



# PRIORITIZE YOUR MENTAL WELLNESS WHILE WORKING FROM HOME

**COVID-19** is having major ramifications on employment, in Canada and around the world. With many people losing their jobs, and others deemed essential facing the virus from the front lines, those who can work from home are in an enviable position. But working from home comes with its own stresses, which must be addressed to create a healthy work environment.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada has compiled six suggestions for those working from home. While these cannot address all the underlying challenges, taking even a small step toward prioritizing mental wellness will mean you're moving in the right direction.

## 1 Understand that this is an adjustment for everyone

Employers and employees alike have been forced to make major adjustments in the way they work. Most employers aren't used to managing all their staff members remotely, and most employees aren't used to accomplishing their tasks from home. Projects are on hold, teams are split up, technical support is focused on organizational priorities, and the list goes on. Under these conditions, it's helpful to remember a couple of things:

- Everyone is trying to get their bearings and settle into this new "normal."
- Some colleagues are facing additional personal challenges, such as looking after their children while schools and daycares are closed, caring for someone with a physical or mental illness, or dealing with less income because their spouse has been laid off.

Whatever the circumstances, now is the time to show compassion rather than frustration.

## 2 Don't feel guilty if it's hard to focus

It's OK if you're finding it hard to concentrate right now. In a global pandemic where every day brings more uncertainty, distractions are natural. Concerns over our health and that of our loved ones or about our finances are expected, and they take a toll on our ability to process information.

Stress can hamper the brain's ability to focus. It can even reduce memory. So don't feel bad if you're not performing at your usual level. The fact is, this isn't business as usual. Be kind to yourself and take solace in the knowledge that you're doing your best.

## 3 Make use of any resources at your disposal

Now is not the time to practise stoicism. With pressure coming at you from all angles, it's important to make use of every support you have to make work more feasible – be it an employee assistance program, a remote counselling service, or an open conversation with your supervisor or human resources team.

If your home situation requires extra flexibility, look into your options. That might mean working at off-peak times to trade child-care shifts with your spouse or reducing hours to accommodate caring for a vulnerable family member. Be honest about your challenges, and don't be afraid to ask for what you need.

## 4 Maintain a regular schedule as much as possible

In these uncertain times, establishing a routine can be helpful for curbing your anxiety. Keeping fixed hours will help you set clear boundaries between work and free time. If you can, commit to a start and an end time as well as to your breaks, while leaving room for flexibility. After all, if the coronavirus has taught us anything, it's that even the most concrete routines can be upended.

When it's time to disconnect for the day, do so completely. With work so easily accessible and fewer alternatives to fill time at home, it's tempting to check emails and perform work tasks at all hours of the day. All the same, it's more important to stick to the schedule and give yourself time to mentally unwind.

## 6 Make time for human connection throughout the day

Socializing at work, even if just a short "hello" at the coffee maker, is a cornerstone of the workplace experience. With everyone now working at a distance, it's more important than ever to bring that human connection back into your workday.

If you have someone at home with you, chat with them periodically throughout the day. Stay in regular contact with colleagues, whether it's work related or just to say hello. Make an effort to call or video chat (when possible) rather than limiting all your communication to email. Above all, reach out to people. Check in with someone and ask how they're doing. We may be tackling our jobs alone, but we're all facing this new reality together.

## 5 Include physical movement in your day

Even moderate exercise has been shown to elevate mood, increase self-confidence, boost memory and brain functioning, and decrease stress. To help make the most of your workday, take small breaks to move your body and get your blood flowing. Consider walking around the house while taking a phone call or using your lunch break to do a short yoga routine.

The benefits of physical activity outside your workday will find their way into your work. Don't discount the effect an evening walk can have on boosting your mood or memory the following day. Exercise can also improve sleep quality, strengthening the body's immune system in the process.

For more information, visit [www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/covid19](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/covid19)



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