

Supporting disabled employees working from home

Employees not used to working from home will need support and advice on movement and exercise in order to stay comfortable and healthy.

Be aware too that the home conditions of some employees might not be conducive to home working – e.g. if they share accommodation, have small children or children who need to be home schooled because schools are closed, or they are unable to send their children to school. This might make it difficult for them to be as productive.

Some employees might also struggle with the isolation particularly if they live alone and might find it difficult to motivate themselves. Managers need to be alert to this and find ways of ensuring that they check in with the home workers regularly.

Here are some suggestions but note that not everything will work for everyone. This is an unprecedented situation, so be forgiving of yourself and others as you go through a trial and error period to find what works for you and your colleagues.

Staying in touch

- Establish daily meetings with your team at the start of every day using video conferencing. You could make joining voluntary and the agenda simply for everyone to say how they are feeling and provide an update on what they are doing. Be sure to use a method that includes everyone though including people who use assistive technology and might need an interpreter or captioning.
- Be flexible and perhaps allow employees to schedule their work for different times from usual to allow them to care for children or other family members. This might mean that they work in the evenings or start early in the day.
- Let colleagues know that just because some colleagues are sending emails very early or late in the day does not mean that they need to be responded to at those times.

- Set up WhatsApp, Slack or Signal groups with your team. However, if these are to share jokes or videos, they might not be for everyone and let people know it's okay to leave the group or opt out of receiving notifications.
- Some employees might, however, be struggling with communication overload as everyone communicates via email, Teams or social media apps. Consider sending out guidelines that say that people should refrain from copying in too many people into emails and from clicking "reply all" when responding. Meeting acceptances don't always need to notify the organiser of the meeting either. Finally think about scheduling meetings for 45 minutes rather than an hour so as to leave space between meetings for people to move and take a break.

Staying active

- Schedule regular "activity breaks" – e.g. at 11.30am every day and again at 3.30pm. If you send invitations for these to your teams, they can be reminded by their computers that this is time to move.
- Suggest activity that can be done indoors – e.g. dancing/chair dancing or yoga by sharing free short online yoga, Pilates, dance or fitness videos. You could ask colleagues to share their favourites.
- Ask colleagues to share their exercise regimes and perhaps pictures from their walk, run or cycle ride.

Staying well

- Some people struggle to set boundaries and switch off when working from home. **Encourage colleagues to work their individual hours and then log off** from the email rather than staying "on" all the time. Actively discourage checking emails and work social media groups out of hours
- Other colleagues might struggle with the change in routine. People managers can help by talking to the individual and **establishing a new normal routine** for the day that they can follow.
- There is a great deal of advice on the internet on how to work from home. This can make some people feel anxious and that they are "doing it wrong". Reassure colleagues that **there is no "right" way** to do this and that it is okay for them to take the time to find what works for them.
- Encourage colleagues to **switch off from reading rolling news bulletins**, receiving push notifications from news sites on their phones and from social media and groups to which they might belong. A constant barrage of negative news can make people very anxious. It is easier said than done, but try only to catch up with the just news at the beginning and end of the working day and perhaps lunchtime. Try to work the rest of the time in peaceful silence or with calming music.

- **Try to stick to regular meal breaks** rather than snacking throughout the day just because the fridge is easy to access.
- **Stay hydrated.** There might no water cooler at home but perhaps it would be easier to stay hydrated if colleagues filled their usual water bottles and had them to hand. Alternatively setting an alarm that tells you to get a drink might encourage breaks to get to the sink, kettle or fridge.



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