to working at home. Consider the following work and personal policies.

- Use your flexible work schedules to address health and well-being —whether to exercise, volunteer, or go to an appointment.
- Commit to eating a healthy breakfast, lunch, and snacks during work time. You are in full control of the food and beverages in your home and do not have to be tempted by unhealthy foods brought in by co-workers in the office setting.
- Avoid eating at your desk. Make sure mealtime allows time away from the computer to help recharge your batteries.
- Schedule your meetings for 55 minutes and give back 5 minutes to your participants to regroup, take a bio break or mentally shift to the next task.
- Take 5-10 minutes and walk to the end of the block and back twice a day to keep your energy up and reduce sitting marathons.
- Schedule 1-2 hours each day as “no meeting” times to catch up on tasks and meeting assignments.
- Keep to your schedule as much as possible (8 am-4:30 pm) for a better routine and allow for flexible work schedule.

System Changes

- Use your email or phone calendar to remind yourself to take activity breaks. Take a short walk or bike ride, perform chair exercises, free weights, or use the treadmill. Walk to the end of the driveway or around the block.
- Set step (number of steps) or stand-up desk goals (minutes) daily.
- Schedule a virtual lunch with a friend or coworker to strengthen social connection.

- Before starting a staff meeting, commit to not talk about anything work related for 10 minutes. Use the time to get to know each other more and enjoy each other's company.
- Commit to hold walking meetings with co-workers and colleagues and connect/visit by phone. It encourages each other and builds in accountability to be active.
- Consider having a walking virtual staff meeting. One person can stay behind to take notes and share the agenda. Rotate the responsibility of notetaker for future meetings.
- Purchase and prepare food for the work week during the weekend. If you have children, involved them in the process as much as possible. Learn how to select healthy foods and prepare multiple days of lunch and snacks for easy access to healthy options.

Environmental Changes and Cues

There may be opportunities to change your home environment to support a healthier lifestyle. What things currently in the home don't support healthy behavior? Do certain foods need to be less accessible? Does a room need to be decluttered or better organized to exercise/stretch?

- Assess your workstation so that it is ergonomically supportive to your health.
- Consider using a standing desk to build in physical activity and stay alert during meetings.
- Take your phone and headphones on a walk during an online meeting. Invest in noise-reducing headphones to reduce any back noise (pets, children, others in the home or wind and traffic when outside).
- Get the ZOOM/Teams app on your phone so you may stay physically active like taking a walk and participate in required meetings but don't consider this time your breaktime
- Drink a glass of water every 2-3 hours.
- Move to different part of your home for variety throughout the day. You may start in your home office but consider sitting on your porch in a comfortable chair or in the living room to mix things up.
- Clear an area of your home so you can do yoga, stretching exercises or meditation. Use YouTube to find videos on these topics to guide you through sessions.

Other considerations

- Consider virtual classes and webinars.
- Take PTO to stay refreshed throughout the year.
- Check out your Employee Assistance Program.
- Research shows people who work from home can be more productive, but some challenges remain. Eliminate distractions and create healthy boundaries with others at home during work time.

Resources

- 40 Virtual Employee Wellness Program Ideas <https://teambuilding.com/blog/employee-wellness-program>

- 6 Strategies for Successful Wellness with Remote Workers
<https://www.wellsteps.com/blog/2021/03/16/wellness-remote-workers/>
- How to Engage Remote Workers in the COVID era
<https://hrdailyadvisor.blr.com/2020/08/31/the-future-of-corporate-wellness-how-to-engage-remote-employees-in-the-covid-era/>
- Surprising Working From Home Productivity Statistics (2021)
<https://www.apollotechnical.com/working-from-home-productivity-statistics/>

Family Resources

- Develop a list of ideas that support healthy living family members can select from each day.
- Involve your significant other and children into your practices.
- Develop a meal schedule for the week and commit to preparing two meals on the weekend to be used throughout the week. If children are old enough, assign them to prepare parts of the meals. Younger children may help with clean up. Use the prepared meals for the week to eat healthy while at work or on nights when the family schedule is busy with extracurricular activities like sporting and theatre events.
- Discuss well-being ideas during a meal. Come up with open ended questions to spark discussion. How were you able to practice gratitude today while at school? Who at school or work do you recognize that might need an encouraging word? What is one way you can show gratitude towards another? (give a compliment, write a note).
- Address tobacco prevention (education with children about the harms).
- Create a Family Health Policy together and drop in certain activities (see next page).

Our Family Health Policy

The _____ hereby adopts the following healthy lifestyle practices to support

(Family name)

each family members well-being:

This week/month/quarter we will _____ to support healthy eating.

(Drop in activity)

This week/month/quarter we will _____ to support active living.

(Drop in activity)

This week/month/quarter we will _____ to support our emotional and mental health.

(Drop in activity)

To celebrate our success, we will _____!

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