



Maintaining employee wellbeing when working remotely

Staying physically healthy when working from home

Addressing the core needs of your employees

The importance of getting enough sleep

Avoiding burnout when working remotely

Setting boundaries to help improve mental wellbeing

Chapter 1: Staying physically healthy when working from home

In the office environment, there are opportunities for incidental exercise. Perhaps you popped out for lunch to a nearby cafe or went for a walk with colleagues. Working remotely reduces these opportunities - but it can create new ones. And it doesn't have to be detrimental to your physical health. There are many ways to help everyone on your team get moving.

Why stay physically active?

Exercise benefits the body in many ways, including boosting the immune system. The World Health Organization recommends varying levels of physical activity for different age groups. The general guidelines for adults aged 18-64 are to find time for at least 150 minutes per week of moderately intense exercise. Whether we are heading out for work or staying at home, this remains unchanged.

Suggestions for staying active

1. Think about ergonomics

If working from home is new to you, set up your seat and desk to support your body, just as you would at the office. Many people will be working at kitchen tables on a laptop, which is fine, but it is essential to ensure the spine is supported. Paying attention to this will limit the negative health impacts of sitting for most of the day. To make your workspace as ergonomic as possible, consider making the following changes:

- Try to keep your posture upright. To help with this, think about creating right angles with your joints - elbows, knees, and ankles.
- Keep your focus at eye level. If you are working with a laptop, this can be hard, but you can raise it with a few books, or invest in a specially designed stand.
- If you can, invest in a few critical pieces of kit for your home office. A screen, desk, and a good chair are all you need to stay comfortable. If you are using a laptop, also consider buying a wireless keyboard and mouse.

Maintaining employee wellbeing when working remotely

2. Focus on creating a new routine

Working at home has advantages, as your day becomes more flexible. However, creating a new routine for yourself is not always easy.

Keeping as many parts of your old routine as possible will help to maintain momentum with physical activity. If you started your workday with a walk as part of your commute, re-create that when working from home. Make it easier for yourself by working with existing habits as much as possible.

3. Allow yourself time to adjust

If you are new to working from home, it can take some time to adjust. Try to accept this fact, and don't worry too much if it feels a little chaotic or unsettling at first.

You might also miss out on some physical activity while you are getting used to your new way of life. If this is the case, don't panic. You will soon get into new habits and ways of operating that work for you and help you achieve your fitness goals.

4. Schedule movement breaks

It's easier to be more creative with your movement when working from home than in the office. You can lie on the floor, jump up and down for 10 seconds - whatever your body needs. Just make sure you have finished the Zoom call first!

The Pomodoro technique can also help you to take regular breaks and remind you to check in with yourself. The idea is to take a short break every 25 minutes, followed by a longer break after two hours, as this is proven to make you more focused and productive.

You can use your short breaks to walk into another room and move around, or maybe even do a few simple yoga poses to get your spine moving. Your upper body is an area to focus on, as this gets very little attention when you are sitting for long periods.

5. Use any extra time you've gained wisely

A great benefit of remote work is no longer having a long and expensive commute. If you had a long journey, this could add up to a significant amount of extra time during the day. Try to avoid using this time for extra work. You most likely wouldn't have been working while traveling to the office, so allocate the time for yourself to be active.

Chapter 2: Addressing the core needs of your employees

There's no doubt about it, the modern workforce has become increasingly complex. Faced with heavy workloads, short turnaround times and high deliverables, many workers are being asked to continually do more – with less. It's no wonder so many employees feel like they're constantly running on empty. That's why it's so important to be aware of your core needs at work, if you want to start performing at your full potential.

For Laurie Coe, Vice President of The Energy Project, it's evident that "the way we're working is no longer working." Coe believes that many employees aren't able to perform at their full potential in today's complex work environments.

Recently, **The Energy Project** partnered with the Harvard Business Review on a 'Quality of Life @ Work' assessment which examined the feelings and responses of 20,000 employees worldwide.

The survey found that individuals have four core needs at work:

- Physical – the need to rest and renew
- Emotional – the need to feel cared for and valued
- Mental – the need to be empowered to set boundaries and focus in an absorbed way
- Spiritual – the need to find a sense of meaning and purpose at work

If you feel like you need to make a change in the way you work, you need to think about how you're addressing your core needs. It's also essential that managers pay attention to the needs of their employees, particularly when working remotely, to maintain positive levels of productivity and engagement. Let's look closer at these different types of employee needs.

Maintaining employee wellbeing when working remotely

Physical – Renew and Recharge

No matter what role or industry you work in, it's important to take care of your physical energy. As the Energy Project's report outlines, employees need regular periods of daytime rest to renew and recharge throughout the day. In fact, 90 minutes is the maximum amount of time humans can maintain attention on a task before losing focus.

After 90 minutes of being absorbed in any form of cognitive work, it's in your best interest to take a break – even if it's a short one. This is because human beings are not machines. Our bodies need to work with our natural rhythms of renewal. Choosing to power through and continue working will only result in feelings of fatigue, irritation and lack of focus, which over time can lead to **burn out**.

So be sure to listen to your body throughout the day. Step away from your work, get a glass of water or cup of tea, or go for a short walk. If you're an employer or manager, encourage workers to take regular breaks and lead by example in this practice.

Emotional – Safety and Trust

As well as looking after your physical wellbeing, it's important to be aware of your emotional needs and how they're being responded to. Even people who are quite assertive and confident in their personal life can struggle to express how they feel in the workplace.

While you may think that your feelings about your job can be kept separate from your actual work, your emotional energy has a very strong influence on how well you perform. Emotional energy needs to be fueled by a sense of satisfaction, safety and trust in your work environment. Feeling unsure, uncomfortable or unsafe at work will have a negative impact on your productivity and results.

On the other hand, feeling valued, respected and safe allows employees to focus and deliver their best results, while helping to foster a positive work culture.

Maintaining employee wellbeing when working remotely

Mental – Focus and Boundaries

These days, workers are presented with a continual stream of incoming information, more than any other generation before. Technology, for all its good points, allows us to be always available, always connected, always switched 'on'.

This means we very seldom have the chance to switch 'off.' And being constantly interrupted by phone calls, text messages, emails and social media notifications makes it hard to focus all our attention on one task.

Protecting your mental energy is about making sure you allow yourself to focus – on one thing at a time. While some people think it's impressive or cool to be constantly busy and doing ten things at once, it won't do your career any favours. In fact, multitasking is not at all conducive to absorbing information and retaining focus, most often leading to lower quality work and higher levels of anxiety and burn out.

To protect your mental energy, you need to set firm boundaries and be self-disciplined. When you feel your focus drifting off, or feel tempted to break your attention and scroll through your phone, put those thoughts aside and refocus on just one task. While breaks are planned and deliberate, distractions aren't – and worse, they can really derail you from your task. In fact, after being distracted or interrupted, it takes an average of **23 minutes and 15 seconds to get back to the task at hand.**

Leaders can help employees maintain focus and mental energy by respecting and encouraging these boundaries.

Spiritual – Meaning and Purpose

According to the Energy Project study, **"no single factor influences people's job satisfaction and likelihood to stay at an organization as much as feeling connected to their company's mission."**

Having a sense of meaning and purpose in your job is what makes it feel worthwhile. Being connected to an overall mission and working in line with your own personal values is a large part of what makes most humans feel significant. It's also essential if you want to find your work and career rewarding. When managers actively support employees in nurturing this purposeful energy, they're able to create a company culture that reflects this.

Whether you're an employer or employee, paying attention to all four core needs is the best way to make a positive impact on your organization and your own work life. Next time you're running on empty, or feel like the way you're working is no longer working, think about your own core needs and what needs to change so you can start performing at your full potential.

Chapter 3: The importance of getting enough sleep

When working remotely, unlimited access to technology puts our brains in a state of constant stimulation. Notifications, alerts, and reminders help to keep us on track, but they can make it difficult to switch off at night.

A **Gallup poll** in the U.S. found that 40% of Americans get less than the recommended 7-9 sleep per night. Yet, sleep is essential to our health and optimal performance at work. We have looked at the science and put together some advice for your team on the benefits of getting a good night's sleep.

How does sleep benefit us?

In the international bestseller, *Why We Sleep*, neuroscientist Matthew Walker explains how sleep can boost our intelligence, make us more attractive, and improve our moods. Not only is sleep an essential process to the body's everyday functions, it can also help to ward off cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

Our brains use around 20 percent of the body's total energy consumption. One of the main functions of sleep is to replenish the hard-working brain circuitry. This process helps to protect us from brain-related illnesses such as dementia and mood disorders.

The REM phase of sleep helps the brain to connect unrelated ideas, which boosts our creativity and problem-solving abilities. Think back to the time you miraculously solved a problem or completed a task with ease after a good rest.

Sleep can also enhance learning. Our waking hours are the best time for learning something new, but the dreams we have during REM sleep improve memory consolidation. For this reason, we are primed for problem solving and creativity when we first wake up. While we have been asleep, our brains have been able to make new pathways and connections with the information we have taken in the previous day.

Tips for getting a better night's sleep

Despite the proven benefits of sleep, many people find it difficult to get a full, unbroken night's rest. Here are some tips to help your team improve sleep hygiene, and reap the benefits of increased brain function:

Maintaining employee wellbeing when working remotely

Get into a sleep routine

Our brains are wired to chase rewards. We feel sleepy, and we want to feel more alert, so we have a coffee and get the kick we need. This pattern of cue, routine, and reward is fundamental to human behavior - a process psychologists have labeled the habit loop. With knowledge of this cycle, it is possible to reprogram the most reluctant mind to repeat a desired behavior effortlessly - including falling asleep at the same time each night.

If you complete the same rituals before going to bed, like flossing, brushing your teeth, or reading for twenty minutes, your brain will learn that this is the time you sleep. The pattern will trigger the release of melatonin, the hormone we need to start feeling sleepy.

Have a tech cool down before bed

The Sleep Foundation states that ninety percent of people admit to using a technological device in the hour before bed. They add that "using electronic devices before bedtime can be physiologically and psychologically stimulating in ways that can adversely affect your sleep."

Devices interfere with our body's internal clock, or circadian rhythm, and suppress the release of melatonin. This effect is due to the artificial blue light they emit. For this reason, avoid using any technology in the hour before bed, and allow your brain to become relaxed and ready for sleep.

Keep your bedroom cool

Our body temperature fluctuates at night, just as it does during the day. But we sleep better when we are cool. The ideal temperature for adults is around 18.3°C. One study in 2012 found that room temperature is one of the most critical factors for achieving a quality night's sleep.

As we prepare to go to sleep, our body temperature also drops, so it is best to avoid high-intensity exercise before bed if you have trouble falling asleep. Keeping blinds down in your bedroom during the day can also be an effective way to prevent heat build-up.

Maintaining employee wellbeing when working remotely

Work with your circadian rhythm

The circadian rhythm, or body clock, is an internal system designed to manage our feelings of sleepiness and wakefulness over 24 hours. This system is controlled by the part of the brain that responds to light.

However, this internal rhythm can vary between people. Our sleep patterns can be divided into two main "chronotypes": the morning larks and night owls. Approximately a third of the population are morning larks, a third night owls, and the other third somewhere in between. There is nothing we can do to reset our natural inclinations.

As a result, in a 9-5 world, night owls are often more tired, less active, and more susceptible to poor health. They have higher rates of depression, anxiety, diabetes, cancer, heart attack, and stroke.

Because of this, opportunities for remote work have real potential to be beneficial for productivity in the workplace. If employers are understanding, we can work with our chronotypes and switch on for work during the hours when we are most alert. Work in sync with your circadian rhythm wherever possible.

Limit your caffeine intake

Caffeine is a stimulant that works on our central nervous system. It can boost energy and improve mood. The half-life of caffeine varies between people but is approximately 5-6 hours. If you consume 10mg of caffeine, you will have 5mg in your system five hours later. In light of this, The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends that you avoid drinking caffeine at least six hours before bedtime.

Chapter 4: Avoiding burnout when working remotely

If you feel like you are struggling to find any energy or motivation for your work, or relying on caffeine and adrenaline to get you through the day, there's a chance you could be at serious risk of burning out. This is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion that brings with it a lack of motivation, low efficiency and feelings of helplessness for sufferers.

Below are the first four signs of burnout, as outlined by Vanessa Loder for Forbes:

- Feeling frequently on edge, with adrenaline constantly coursing through your body
- Lack of engagement – you don't feel motivated when working
- Increased cynicism – feeling more negative, cranky and defensive
- Distracted eating – eating your meals in front of a computer or snacking more than usual

If you're a manager or team leader, this could bring to mind someone in your team, or even yourself. It's really important for individuals and managers to be aware of any signs of job burnout, particularly when working remotely, and take action before it has any further effects on a person's mental and physical health.

The impacts of employee burnout

The impacts of employee burnout are considerable – organizations can expect to suffer from reduced productivity, higher employee turnover, financial burdens from absenteeism and the possibility of medical, legal, and insurance expenses.

For individuals, burnout can contribute to serious mental health issues, such as anxiety, insomnia, hyper vigilance and depression. These can in turn lead to problems with physical health, manifesting in high blood pressure, heart disease, gastrointestinal issues, adrenal exhaustion and chronic fatigue.

On top of all this, your physical and mental exhaustion can very likely lead to doubts about your competence and the value of your work, causing you more stress and creating a vicious circle.

Maintaining employee wellbeing when working remotely

Major causes of burning out

There are many factors that can contribute to burnout, including poor work-life balance, stress, mismatched needs or values, or a disharmonious workplace environment. Let's take a closer look at the five major causes for employee burnout.

1. Poor work-life balance

Most people are aware of the importance of keeping a healthy work-life balance. Striking a satisfying balance between work and family/social life is very important for an individual's health and overall wellbeing.

But many of us are still guilty of putting in an unhealthy amount of time and energy into our jobs, leading to poor work-life balance. If you find that your work takes up so much of your time and effort that you don't have any energy to spend time with your family and friends, you're at an increased risk of burning out.

2. Always being "on"

Another factor that can strongly contribute to burnout is not taking the time to disconnect from work to renew your energy. Most of us are conscious of being switched "on" while on the job – especially if we're dealing with time pressures, tight deadlines, high workloads and lots of meetings or negotiations.

Failing to fully disengage from work, by switching off at home after hours, puts you at risk of chronic stress and other elements of burnout. In 2016, France passed a labor reform law that banned checking emails on weekends, in the interest of employee health and productivity. This highlights the important link between disconnecting from work, even when working from home, and maintaining positive emotional and physical health.

Maintaining employee wellbeing when working remotely

3. Our unconscious needs not being met

A study from 2016 considers one of the main causes of burnout to be a mismatch between a person's unconscious needs and the opportunities and demands of their workplace.

These “unconscious needs” take into account our unique personalities – who we are and what motivates us as individuals. For example, you may have an unconscious need to feel in charge, to maintain discipline or to engage in strong discussions or negotiations. On the other side of the scales, we have people who seek a sense of warmth and welcoming from their workplace, needing positive personal relations, trust and a feeling of belonging.

Neither one of these two examples is right or wrong – humans are complex, with all of us needing very different things from our place of work. However, working in a job that doesn't match up with your needs can cause problems, with the greater the mismatch, the higher the risk of burnout.

To address this issue, you can look at ways to improve the correlation between your job and your needs through “job crafting”. For example, an employee with a strong need for collaboration and personal relations might find ways to include more teamwork in their role. Talk to your manager about this. A good manager should be interested in understanding their team members' differences and working with them in a positive way.

4. Clashing values

It's also important to think about your values and whether they align with those of the company or organization you work for. If you're passionate about the environment, or animal welfare, working for a company with no understanding of those values or ethics could prove unsustainable.

Trying to suppress your true thoughts and feelings at a job where your values don't match up is exhausting and will wear anyone down, leaving you feeling emotionally drained.

5. Dysfunctional workplace dynamics

Working in a negative environment with bad vibes between team mates, or any form of bullying or harassment, is another big contributor to job stress.

Unsupportive managers, bullying colleagues, micromanaging supervisors – any form of interpersonal conflict will have a huge impact on an individual's resilience and increase their likelihood of burnout.

Your role as a manager in preventing staff burnout

As a manager, particularly if you're in HR, it's your responsibility to recognize the signs of chronic stress, exhaustion or burnout in your employees and help them to understand and manage it. It's also vital that you do this for yourself – you can't look after others unless you're looking after yourself first.

Chapter 5: Setting boundaries to help improve mental wellbeing

If you feel like you are struggling to find any energy or motivation for your work, or relying on Setting boundaries, particularly saying 'no' to your boss, can be a difficult thing to do. We are empathetic creatures, and our survival as a species has depended on helping each other. We are biologically wired to work together in order to achieve more than we could individually. This means traits such as selflessness and compassion are valued highly in our society, and focusing on our own needs can feel unnatural or have a stigma attached to it.

In a work context, setting boundaries is essentially making sure you can negotiate for yourself and ensuring you have plenty of energy to get on with your daily tasks. Although this might sound obvious, when you are juggling the competing demands of customers, team members or clients, as well as your own needs, it can become difficult to find time for everything. It is important to give both yourself and those around you the appropriate amount of attention, and even more important to ensure you feel energised yourself first.

Although occasionally taking on more work than you can manage won't do a lot of harm in the short-term, over time this will increase your stress levels and take its toll on your body. While a little stress is necessary for getting things done, excessive stress can lead to poor physical health, difficulty relating to colleagues and underperformance. Striking a balance is crucial, and carefully setting boundaries is one way to work towards this.

In recent years, there has been a huge shift in work culture, with 'work-life balance' becoming the phrase of the moment. Although it initially appeared to be a trend bad managers could pay lip service to, millennials are now demanding opportunities for balance from their roles, and employers have had to step up. Many companies now go beyond empty reminders that employees need to take care of themselves, and offer structures to facilitate self-care and mental health. There has never been a better time for taking care of yourself in the workplace, especially if working from home, and setting boundaries more frequently is an effective way to begin.

Five ways to set boundaries effectively

If you have difficulty setting boundaries with your colleagues, particularly around your available time, these are our top tips to help you navigate each situation and communicate with others appropriately.

1. Time management

Blocking out your time carefully can be hugely helpful for setting clear boundaries for yourself and with others. You might prefer to organise your time weekly or daily, but whichever approach you choose, having a visual of the amount of time you have available can be helpful. If somebody asks you for help with a project, you can quickly say 'yes' or 'no' based on how much time you can allocate.

2. Communication

Letting your team members know how you are feeling or whether you need support is crucial. If you are stressed or feel like you have reached your limit, communicating this well and offering an alternative path forward can help to take the pressure off. If you need to reset, make your colleagues aware of this. If you are a leader and have a tendency to take on work that others could be doing, don't be afraid to delegate, especially if you are under the pump trying to complete a task that requires your level of skill and experience.

3. Regularly checking in

Mindfulness is now a widely respected and hugely popular tool for managing stress at work. While there are many apps out there to guide you through practice, this approach isn't for everybody. Mindfulness can simply be tuning in to where you are and how you are feeling in a given moment. Our thoughts are constantly on the go, and regular practice, however you choose to do it, can be beneficial for keeping our active brains in check. If you feel like your thoughts are racing, take a break and go for a walk. Focus on your breathing while you do this for extra benefits. Finding a moment of calm during the day can be rejuvenating.

Maintaining employee wellbeing when working remotely

4. Focus on the task at hand

Your ability to concentrate on a particular task can be an indication of whether you have taken on too much, or set yourself too much to do that day. If your mind is darting around to the other activities you need to complete, it might help to review your scheduled activities and make adjustments. Over-committing yourself can be a huge source of stress and it is important to be realistic about what you can achieve.

5. Be wary of traditional 'to-do lists'

Recording everything you need to do in a long, never-ending list may offer you temporary relief from racing thoughts, but it could leave you open to feeling unsatisfied and frustrated with your work when you are unable to check off every item you have recorded. You also run the risk of accepting more work without considering the amount of time you can spare.

Remember, setting boundaries is a constant balancing act, not something anybody can perfect. It can also feel as though you are letting others down by saying 'no', but ultimately they will be more grateful if the quality of your work isn't impacted by lack of time or stress. By making it a priority in your life to set limits, you can realise when you need to reset or look after yourself. If you can do this, you will be well on the way to feeling healthier and happier in your work and daily life.



Go1 helps millions of people in thousands of organisations engage in learning that is relevant, effective and inspiring.

go1.com