

Properly prepare for your day working remotely

TIPS AND PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR EMPLOYEES

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Introduction

Working remotely is now well established and has advantages, but also inconveniences.

In this guide, we have identified the key elements that will ensure you manage working remotely well. We've also identified all the positive aspects related to working remotely.

Whether you're fully remote or working in a hybrid situation, certain challenges are now well known. In this guide, you will find solutions to these challenges to ensure that you manage working remotely well and benefit from the positive aspects of this form of work.

Among these challenges, the continuous, intensive use of virtual platforms has modified our perceptions and asked more of us physically and psychologically. For certain workers, working remotely must be combined with family and parental obligations, involving interactions and sustained interference between work and personal/family life, which increases one's mental burden.

In this context, we present this guide on well-being while working remotely, which, we hope, will help you better manage your time, the boundaries between your personal life and your professional life and the use of diverse technologies, with the goal of helping you take care of your physical and mental health.



SECTION 1

Managing your time and technology platforms


Virtual meeting platforms allow a greater integration of remote work into different companies, but it also comes with possible repercussions for the mental health of workers.

Continuous work over videoconference has caused a new phenomenon that scientists now call *digital fatigue*. Given that remote work and hybrid work have become forms of working that are here to stay, it is important to manage the time you spend in front of screens well and to master technology platforms.

WHAT IS DIGITAL FATIGUE?

Digital fatigue is defined as *“the fatigue, anxiety and exhaustion associated with the overuse of virtual communication platforms.”*¹

Digital fatigue can have harmful effects on:

- 
- PHYSICAL HEALTH**
- Eye health
 - Musculoskeletal disorders
 - Headaches
 - Reduced energy
 - Sedentariness
 - Etc.

- 
- MENTAL HEALTH**
- Stress
 - Anxiety
 - Burnout
 - Decreased concentration and memory
 - Etc.

In this section, we introduce some of the possible solutions proposed by experts to reduce these harmful effects.

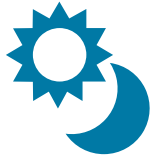
Please note that the solutions proposed in this guide will help you stay in good physical and mental health while working remotely, as well as in your life in general.

1. Lee, J. (2020). A neurological Exploration of Zoom Fatigue. Psychiatric Times. <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/psychological-exploration-zoom-fatigue>

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WHEN WORKING REMOTELY, IT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP A REGULAR SCHEDULE EVERY DAY:



When you wake up and when you go to sleep:

Try to keep a consistent schedule for waking up, going to sleep and going to work. This way, your circadian rhythm (or internal clock: biological rhythms of about 24 hours that determine our sleep-wake cycle and several other physiological processes) is regulated and you'll have less difficulty adapting.



When you start and finish work:

The same principle applies to your work hours. Start and finish your workday at the same times as you would in person. Before you start work, it is strongly recommended to create a "fake commute," for example, taking a walk or jogging, practising a relaxing activity or taking care of domestic or family-related tasks. Get dressed and prepare yourself as if you were going to the office or your workplace.



Meal times and length:

When working remotely, meetings happen one after another and the high workload causes many people to forget to eat lunch. Try to have your lunch at the same time each day, don't eat at your desk while working and take the time you need.



Break times:

It is important to take breaks during the day, to get away from your screen, stand up and move a little or even get a bit of fresh air. It is strongly recommended that you get up every hour throughout your day.



End of the day:

Create a buffer moment at the end of the day to help you transition from your professional role to your personal/familial role.

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Other tips and practical advice for reducing your digital fatigue:

- ✓ Take breaks away from the screen.
- ✓ Avoid using the “full screen” mode.
- ✓ Increase the space between yourself and the screen by using an external keyboard.
- ✓ Turn off the “Self View” function to avoid seeing yourself during meetings.
- ✓ Keep your eyes a good distance away from your screens; adjust the brightness of your digital device; clean your screens; adjust your screens’ colours and contrast; if you wear glasses, have blue light protection put in the lenses if possible.
- ✓ Turn off your camera and/or your microphone from time to time during virtual meetings.
- ✓ Limit the total amount of time you spend in front of a screen per day: keep a regular schedule to help with managing your time and create a moment for yourself at the end of the workday.
- ✓ Encourage telephone calls for people/clients outside your organization.



PLANNING VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Proper planning for virtual meetings can help you manage your perceived stress levels and additional cognitive demands in order to limit negative health effects.

1. Remember the framework for intervention during virtual meetings with multiple participants (putting your microphone on mute, raising your hand before speaking, deselecting your camera option).
2. Establish measures for virtual meetings to define meeting criteria and guidelines (e.g. do not plan meetings between 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m., plan 25- or 50-minute meetings instead of 30- or 60-minute meetings).
3. Make sure you have sufficient knowledge of technological tools to give yourself an acceptable level of confidence and to support other team members if necessary.



SECTION 2

Managing boundaries between work and personal life

Boundaries are mental, physical and symbolic barriers that allow you to divide your work life and your personal life.

Knowing your preferences when it comes to prioritizing these boundaries allows you to manage distractions and interruptions better when working remotely. There are 2 types of role management preferences:



SEGMENTED ROLES:

You may prefer segmented roles, meaning that you don't like when your work encroaches on your personal life or vice versa. You are therefore someone who prefers to work in person.



INTEGRATED ROLES:

You are someone who adapts well to working remotely and who is not bothered if your two roles overlap. You work well remotely and you handle the overlapping of your responsibilities well.

In order to better handle interruptions while working remotely, identify possible distractions during a typical workday and for each distraction, come up with a possible solution.

Advice:

- ✓ Ask those close to you to limit communication to urgent situations and to limit background noise.
- ✓ Ask loved ones to knock on the office door before entering. If you don't have a closed office at home, you can use colour codes, homemade notes or posters.
- ✓ Use childcare services, even when working from home.
- ✓ Manage others' expectations regarding emails, calls and other communications by setting boundaries.
- ✓ Inform those close to you before you begin a task that requires concentration to avoid being interrupted.
- ✓ Let colleagues know when you are absent for personal reasons (e.g. put a status with a return time).



SECTION 3

Preventing physical health problems



WORK ENVIRONMENT:

An inadequate work environment and inadequate equipment are also factors that can cause fatigue, especially if you do not have a calm workspace at home where you can concentrate.

Prolonged time in front of a screen is also one of the causes of fatigue and other problems, such as eye strain in particular. The act of sitting continuously without a regular break causes different problems:

- Musculoskeletal problems: back pains or upper and lower limb pain due to reduced mobility, stiffness, pain
- Eye strain can cause a stinging sensation in your eyes, blurred vision and headaches
- Decreased energy and fatigue

No prolonged posture is good for the body. You need to move and alternate positions throughout the workday and ideally every hour. You can get up occasionally or buy a sit/stand desk or a portable *adjustable sit/stand ergonomic work platform for furniture*.

Tips and advice for a positive and healthy remote work environment:

- ✓ Try to create a comfortable workspace: make sure your work zone is reserved for professional activities or is at least a calm space well away from family activities, as far as this is possible. This allows you to better define your work and personal life and limit interruptions/distractions.
- ✓ Include the possibility of connecting with nature, even if this only means having some plants in your workspace.
- ✓ Avoid setting up your workspace facing a wall; instead favour an orientation perpendicular to a window.
- ✓ Make sure you maintain an adequate work posture.
- ✓ If possible, evaluate the ergonomics of your workstation to diminish or eliminate any discomfort or pain associated with bad posture.
- ✓ Take regular breaks.

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- ✓ Hydrate regularly throughout the day.
- ✓ Take the time for a real meal break and keep a balanced diet.
- ✓ Include breaks to stretch.
- ✓ Disconnect: take a few minutes throughout the day to relax.
- ✓ Go outside every day: whenever possible during your break time, find the time to go outside to get a change of pace. This will let you clear your head by exposing you to daylight and will help you concentrate more effectively when you resume working. What's more, getting some sunshine for even 15 minutes a day helps you synthesize vitamin D.

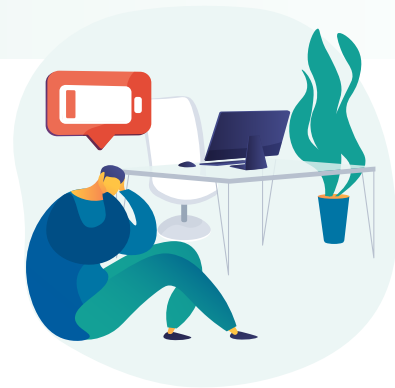


PROMOTE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE:

- ✓ Walk every day.
- ✓ Make phone calls while walking whenever possible.
- ✓ Practise moderate physical activity for at least 20 minutes a day. This helps release any tension you've accumulated during the workday and helps regulate stress.
- ✓ Get some air—get some fresh air into and air out the room you work in.
- ✓ Foster healthy eating habits. For example, take the time to eat well, pay attention to your food choices, limit your coffee intake and snacking, stay well hydrated.
- ✓ Disconnect from all of your electronic devices at least one hour before going to bed. Blue light can disturb your sleep.

For your eye health, practise these 4 short exercises daily:

- 1. The 20-20-20 exercise:** Every 20 minutes, look 20 feet away from you (around 6 metres) for 20 seconds.
- 2. The lift exercise:** Tilt your head toward the ground, place your hands in little cups over your eyelids, let your eyes “fall” toward the palms of your hands. Repeat a few times.
- 3. The clock exercise:** Close your eyes. Move your eyes clockwise toward one o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock and so forth, until you go around the whole clock face. Then, restart going in the opposite direction. Take your time and make a note if your eye movement is less fluid at a certain hour.
- 4. Lubricating your eyes:** Blink your eyes as often as possible while using screens.



SECTION 4

Preventing mental health problems

It has been documented that using technology platforms continuously for holding meetings has its share of neurological and psychological consequences. During virtual meetings, certain brain mechanisms cause, among other things, cognitive overload, constant hyper-vigilance and a presence/absence dissonance. Your level of concentration has to be higher because you're processing numerous and varied information on your screen, seeing yourself on the screen during meetings or fearing an unexpected disconnection.

These added difficulties to adapting can cause an increase in psychological problems, such as:

- Increased stress levels
- Decreased concentration and memory
- Symptoms of anxiety

In the long term:

- Symptoms of depression
- Professional and personal burnout

To help you better manage these additional demands and to protect your mind, here are some practices you can do daily:

1. Practise relaxation techniques: yoga, meditation, deep breathing, heart coherence, mindfulness, writing, arts, musical instruments or gardening.
 - For more information on mindfulness:
<https://global-watch.com/en/articles/global-watch-scientific-content-en/being-present-here-and-now-looking-at-mindfulness-2>
2. Don't try to multi-task.
3. Try to disconnect when you can, according to the needs and constraints of your work.
4. Take a few minutes throughout the day to relax, go outside or practise another activity that promotes relaxation and disconnecting.
5. Automate more tasks and activate the "auto response" function whenever possible.
6. Leave a buffer moment between virtual meetings.
7. Optimize handling your emails (set times for sending replies and managing your inbox).

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For the mental health of your colleagues, be aware of your cyberbehaviour while working remotely.

- ✓ Be mindful of your online communications, rewrite emails that could be perceived as impolite or discourteous and reread your messages before you send them.
- ✓ Take the time to reflect before replying to a message if you've experienced a difficult situation during the workday. Think about actions (for example: writing an email in an aggressive tone) that could have repercussions for your colleagues and for your relationships with them in the long term.
- ✓ Be empathetic toward your colleagues who have different obligations or needs (for example: colleagues who have dependent children, colleagues who are less comfortable using information technology) so that you don't act impatiently with them.



MAINTAIN SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Working remotely can lead to a loss of human connection, social interactions and informal exchanges: working remotely means working away from others.

Professional activity is not limited to the exclusive realization of tasks that we are asked to complete. It is much richer thanks to formal and informal daily discussions.

Remote or hybrid work changes interpersonal relationships at work and at home: in the context of remote work, it is much more difficult to set boundaries between your professional life and your family life. This can lead you to play several different roles simultaneously.

It is well known that social interactions protect you against risks to your mental health.

Keep in regular contact with your team members to maintain these social interactions and to promote your physical and mental well-being as well as theirs. For example:

1. Send a hello message to your colleagues or team members.
2. Organize lunches or remote or in-person social activities if the circumstances allow.
3. Organize remote team health challenges (on your work platform or other mobile applications).
4. Be a part of a committee in the company or join a social club.

Conclusion

From now on, remote work will be a part of the way we work. We have to adapt and take full advantage of it, regardless of our personality type, our style of boundary management and our type of work (as a manager or employee). We remind you that working remotely has certain advantages, such as less time lost commuting, a more dynamic routine for hybrid workers, a better work-life balance and, in some cases, better concentration for finishing certain tasks, as well as other benefits.

This guide is intended as a reference document to help you as an individual take care of your physical and mental health while working remotely, throughout your career and in your life in general.

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