Working from home

During the current COVID-19 health crisis, we are being encouraged to work from home if possible. For many of us, this will be the first time we've had to do this, so we've put together a short guide to help you get the most out of this experience, while being mindful of your own wellbeing.

There are dozens of guides about working from home online which offer a wide range of advice that can become confusing. We've tried to collate this into one short guide and have included some links if you'd like to do further reading on any of the topics.

Preparing you and your environment

1. **Get dressed.** This not only helps to avoid any embarrassment from an unexpected video call, but also helps to put you in a frame of mind for working. Some people like to dress as if they are going to work, while others prefer to dress less formally. There are no rules, so dress in whatever way you feel is most appropriate.

2. **Have a designated workspace.** If possible, have a place that you will always use for working from home, preferably away from any distractions like a TV. This can help you make a distinction between your work and your home life, as it can be easy for the boundaries to become blurred when working from home.

3. **Make sure you have everything you need.** If you are working from home you are not likely to have the same ready access to additional equipment, stationery or IT support. If your employer is asking you to work from home, they have a responsibility to make sure you have the tools to do this. You do too, so it's important to discuss what you will need with your employer and how you will access this.

4. **Communicate with colleagues.** If you work as part of a team, it's important that you try to maintain a way of keeping in touch with each other. This not only makes sure your team can work as effectively as possible but can also help to minimise any feelings you may have of being isolated. You should agree with colleagues how you will keep in touch and it may help to identify definite times for telephone or video calls.

5. **Prepare a 'to do' list for the day.** Love them or loathe them, a 'to do' list can really help you to keep on track while working from home. It's important to be realistic when drawing up your list so that it is achievable and does not become overwhelming. If there is too much on your list the hoovering, ironing or washing the car might suddenly seem far more important than what you need to do that day.

Working from home can provide different challenges for you, and your employer, to look after your wellbeing. Just as you would if working in your employer's premises, it's very important that you both work together to minimise any risks to you when working from home.

Here are some suggestions that should help you to promote your own wellbeing while working from home. Please remember that your own health is very important so you must let your employer know if you are unwell for any reason, particularly if you live alone.

1. **Maintain your regular work pattern.** As far as possible, try to maintain the same start and stop times that you would usually have at work. We understand this can be difficult, particularly if you have caring responsibilities, however keeping to your usual work routine can really help to maintain the boundaries between your work and home life.

2. **Take regular breaks.** If you are using computer equipment, you should be taking short breaks every hour as you would in an office. It can be very easy to lose track of time when working from home as you may not have the usual cues and prompts to take breaks. It's really important to build these breaks into your work pattern. Don't forget to take your lunch break as you usually would. Remember that by law, you should be taking a break of at least half an hour after six hours of working.

3. **Don't forget exercise and fresh air.** If you can, it's a good idea to get some exercise and fresh air. You may not be moving about as much at home as you do in your work place, so a short walk outside may help to refresh you. However, please remember to follow the current guidelines from the government about physical distancing and minimising contact with other people not in your household.

4. **Maintain social contact with colleagues.** One of the biggest risks of working from home is that you might start to feel isolated and lonely. We can all take social contact at work for granted, like chats in the kitchen or catching up while waiting for something to print. When working from home, you're not likely to have the same opportunities to do this, so it's really important to make a point of including social activities in your working day. No-one will mind if you phone a colleague for a quick social chat or you keep in touch by text message. Remember, this could also make a big difference to how your colleagues are feeling.

5. **Keep it clean.** Don't forget to regularly clean any equipment you use for working from home, this includes your phone. Watch this short BBC video of how to do it here.

Further reading (click on each title to open the page)

ACAS guidance on working from home

The Guardian's working from home guide to technology (you may not need everything listed here)