

## Part 6 – Working from Home

Since the outbreak of Covid-19 we have all had to adjust to new ways of living and working. Many people may have been working from home since the beginning of the initial lockdown in March. Others may have been furloughed and have either already returned to work or are waiting to return, however in the current situation, government guidelines advise that we should continue to work from home where possible.



Whilst there can be many perks from working at home; organising work to fit in with our own schedules, saving money on commuting, being able to home cook and having access to our own space; it can also cause stress, boredom and uncertainty.

As well as the financial benefits work gives us, it also provides a structure in our lives, a sense of identity, esteem and social networks. There is a risk that these may be lacking when working from home.

This article looks at ways we can maintain both our physical and mental well-being whilst working from home.

*If working from home is now the norm for you, it would be great if you could share any handy tips with the DSAuk office or through DSAuk Social media: Facebook and Twitter.*

### **1. Set a Routine**

In the first DSAuk Mental Health and Wellbeing article of this series: [Routine and Daily Balance](#), the importance of routine and structure during the Covid-19 outbreak was described, ensuring we maintain a sense of achievement, pleasure and staying connected.



When working from home those schedules between work and personal time can often get blurred, so if you can, consistently follow your normal sleep and work patterns.

Although we may have extra time in bed, always aim to get up at the same time as this can help stabilise your internal clock and improve sleep, making it easier to concentrate during the day.



Once you are up, get ready, washed and dressed and eat breakfast as if going to work.

(For help with Sleep see the DSAuk Mental Health and Wellbeing Article: [Part 2 - Sleep](#)).



It's important to have markers that signify the start of the working day and most importantly the end:

- ✓ Have a clear start and finish time
- ✓ Schedule in your 'commute time' and spend it exercising, reading or listening to music.
- ✓ Do a mindfulness exercise to focus on the present. It may be a mobile mindfulness to signify that we have mentally 'arrived' at work.

(See the DSAuk Mental Health and Wellbeing Article: [Part 3 - Mindfulness](#)).

Most importantly when your workday stops, stop working. Do something that marks the end of your day to detach physically and emotionally from work and focus on your home life.



- ✓ Shut down and stop checking e-mails
- ✓ Physically move away from your 'office area'.
- ✓ Change into home gear.

The commute home can often be the space that allows us to gradually disconnect from work, so if you can, replace this with a walk, even if it's only round the block or to the end of the drive and back again, to signify the end of the working day.

At the end of the day try to get to bed at your usual time.

## 2. Have A Dedicated Workspace

To support us in both physically and mentally engaging and disengaging with work it's important to have a dedicated area of work.

If you're lucky enough to have a spare room then set this up as a home working office. If not, try to find a quiet space away from other people and distractions, like the TV or the kitchen when you feel snacky. If it's in the same area as your home life separate it off with blankets or screens. Seeing our workplace out of office times may lead us to worry about e-mails we need to send, projects we need to do or conversations we need to have.



Clear your workspace of clutter and get everything you need in one place before you start work – laptop, phone, tablet, paper, notebook, pens, phone or tablet chargers etc.

Ensure you are comfortable and set up your equipment to avoid physical strain. **Back problems are common when working from home and are a particular concern for people with dwarfism, so we need to ensure our office supports our health.** Whilst it might be tempting to sit on the sofa this can be detrimental to our spine when working on laptops.



## Dwarf Sports Association UK Mental Health and Wellbeing



Look at the NHS guidelines to set up your workspace correctly:

[www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthy-body/how-to-sit-correctly/](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthy-body/how-to-sit-correctly/)

You can also find information about workstation assessments at:

[www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/assessment.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/assessment.htm)

If you have an ergonomic chair, this is the best choice as it adjusts to your body shape and size, providing maximum comfort. If you do not have an ergonomic or office chair, then you can adapt your dining room chair by adding cushions in order to support your back and bring you forward on the seat so that your knees are at the end of the seat.

Ensure that your desk is solid but not too big so you don't over-stretch when locating the phone, stationery, documents or other office items.

***Always ensure*** your feet are fully supported by resting them on the floor or a foot stool.

You may need to trial different combinations of chairs and stools until you get the right set up. Make sure your knees are bent to approx. 90 degrees with your feet flat on the floor or footstool. If your knees are too high or too low, you may experience pins and needles or numbness. If you get these symptoms in your legs then look again at your set up and make some adjustments.



If you use a laptop rather than a desktop, set up your workstation correctly. For example, even if your desk and chair are at the correct height for you, with the laptop placed directly on the desk, you're still likely to be tilting your head down to see the screen and hence curving your neck. Ask your employer for a laptop stand that can be raised and adjusted to bring the screen in line with your eye level and a separate keyboard that can be situated on the desk at a comfortable height and distance for your hands.

Using a headset for phones and mobiles can avoid having to stretch out to reach them.

If you are concerned about your home working set up, or have any questions, our DSAuk physiotherapist Kim Dean is available to offer advice. Please contact Kim through the DSAuk office on 01246 296485.

According to ACAS ([www.acas.org.uk/working-from-home](http://www.acas.org.uk/working-from-home)) employers should: ensure that work can be done safely at home, you have the right equipment to work safely, managers keep in regular contact with you and ***“reasonable adjustments are made for an employee with a disability”***.



As employees we have a responsibility to take care of our own health and safety, raise any health and safety issues to our employer along with any home working arrangements that need to change.



If you have any special equipment at work talk to your employer about whether this can be transferred to a home working environment or further equipment issued for use at home.



During coronavirus you can still get support from Access to Work ([www.gov.uk/access-to-work](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)) who may be able to help in working from home. Talk to your employer, HR department or Access to Work about your situation.

### 3. Setting Boundaries

The flexibility of working from home can be a positive but it can also be difficult if there are others at home to deal with like children and partners (who may also be working from home). I have also got two dogs who think as I am at home its walkies and play time!



So, setting boundaries is important for our mental wellbeing.

Have a discussion and set some ground rules with those you share the house with. Remind them that you need some quiet time and share your schedule. If there are two of you working from home think about where your office spaces will be so you can still operate efficiently, when you will meet for lunch etc.



Similarly set boundaries with work. Switch off when the workday is over and enjoy your leisure time with family at home.

### 4. Taking Breaks

When we are working at home it may feel like we must be available all the time. However, just being present is no use to anyone if our well-being is suffering.

When working from home I can get so drawn into the computer that I forget how long I have been on it.

To help manage concentration and avoid stress it is important to step away and take regular screen breaks and importantly, a lunch break. Put a reminder on your phone or screen to have a short break and take 5 to 10 minutes each hour to concentrate on something else.



With digital platforms, such as Zoom and Teams, it's easy to go from one meeting to the next without those usual physical breaks of having to walk to a different room or even drive to another location so a screen break is vital to give you time to prepare yourself for your next meeting.

When we are in the office there are often things to break the monotony of one task; going to the photocopier, colleagues asking us questions, getting up to make a coffee, so do something different when you are working at home to break repetitive tasks.



When working from home it is very easy to forget your normal routines and stay seated for too long. It is recommended that throughout the day you take regular movement breaks, so every hour or so make a point of getting up from your work station and walking around a little or doing some light stretching or exercises before sitting back down.

There are several exercise examples on the DSAuk website. Take a look at [Seated Exercises](#) or [Beginners Exercises Part 1](#) for some ideas of simple exercises you can do when you take a screen break.

You can also get some fresh air and get mobile during your lunch break or straight after you finish working for the day, with a walk or a bike ride.

If you are unable to get out, there are lots of desk yoga and exercise guides available on the internet, enabling you to be active while still sitting at your desk. Perhaps you could also try the Windmill technique as described in the DSAuk Mental Health and Wellbeing Article: [Part 5 - Breathing Techniques](#)



## 5. Staying Connected

Some of us may spend more time at work than we do at home, so it's hardly surprising that the workplace is a source for social networking and friendships.

We may feel more isolated when working from home but there are lots of ways to stay in touch with colleagues, boosting their mental well-being as well as our own.

- Schedule video calls with your team and pick up the phone instead of emailing.
- In the workplace, those times prior to a meeting starting or in a coffee break would have been spaces where we caught up socially with our colleagues. There is often a tendency for digital and virtual meetings to start formally, straight away, so suggest you have a check in time a few minutes before the meeting starts and take virtual coffee breaks to catch up with peers.
- Don't forget your colleagues probably feel the same as you. We know from the DSAuk Mental Health and Wellbeing Article [Part 4 - Resilience](#), that helping others can improve our own well-being so ask how they're doing and whether there are ways you can support each other.
- Make time to socialise virtually through a Friday online get-together. Or meet in person for a coffee or lunch if you can do so, following the latest social distancing guidelines. Christmas office parties may not be the same as before so think how you can set one up digitally with quizzes and fancy dress!





For those people who manage others:

- Maintain daily team briefs and allow time for questions.
- Ensure in staff supervision there are no distractions and assess your staff's boundaries, fatigue and burnout.
- Notice changes in your staff's behaviour – aches and pains, decreased productivity, low morale.
- Remember you can't provide solutions all the time and your own wellbeing is important too.

## 6. Looking After Yourself

Remember from the DSAuk Mental Health and Wellbeing Article [Part 4 - Resilience](#), during this unusual time and situation with Covid-19 when things don't feel normal, it's especially important to look after and be kind to ourselves.



We may be continuing to work from home for some time yet and it may become a permanent arrangement in the longer term, so think about ways you could improve how you work while at home. *If working from home is now the norm for you, it would be great if you could share any handy tips either with the DSA office or through DSA Social media: Facebook and Twitter.*

Recognise that you may not be as productive working at home as you usually would be working in an office and this is ok. Given the circumstances, be realistic about what you can achieve.

If you are struggling with working at home, speak to your colleagues, manager, or Human Resources department about your concerns.



Most importantly relax and when your work is done, enjoy your leisure time. We are all in this together.

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