

Mental health and wellbeing while working from home

Covid-19 has changed the way we all work. All organisations, charities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are having to change the way their workers complete tasks during this pandemic.

With many workers around the world having to work from home, taking care of your mind as well as your body is really important.

During this time, they may begin to experience a range of emotions including boredom, frustration and loneliness. They may also feel 'low', anxious, or depressed over issues such as health and finances.

Whilst it is important to remember that this situation is temporary, the tips and suggestions listed below are things you can do now to help you keep on top of your mental health and wellbeing.



Health promotion for workers

Encourage healthy sleeping

Workers should try to have plenty of sleep. This can help workers to stay healthy, be more productive and to recover if they develop or have had symptoms of Covid-19 or other illnesses.

Stand regularly

Remote workspaces may be different from usual working environment set-ups.

It is important for workers to take regular rest breaks and to stand up often to experience health benefits.

Extra movements including stretching and physical exercise can enhance the health benefits. For more general information on standing at work and the associated health effects, see www.iosh.com/sit-less-move-more.

Eat nutritious food where possible

A healthy diet can help the body fight off infection and raise overall health levels.

Encourage workers to partake in controlled breathing exercises

Deep and controlled breathing can help workers to relax when stressed. The process also switches brain activity to a different section of the brain which encourages more rational decision-making processes.

Encourage workers to allow ultraviolet (UV) light into rooms

UV can help workers to feel less isolated and can help eliminate feelings of loneliness.

Encourage good standards of hygiene

Educate workers in the importance of good personal hygiene and maintaining clean work equipment, eg wiping keyboards with cleaning products. Encourage workers to follow government public health advice regarding hygiene.

Encourage workers to plan their upcoming financial situation and offer support where possible

Workers may need to adopt and plan for short-term lifestyle changes to consolidate or utilise finances more efficiently. Offering support for this task may help to reduce the potential for unhealthy stress levels.



Adopt a positive mindset and provide positive yet realistic messages

Provide positive information to workers

It is still important to educate workers about the virus and its symptoms. However, this can be supported with positive stories and positive images of people who have experienced Covid-19 and have recovered or who have supported somebody through recovery. This can create more positive mindsets and provide rationality, logical thinking and reassurance.

Reassure workers with positive messages

Inform workers that it is ok to be fearful, apprehensive, angry and frustrated in the given situation. These are normal responses. However, encourage workers to accept the current situation, consider multiple factors (all the received information), focus on positive media stories and to think calmly, rationally and logically. Offer support.

Motivate workers through praise

Ensure that workers are rewarded for their work. Workers may be naturally fearful, and a morale boost can help to raise wellbeing to a more positive state. A simple 'well done' or a 'smile' (whilst on a teleconferencing call for example) can make a difference.

Control workloads and deadlines:

Provide varied tasks (if possible) – try to offer some variety of work to allow dynamic thinking and working. This will help to provide fresh cognitive challenges and allow workers to feel stimulated, motivated, and productive.

Allow flexibility

To help workers manage their own health and that of others allow them to take extra rest breaks if required and to address other concerns or issues alongside their remote working. Ensure that work deadlines and timescales are reasonable as this will help to reduce stress.



Consider terminology and social labelling

Do not use derogatory, damning or social labelling terminology

Individuals should not be referred to as 'Covid cases', 'Covid victims', 'Covid families' etc as this can have negative social effects. It can also cause individuals to feel victimised, social outcasts and isolated in a time of isolation.



Advise on information gathering

Provide clear and positive information to workers

Help to deter workers from obtaining information from negative or unaccredited sources, such as that sometimes found on social media platforms.

Encourage workers to listen and follow public advice

The government will provide ongoing updates and general public advice. Organisations can reinforce such messages and ensure that the correct advice is distributed to its workers.

Advise on when to seek public health information

Advise workers to seek public advice at specific times during the day (once or twice a day) and from reputable sources. This can help to reduce the overwhelming amount of potentially fearful information. It can also help organisations to supply positive information and messages.



Relaying the human message

Encourage workers to be compassionate to themselves and towards others

This will provide them with self-reward and will offer support to others. This can allow them to lead by example and inspire others to do the same.

Encourage workers to support each other

This not only includes other workers, but family, friends, vulnerable people and others. This can encourage unity.

Remind workers of the organisational core values, attitudes and behaviours

Embed them in messages and demonstrate them through managerial leadership.



Organisation support

Here are some organisational considerations to manage and prevent the potential for negative wellbeing or mental ill-health.

Communicate the organisational plan

Be open and honest with all workers and ensure clarity. The workers have a right to know what the organisation is doing to help protect its workers, their families, friends and others, and the organisation itself.

Keep in regular contact with remote workers

This will help to avoid feelings of isolation and loneliness. It's a good way to ensure that workers are well and that they understand information and instructions presented to them.

Use varied methods of communication

Teleconference-based calling should be the preferred option as this can introduce visual human interface. Although, telephone, email and social media engagement may still be used to supplement communication.

Use physical distancing for groups of people

Ensure must-have group meetings and engagements follow government physical distancing advice. This may be in the form of teleconference-based calling, forums, group emails, etc.

Disability support

Ensure that coaching support and remote-based organisation still takes place for those who require additional support. Encourage workers to send photographs to highlight any potential issues or adjustment queries.

Set boundaries between working and non-working hours

Allow workers to disengage from work when they are required to. Avoid sending communications during this period unless it is an absolute necessity. This will allow workers to continue a healthier work-life balance.

Encourage workers to discuss wellbeing and mental ill-health concerns

This can help to alleviate symptoms and prevent them from worsening. It also allows managers the opportunity to adopt preventative measures.

For more information on mental health and psychosocial considerations during the Covid-19 outbreak, see the World Health Organization (WHO) at www.who.int.

For more information visit
www.iosh.com/coronavirus/wfh-mental-health

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