

Westfield Health

# Working from home

A guide on how to work from home safely and productively

[www.westfieldhealth.com](http://www.westfieldhealth.com)





## About Westfield Health

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We're dedicated to making a healthy difference to the quality of life of our customers and the communities in which they live and work.

We inspire and empower each other to be the best that we can be, so we can deliver evidence-based health and wellbeing solutions that support people, communities, and workplaces to be healthier.

We're proud of our not for profit heritage and are passionate about making a healthy difference. We have no shareholders, so the more successful we are the more we can give back to those around us.

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## Introduction

COVID-19 has already brought major changes to the way we work, with many people now working remotely. Though some people regularly work from home, for others, it'll be a major change to their daily routine.

Thinking ahead about how you can establish a healthy work space, structure your day and take care of your mental and physical health will help make sure working from home is a positive, productive experience.

If you're also self-isolating due to coronavirus symptoms or someone in your household being ill, take a look at our Understanding Isolation guide for tips on what isolation should look like as well as resources to keep you busy.

## Understanding COVID-19

There's a family of viruses called coronaviruses that are common all over the world; COVID-19 is a new strain of this type of virus that originated in Wuhan last year.

The main symptoms are fever, a cough and shortness of breath. Sufferers may also feel tired and have aches and pains. If this progresses to pneumonia, it can cause breathing difficulties that require urgent medical support.

Like seasonal flu, it is more dangerous for older people, those with weaker immune systems and people with long-term health conditions.

As the number of cases changes day to day, the most up-to-date figures for the UK can be found on [Public Health England's website](#).

# Setting up your workspace



Just as our usual office or workspace is set up to help us collaborate and do our job productively, it's important to try and create the right working environment at home.

## Creating a workspace

First of all, you need to decide where your work space is going to be.

Try to create yourself a dedicated workspace, even if it's just a corner of your dining room.

Try and find a spot where you're least likely to be disturbed by potential distractions, including children and other family members, who may now be around for all or part of your working day.

This doesn't mean your work area has to be a permanent set-up: it could be an area you only set up during working hours, but it does need to have the equipment and environment you need to work effectively.

Creating a dedicated space will help you have the mindset that when you're there, you're at work. It'll also give some definition between work and home which can be tricky when working remotely.

## Getting the tech sorted

From VPNs to monitors, our home setup can often be very different to the office environment.

If your organisation has an IT team, the first step is to make sure you have their contact details in case you're struggling to get or stay connected.

You may also need to think about alternative ways of keeping in touch in case you're unable to use your usual work equipment or connection.

This could be as simple as exchanging personal mobile numbers and starting a team WhatsApp group.



### Did you know...

There are many free apps out there that can help you keep healthy habits. Take a look at ones like Stretchly, OutStanding, or Micro Breaks.

## Working in healthy way

When you're at work, your employer has a duty of care to make sure that your working environment is safe and any risks have been minimised.

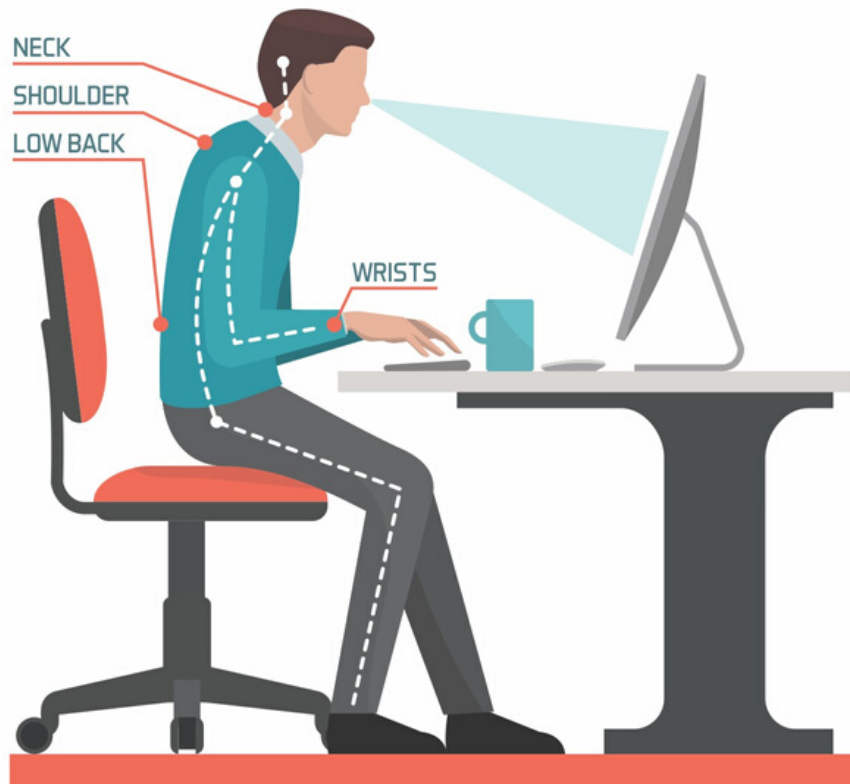
Now that you're creating your own work space at home, it's important to think about how you'll take care of your own health and safety.

That includes not only electrical appliances and furniture, but also the way in which you work.

It's also important to avoid repeated movements or staying in the same position for too long: the easiest way to do this is to vary your tasks so you avoid repeating the same movements for prolonged periods of time using the same parts of your body.

You can also do this by getting up and stretching every so often and making sure you take regular breaks. If you're finding this hard, try setting a timer on your phone to make sure you get up every hour.

Finally, it's really important that you adhere to any arrangements your employer may introduce to reduce risks. This may be through equipment provided, a process for reporting accidents or symptoms of ill health.



**wrong sitting position**

### MONITOR

Adjust distance and height: top of the monitor at eye-level and slightly tilted.

### ARMS

Relax shoulders, forearms parallel to the floor. Minimal bend at the wrist.

### CHAIR

Should have a backrest and armrests, adjust height.

### LEGS

Thighs parallel to the floor.

### FEET

Parallel to the floor, use a footrest if necessary.



- Make sure you have a chair that supports your lower back and allows you to sit up comfortably.
- Be aware that tables and chairs at home can be a different height from standard work stations. For computer work, make sure your chair height allows your forearms to rest comfortably on your work surface so that your elbows are roughly at right angles.
- Some employers may be open to you taking home key pieces of equipment, such as your chair, keyboard and monitor, so be sure to ask your line manager if this is possible.

correct sitting position

# Creating a routine



Working from home gives you more flexibility than working in an office, but it can also lead to the normal boundaries between work and home life becoming blurred. Over time, this can start to take its toll on our mental health, so it's important to think ahead and create a healthy work routine.

## Designing your routine

It's a good idea to put together a clear plan for when it's time to work, when it's time to have a break and when it's time to relax back into home life.

Start by thinking about when you're most productive. You will need to take into account additional responsibilities, such as childcare or caring for others.

A great way to create consistency is to set the same wake-up time and bedtime every day. Why not try getting up at your usual time, getting ready, then using your usual commute time for some morning stretching or to read a book?

Creating a routine will give a sense of stability and structure that will help put you in the right mindset for your working day.

### Questions to ask yourself when designing your routine.

- What times of day am I most productive?
- How can I make the most of those times of day? What tasks should I focus on then?
- When am I likely to get distracted? How can I mitigate that?
- What are the non-work things I enjoy that boost my mood and make me more productive? How can I build those in to my day?
- Is the routine I've outlined not just feasible but sustainable?

Use the template on the next page to design your day.

## Daily routine template

My working hours will be:

I will take breaks at:

The most important task for today is:

Once I've completed that, the next three priorities are:

To look after my health and wellbeing, I will:

Physical wellbeing

Mental wellbeing

Water tracker:





## Sticking to your schedule

It's one thing to create a timetable, but another thing to stick to it!

This discipline is one of the most difficult things to get used to when you first start working from home, but is absolutely key.

Keeping to the working hours you set will also prevent you from over-working which is easy to do when your office is at home.

If you live with others, try sharing your work schedule with them so they know when you'll be around and when you'll need to concentrate.



### Did you know...

1.5 million people in the UK work from home with their main job.

## Promoting productivity

It's impossible to operate at 100% throughout the day. Even the most energetic, dynamic and dedicated person can't be giving it their all, constantly. That means you need to make sure you're taking regular breaks.

Experts agree that the optimum concentration span for the human brain is around 50 minutes, so planning your work schedule in 50-minute blocks and interspersing these with short breaks will allow you to perform more effectively and efficiently throughout the day.

Don't skip your lunch break and make sure you eat away from your workspace. If you really are too busy to take a proper lunch break then make sure you take at least 15 minutes away.

Use your break times to clear your mind, stretch, get outside for some fresh air if you can and connect with others - even if that is via phone.

Breaks allow you to unwind, re-focus and then apply yourself better.

Take a look at the ideas on the next two pages for more information on different productivity techniques you could use.

## Productivity techniques

Everyone has different techniques for managing their workload. In times of change like the coronavirus outbreak, this may lead to additional projects and stress, so it's a good time to think about how to maintain balance by prioritising your tasks.

"If it's your job to eat a frog, it's best to do it first thing in the morning. And if it's your job to eat two frogs, it's best to eat the biggest one first."

Mark Twain

- Do
- Delete
- Delegate
- Defer



### Eat the frog

This comical-sounding technique refers to tackling the job that you fear the most first. Mark Twain coined the original phrase: 'If it's your job to eat a frog, it's best to do it first thing in the morning. And if it's your job to eat two frogs, it's best to eat the biggest one first.' Author Brian Tracy developed the idea into a book in which the central concept is based around doing your worst task first, as it's the one likely to cause most procrastination.

### Practise the four Ds

The four Ds is a task management system that allows you to keep on top of your to-do list. It's particularly helpful as an email management technique. Do – when faced with a task that's quick to complete and important, go ahead and do it. Many tasks can be progressed or dealt with in two minutes. Delete – some requests can be deleted as soon as they arrive. Delegate – can you pass a task on to someone else to carry out? If so, ask someone else to take the job on and complete it for you. Defer – sometimes you simply need to mull something over. A decision might not be possible immediately, and it's fine to wait a while before acting.

### Pomodoro technique

The Pomodoro technique is a method for managing your time. Originally created by software developer Francesco Cirillo, the Pomodoro system encourages you to break your tasks into 25-minute intervals. At the end of every timed interval, you take a short break, recharging your brain in preparation for the next Pomodoro. Every four Pomodoros, take a longer break to boost productivity. One of the most popular time management techniques, Pomodoro helps you stay on top of a busy, ever-changing workload by encouraging you to focus on a single task for a short yet intensive block of time.

## Eisenhower matrix

US President Eisenhower is credited with developing this popular prioritisation technique, now known as the Eisenhower matrix. The idea is that by deciding how important and urgent each task is, you can see which tasks you should focus on first, delegate or put on hold.



# Mental wellbeing



**Whether you enjoy working from home or are worried about it, it can sometimes be lonely - or especially stressful if you're suddenly juggling work and childcare in the same environment.**

Faced with such a big change to our daily routines, it's important to think about how you'll take care of your mental health and stay healthy mentally as well as physically. Here are a few ideas for boosting your mental wellbeing.

## **Talk to your friends and loved ones**

Keep in touch with your friends, loved ones or colleagues. Talking and sharing your thoughts and feelings when you're feeling stressed or anxious can give you a fresh perspective, as well as enable you to process the experience and focus on ways to move forward positively. Although you may not be able to meet in person, you can make use of the telephone, social media and email.

## **Digital detox**

Stay in contact with friends via social media, but try to avoid or mute accounts if you find they are sensationalistic and raising your stress and anxiety levels. You may be finding yourself checking news websites more than usual, so it's a good idea to monitor your usage and consider adjusting the time you're spending on them if you're finding it's having a negative impact on your wellbeing. You need to keep informed, but make sure you're getting your information from reputable sources that provide a balanced view.

## **Be active**

Exercise can help us to manage stress and anxiety as it changes parts of the brain which regulate stress and also provides a distraction from anxious thoughts. Turn ahead to our next section on physical wellbeing (pages 13-15) for ideas and resources on getting active.

## **Calming breathing**

A simple way we can help to control our stress response is through being aware of and controlling our breathing.

Proper breathing physically helps us to relax and calm down and prevents anxiety-associated hyperventilation.

Calming breathing can be used anywhere and at any time to help calm you down and relax. Try the techniques on the next page to get started.



### Calming breathing

- Position yourself in a quiet environment
- Make sure the air temperature is comfortable
- Sit comfortably in a chair or in a relaxed position
- Drop your shoulders naturally, so that your lungs can fully expand
- Gently lift your head and fix your eyes straight ahead of you; don't strain
- Take five slow, steady breaths
- Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth
- Begin 'Calming Breathing' by breathing in easily and gently to the count of three, holding for a second, then breathing out to the same count of three

### Diaphragmatic breathing

- Lie on the floor placing a small pillow under your head and another under your knees (this is optional)
- Place your hands flat across your stomach, with just the tips of your fingers touching
- 'Bell' out your stomach as you breathe in, filling the lower part of your lungs with air (your fingers should move apart) and count to three
- As you breathe out to the count of three, flatten your stomach muscles (your fingers will be drawn together again)



**Did you know...**  
Free mindful breathing and belly breathing tracks that guide you through some simple yet effective breathing techniques are available at [stresscontrolaudio.com](http://stresscontrolaudio.com)

# Keeping active



While working at home, most people won't have access to specialist gym equipment. But this doesn't mean you can't exercise.

Keeping your body active is a great way to break up your day and keep your energy up. Here we've made a list of five of the most effective exercises you can do at home. All you need is some clear floor space.

Start by doing all exercises once. As you get stronger and more confident you can repeat them 3-5 times, increasing as you get stronger.

## NHS exercise guidelines

The NHS guidelines recommend that adults do 150 minutes of exercise a week. That breaks down into five 30-minute sessions.

For more information on the guidelines, visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/>

## Planks

Planks are a great all-round exercise. They're very effective at strengthening your core and they work your shoulders, arms and glutes too. To do a plank, place your hands on the floor shoulder-width apart in the press-up position. Straighten your back by lifting your head slightly, focusing on a spot on the floor about half a metre in front of you. You should be aiming to hold this position for around a minute at a time. To isolate your core further, try a forearm plank. You should follow the instructions as above, but resting your weight on your elbows with your arms out flat in front of you.





## Lunges

Lunges are a great exercise for your legs, working your hips, glutes, quads, hamstrings and core, as well as your inner thighs. To perform a lunge, stand up straight with your legs hip-width apart. Take a long step forward with your right leg so that your foot touches the floor heel first. Lower your body until your right thigh is in line with the floor and your lower leg is vertical. Then, stand up by pushing your right heel into the floor so your back is in your starting position. Repeat these for 10-15 times on each leg. To make it more difficult, try holding something safely and securely in your hands to add weight.

## Mountain climbers

Mountain climbers are a great exercise to raise your heart rate whilst exercising your legs and engaging your upper arms and core. Start in a high plank position, as described above, with your arms shoulder width apart. Bring your left knee up to your chest then return it to the starting position. Repeat the same motion with your right leg. This counts as one repetition. Try to keep your back straight throughout. Repeat this for 10-12 reps. The faster you do it, the harder it will be.



## Squats

Squats are a lower body exercise that work your legs and glutes and help to improve lower body mobility. To do a squat, stand with your legs shoulder width apart and your feet either pointing forwards or slightly out to the side, whichever feels more comfortable. Slowly sit back, bending your knees whilst pushing out backwards, keeping your knees behind your toes. Try to squat until your hips are lower than your knees. If you can't get this far down then keep practising! Then stand up, keeping your back straight throughout. Repeat this 10-12 times.



## Press-ups

Press-ups are one of the most popular bodyweight exercises that are very effective at strengthening your chest, core, triceps and shoulders. As with all exercises, it's very important that you have good form. Place your hands on the floor, shoulder width apart. Put your feet straight out behind you, until your back is straight.



The movement starts by moving your chest to the floor, then pushing back up into the starting position. Keep your hips in line with your shoulders throughout and your elbows tucked into your sides. The closer your chest gets to the floor the better. If you find this too difficult then try them with your knees on the floor.



