

Working from home guide

In this guide:

- Tips for arranging your workplace
- Solutions for the biggest pitfalls of working from home
- Advice from our experts in the areas of ergonomics, psychology and vitality

For more information, see humancapitalcare.nl.

Pitfalls that you can identify and solve

Working from home once again has become the norm. Regardless of the many advantages of working from home, such as freedom, higher productivity and better balance between work and private life, there are also pitfalls. In this area, we have gained a great deal of experience in the recent months. Therefore, it is important to know what the pitfalls are and how to deal with them. In this guide, we will answer the question of how you can deal with the new – temporary – reality of collective work from home and particularly, how do you stay healthy, happy and productive.

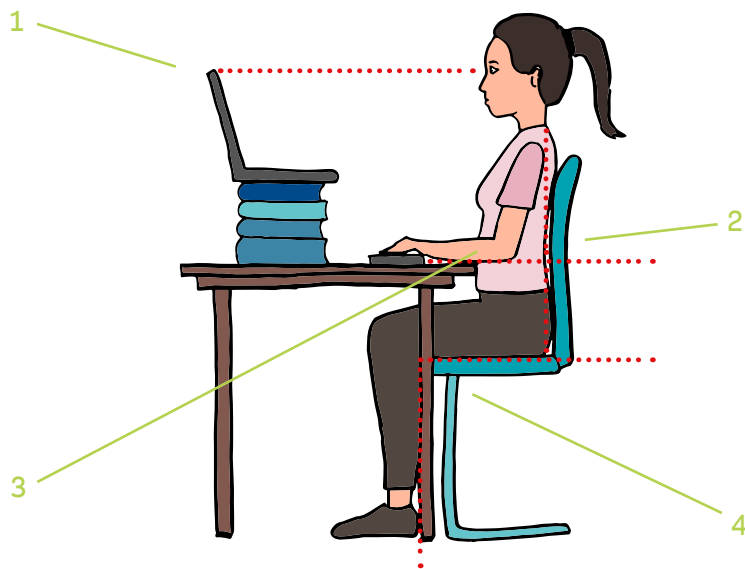
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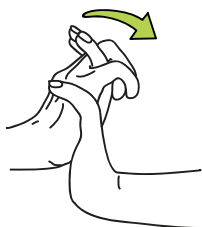
Arranging your workplace

A workplace at home with a laptop can also be arranged as optimally as possible. Do that together with an expert via our [home-workplace check](#), or use the tips of our ergonomist, Lennart Bron.



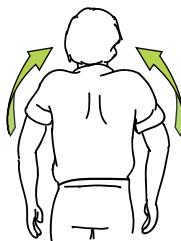
1. The top side of the screen is just under eye level.
2. Your back is straight.
3. Your forearms are supported on the worktop.
4. Knees and elbows are at an angle of 90 degrees.

Pull and stretch exercises



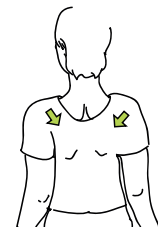
Arms and wrists

Always start with a warm up of your wrist. Interlock your fingers and twist your wrists round and round. Do this for approximately 1 minute.



Neck, back and shoulders

Pull your shoulders up and then let them sink down. Exhale when relaxing.



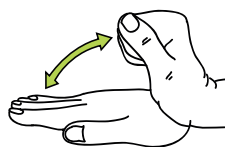
Neck, back and shoulders

Sit up straight and pull your shoulder blades backwards and downwards.



Neck, back and shoulders

Place your arms over each other and stretch your elbows forward, rounding your back.



Arms and wrists

Place your forearm with your hand flat on the table. Make a fist and raise your hand without moving your forearm. Afterwards place your hand flat again on the table.



Neck, back and shoulders

Sit up straight and turn your head as far as possible past your shoulder. Now do the same exercise in the other direction.

Tips for a good work posture

- Do you have an office workplace at home? Use this place just as you would in the office.
- Facing in the direction of daylight is tiring. It is preferable to have the window behind you or at your side.
- Do you have an office chair by the dining table?
 - Set the armrests in a way that gives your arms good and relaxed support.
 - Raise the seat of the chair so that the armrests are at the level of the table top.
 - Place something under your feet for a horizontal support of your legs.
- If you don't have an office chair, try to raise the height of your chair in another way. The intention is to rest your forearms on the table without needing to raise your shoulders.
- Place the keyboard a bit further away so that your arms are resting properly on the table. Sit with a straight back and avoid leaning forward over the desk
- If possible, use a separate keyboard and screen. The top edge of the screen should be just under eye level. No separate screen? Then place your laptop on a raised surface (for example a pile of books).
- Alternate sitting every 30 minutes with moving about: walk around (for example when on the phone) or do some stretching exercises. Perhaps use pause software, such as Workrave.
- Also sit regularly for 30 minutes on the sofa or armchair with your laptop on your lap. You can place pillows under your elbows for support.
- If you use the phone often, it is more relaxed to use a hands-free phone. Use earplugs/headphone or the speaker function.

Watch our animation: [a good workplace is quickly set](#).



Lennart Bron

European certified ergonomist, HumanCapitalCare



It is important that you stand up often, alternate position and move about throughout the day. This prevents physical problems and keeps you mentally alert. Don't dive into your laptop. Connect a keyboard and set up a screen somewhat higher, for example on a shoebox. If you have room for a separate screen to use alongside, that works far better than using a small laptop screen. Sufficient, even and effective lighting enhances your viewing comfort.

Workplaces that are not adjustable, such as a kitchen table, pose added burden for your shoulders and neck. Raise your chair using a pillow if you are sitting at a high table and find yourself raising your shoulders excessively.

Arranging your days as working days

Normally, it is clear when your working day starts and when it ends. When you're working from home, this boundary gets blurred. It is therefore important to set boundaries for yourself. This helps you structure your day. This is how you can make your day structured:

- Get up at your normal time (perhaps deduct your commuting time and then enjoy an extra hour in bed).
- Follow your daily routine of showering and getting dressed. It is tempting to stay in your pyjamas or bathrobe in the house, but as soon as you get dressed, you get into a different mood. You are more focused, sharper and more productive.
- If you don't have an office at home, try to organise a place intended only for work.
- Also set the boundaries for your family members. For example: a closed door means Do Not Disturb. Formulate clear agreements with your partner regarding work times, certainly if you both also have to take care of the kids.
- Take enough breaks and don't forget to have lunch. Working in a stressful and focused manner for too long periods will be at the expense of creativity, productivity and will result in increased incidents of stress.
- Define a clear start and end of your working day. Indicate clearly when you are available and reachable; for yourself, your colleagues and your manager.
- Just like on normal working days, go to bed on time. You will then start the next working day well rested.



Louise Hildebrand “
Psychologist, HumanCapitalCare

The current situation of corona and working from home can lead, for example, to mental pressure and a restless feeling. An easy method for achieving more physical and mental calmness is to train daily in good breathing. This may seem like an astonishing tip (entirely from a psychologist) because people simply breathe by themselves. I like making a comparison with sitting at a computer or laptop. Everyone can do that, yet not everyone sits in the best way at a computer or laptop. Take for example a bent back or raised shoulders, which ultimately leads to the developing physical problems. The same applies to breathing. Poor breathing can lead to all sorts of mental problems. When you learn to breathe better, you experience more restfulness, focus, energy and relaxation.

Good breathing means in general: breathing deeply, breathing calmly and breathing with regular intervals. When breathing in, you can expand your belly and when breathing out, you can pull back.

In my consulting room, I notice daily that much can be gained from proper breathing. An easy breathing exercise, for example, is breathing in on 4 counts and breathing out on 4 counts. Eventually, you can expand this exercise to 8 counts. Try this for 5 minutes per day. A good investment of your time with lots of benefits!

Setting boundaries to prevent blurring

If the work domain invades the private domain, this can lead to blurring. The boundary between the two worlds fades, eliminating the distance between one and the other. Consequently, the phone or the laptop also lies next to you in the evening while you're watching TV and every mail that comes in immediately gets your attention. If you then take the laptop with you to the bedroom 'to just go thru a few emails', then the boundary is totally lost. Being constantly 'turned on/connected' means that you don't take any distance from your work and the issues related to it. Your body continues to produce stress hormones and this can even upset your night's rest. To maintain good mental health, it is important to prevent blurring.

The causes of blurring

One of the reasons for blurring is that working from home reduces the clear boundaries of your job. You are no longer physically at your workplace for eight hours. That can feel liberating because you can divide your hours as you like. However, this also has a reverse side. If at home you close your laptop at 17:00, no one has seen that you actually worked a full day. You do not want to appear as someone who cuts corners and therefore the risk is that you might be inclined to work more hours. The thought behind this is 'better safe than sorry', certainly due to reports of an upcoming recession and rising unemployment.

The most important reason for this is the lack of clear boundaries, and especially the visibility of results. Often, there are fewer adequate agreements made and therefore, employees look for measurable ways to prove that they are working hard and putting in many hours. Obviously, the most common factor is time. Sometimes this takes extreme forms when colleagues call or mail each other late in the evening. This puts further pressure on the balance between work and private life.



Defining working hours to prevent blurring

1. Where do you work?

To prevent blurring, it is important that you set strict boundaries, also regarding where you work. Therefore, make sure that you don't take your work and anything related to it to your 'safe haven' or to the place where you always relax. If you have your laptop or work telephone in bed, you are introducing your work domain into your bedroom. In the long run, you will connect your bedroom (or your feel-good spot) to the stress created by your work.

Look for a place where you can work undisturbed. Ideally is a room with a door that you can close after your working day. If you don't have such a room, then at least designate a corner in a room as a work corner. Use that work corner only for your work.

2. When do you work?

Your manager also plays an important role in preventing blurring. Discuss with your manager the expectations regarding availability and reachability. Make agreements about when you must be reachable and the hours that you will work. Make sure that it is clear when you will be working and when your working day is finished.

3. What do you do?

In order to clearly show and measure that you are working hard – in a way other than investing lots of time – make agreements about output. Quite often it is unclear what has to be delivered at the end of the day, so many employees are left with a nagging question: "have I really done enough?" And the drawback of this question is the fear that you have worked inadequately, accompanied by the anxious thoughts about the consequences. Therefore, make clear agreements with your manager about output and results. Ensure that these goals are feasible, measurable and solid.

Switching on and off

Ensure structure. Set your alarm clock, get dressed and start your day. That defines a clear start of your day and makes it easier to switch off when your work is done.



Set goals

Set realistic and small goals for the content of your work, which you can later tick off as done. Be aware that you cannot be productive for eight hours long in your workplace, so don't expect this at home either.



Set boundaries

What is work time and what is private time.

For this purpose, dedicate a place in your home intended for work. If you don't have a work room, then it is sufficient to create a work corner. Work only there, so you can also walk away from it.

Self-management

Be aware that you are the one who must manage your working day, because the context - the work floor - is temporarily gone. Therefore, deploy good self-management, so that you not only work well, but you can also relax when you need it.



How to stay productive

There is nothing more frustrating than working hard the whole day and at the end of the day feeling that you actually have not progressed at all. You might also feel guilty or anxious because you still have lots of work to do, but that you lack an overview of it and thereby a grip on the situation.

Concentration in a normal working day

A normal working day at the office rarely consists of eight consecutive hours of concentrated work. There are many brief interruptions and distractions. That is exactly why you can focus and concentrate reasonably well throughout the day. The concentration span of an average person is actually just over 20 minutes. The brief interruptions usually enable you to have short breaks and afterwards you can once again direct and sustain your attention. This is also good for a balance of hormones (especially generating and breaking down the stress hormones).

Tips for a productive working day at home

In general, there are fewer external disruptions when you work at home. Consequently, you might find yourself easily sitting for hours at your computer. Therefore, use these tips:



Define your working hours

Make good agreements with your colleagues, manager and your family about when you are available and reachable for work. Stick to your agreements.



Short periods of focus

Work in short and defined periods. You will be more effective if you alternate short periods of focus, concentration and goal orientation with short periods of relaxation.



Setting goals

Set realistic and feasible goals. Divide these goals into smaller sub-goals. Create a well-arranged task list for this purpose.



Reward yourself

Reward yourself for the goals achieved: a short break, a chat with a housemate or call a colleague, read an article in your favourite magazine or have a cup of coffee or tea with a snack. Ticking off the goals you've achieved gives you a sense of control and satisfaction. Certainly at the end of a working day, it is wonderful to look back at what you have achieved.

Staying connected

Some of the most common complaints expressed by people who have been working at home for a long period are the lack of social contact and the loss of connection with others. Certainly now that we all maintain social distance in order to contain the corona virus. Some people even experience a considerable degree of social isolation. You might feel lonely, resulting in emotional problems, such as gloominess or depression. Loneliness also makes you feel less motivated and makes you less productive. It is important to stay connected and to use all the available communication means for that purpose.

Social support as a source of energy

Social support (from colleagues and from the manager) is an important source of energy at work. Social support entails various things. It is the appreciation that you get from your manager for “a job well done”, but also for the help that a colleague offers if you are struggling with a difficult problem. And it is the cosy feeling that people experience at a workplace. This source of energy largely falls away if the interaction at the workplace is gone.

Stay digitally connected

The new technology can improve many things in the new situation. By now, many departments work with Teams, Hangouts, Zoom or other applications. At the private level, video calls with family members are well established. And although the latest technology can never replace personal contact, it is giant step forward compared to the radio silence that earlier generations would have had to cope with in a similar situation. Use these means of communication and stay connected.



Tips for staying connected

- If you think it would be helpful, you can decide with your manager to have a video call every day (perhaps both at the start and at the end of the day). This is an opportunity to discuss matters and clarify what needs to be done and what has been done already.
- Use video conference calls for meetings. But please note: a video conference with a large group becomes rapidly chaotic. Agree in advance upon the agenda, don't make the meeting too long and if one of the participants has to speak for a longer time, agree then that the rest will go on 'mute'. Let everyone speak their mind and ignore periods of silence.
- After joint meetings, create sub-groups of two or three people who will continue afterwards to stay in contact with each other by video.
- Set up a WhatsApp group with your team or department. Keep one another informed about developments, but also share personal happenings and look for contact, just as you would do at your workplace. If needed, there can be a separate group for business matters and a group for informal messages.
- Ensure a positive tone in the communication. Appreciation, compliments and boosts are great to receive and perhaps even easier to give (and to receive) via WhatsApp or a business chat as opposed to one-on-one. Value each other's efforts. This is a stressful period, including sad news and the worries about everything that this virus could cause. Removing the sense of isolation is ever so important.
- Remember that your colleagues are in the same boat. You might be feeling gloomy or lonely, but your colleagues might be feeling exactly the same way. Help yourself and at the same time others by being attentive to staying in contact. Call each other, send a message or let each other know that you're there for one another.
- Continue to celebrate your colleagues' birthdays and make room in your schedule for a joint coffee or lunch break.

Remote coaching in case of mental strain

Since the start of the corona virus, many people experience mental strain, for example by the imbalance between work and private life, by gloominess from little social contact or by the additional worries about one's health or the health of family or friends. 'Remote Coaching' is exclusive for the employees of HumanCapitalCare customers.

Being attentive to having a healthy lifestyle

It is obvious that moving/exercising and a healthy diet are always essential for a good life. As a result of the corona virus, it is probably even more important to stay fit. With these tips from our vitality & health experts, you will exercise and eat in a healthy manner while working from home.

Positive impact of a healthy diet

Eating nutritious food has a positive impact on both your physical and mental health. Eating healthily:

- Provides more energy and so you feel fitter.
- Ensures better performance.
- Helps you in coping better with stress.
- Promotes better night rest.
- Helps maintain your weight.
- Reinforces your immune system and therefore, reduces the chance of infections.
- Helps reduce the risk of certain diseases (diabetes type 2, cardiovascular diseases, certain types of cancers).

It might be difficult to eat healthy food when you are working from home or perhaps – because of the corona virus – you are not permitted to work while you would like to do so. Tips: Try out a nice new recipe or spend more time in the kitchen preparing fresh meals. Perhaps use the time that you normally need for commuting for these tasks. The food items listed below are good for the immune system:

Fruits	Vegetables	Nuts	Other foods
Oranges	Broccoli	Almonds	Sweet potatoes
Pineapple	Spinach	Walnuts	Garlic
Strawberries	Cabbage	Hazel nuts	Low-fat yoghurt
Grapefruit	Carrots		Oysters
Kiwi	Beets		Wheat germ
Guava	Mushrooms		Ginger
Tomatoes			Green tea
Lemon			
Elderberries			
Watermelon			

Healthy snacks are:

- Handful of unroasted and unsalted nuts
- Whole-wheat cracker with a healthy spread, such as hummus
- Fresh fruit
- Dried fruit
- Cup of cottage cheese
- Snack vegetables
- Cooked egg

A lunchtime walk when working from home

At this time, taking a walk with colleagues during lunch break, cycling to the office or climbing stairs to the workplace, this is not an option for everyone.

The advice is to exercise at a moderately intensive pace for 30 minutes five times per week and two times per week to engage in muscle-toning exercises. Moderately intensive workouts are perfect during a day of working from home. Ride a bike or take a walk, but do that at a relaxed moment and while maintaining adequate distance from one another. For the muscle-toning exercises, use your creativity. A 5-kilo kettlebell or medicine ball is equal in weight to a bag of sand, potting soil or potatoes. You can find many home workouts online.



View [the video](#) about lunch walks. *Only dutch.*

More tips for staying fit while working from home:

- Have your coffee breaks while standing – away from your screen;
- Stand up occasionally during online discussions. Put the screen a bit higher (on a box, laundry basket or on a small cabinet) to be able to see your colleague well;
- Don't plan discussions from hour to hour, but let a new discussion begin at 5 minutes past the hour. That gives you the time to 'walk over to your discussion' (just like at the office). Use this time as well for a bit of bodily movements;
- Have your partner / housemate join you for those moments of physical activities. Help each other to stay active;
- Set your alarm clock to buzz every half hour and walk away from your work space as soon as it buzzes. Restart the alarm clock after two minutes upon your return.

“ **Sylvia Fontaine**
Senior vitality and health advisor, HumanCapitalCare



Exercising regularly is essential in order to remain energetic when you're working from home. Therefore, plan some physical routine during your working day at home. For example, plan a lunchtime walk: put on a jacket or raincoat and go outdoors for a daily walk around the block. Taking a walk does not necessary have to be during lunchtime. Walking between 14:00 and 15:00 allows you to avoid any pedestrian traffic on the street and helps to overcome your afternoon dip.

Exactly when it is sulky and grey outside, a short walk can give you a mental uplift. Make your walk nicer by looking for special places in your surroundings, by photographing special COVID boards, or by observing the seasonal changes. Moreover, the change of environment is good for your eyes: this way, you give your eye muscles a rest after hours of staring at the screen.

PS: Do you prefer to cycle, run, ride a scooter or skateboard? Replace 'walking' with your preferred activity.