Create a healthy work-at-home space

The coronavirus pandemic work-at-home mandates have prompted many people to work in their living spaces on laptops or computers for extended periods, some with makeshift desk set-ups. If not properly adjusted, this setup can create undue muscle strain and impact well-being and productivity. Even if you have a less than ideal working space available, the following tips can help optimize your comfort and efficiency.

Set up your workspace to minimize distractions. Whether you have a dedicated room or just a space facing a wall at the end of the hallway, aim to block out nearby household activities. Try noise-cancelling headphones or makeshift screens. And remember, when not making or receiving work-related calls, turn off your cell phone, and place it out of your direct line of sight.

Keep your body in a neutral, relaxed position. Adjust your chair so you can sit all the way back, slightly reclined, with your feet flat on the floor and knees level with your hips. Keep your back straight and tall, and your shoulders back—a lumbar support pillow or rolled-up towel placed in the curve of your back can help you achieve this.

Position your monitor screen at your eyesight level to avoid head tilting. Overall, your keyboard/desk set up should be at elbow height, allowing your arms to be parallel to the floor when typing. Consider keyboard and mouse pads to help keep your wrists in a flat position.

Rest your eyes every 20 minutes for 20 seconds to view something 20 feet away. If possible, work near natural light.

Get up and move often. Go from seated to standing while working, relocating to a kitchen bar counter, for example. Throughout the day, do a full spinal stretch, reaching your arms above you and arching backwards. Movement can relax tissues, lubricate joints, prevent stiffness, and reduce fatigue.

If you’re experiencing extreme muscle strain that interferes with your work, talk to your healthcare practitioner.

COVID-19 and financial stability

The global coronavirus pandemic and efforts to promote social distancing has greatly affected businesses and organizations, forcing many to furlough or lay off staff, or decrease working hours. Experiencing a sudden change in income can be devastating. One way to cope with these feelings is to be proactive and financially responsible during this challenging time.

Evaluate your budget — Creating and sticking to a budget is a fundamental of financial wellness. If you have one already—great! If not, establishing a budget (or updating an existing budget to reflect any recent wage changes) can help you stay afloat in this uncertain time.

Prioritize your spending — After determining your budget, if you find yourself over budget, you may find it necessary to prioritize your spending even further to make sure your money goes to where you need it most. For example:

- **Essentials** — Food, medicine, medical supplies
- **Housing** — Mortgage/rent, utilities
- **Debt** — Student loans, car loans, credit cards

Identify areas in which you may be able to receive assistance — Contact your financial institutions to see if they’re offering any support or relief. Many mortgage companies are reducing or waiving payments for those experiencing hardship. Some credit card companies are allowing their customers to reduce their payments.

Additional assistance, we’ve collected a list of resources you may find useful. Visit: blog.healthadvocate.com/2020/04/resources-for-financial-emergencies
Feeling anxious and overwhelmed?

Try a mindfulness break

As the global pandemic continues, worrying about our own and our loved ones’ health can be overwhelming and distracting, causing us to lose focus. Using simple mindfulness techniques to stay in—and accept—the present moment can help slow down your body and mind, helping you feel calmer while improving attention. With practice, you’ll feel more able to cope with stress and to withstand life’s challenges a little better.

The simplest mindfulness technique is to focus on your breath. Here’s how to do it:

- Find a quiet place to sit for 5 minutes or so, and close your eyes if you want.
- Relax your stomach, shoulders and jaw, and begin to focus on your breath flowing in and out.
- Don’t force it. If your mind wanders from your breath, you can bring it back by saying to yourself “I breathe in and I’m calm,” and on the exhale say, “I breathe out and I let go.”
- If intrusive thoughts arise, observe them like clouds drifting by without judgment, and return your attention to your breathing.

Additional mindfulness techniques include focusing your full attention on everyday objects like a tree, or on simple activities like eating. For example, chew each bite very slowly, noticing the textures in your mouth and the flavors bursting on your tongue.

If your anxiety is overwhelming and you need more help with coping strategies, reach out to your healthcare practitioner or licensed professional counselor.

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Mental Health Awareness Month

In honor of mental health awareness month and given the stress we are all facing during the pandemic’s social isolation, it's more important than ever to raise awareness around mental health. Let’s Talk. Talking about it is the first step to getting help. Speak up. Show support. Together, we can shatter stigma. Learn more here. Take quiz on depression here.

Turn to us—we can help.

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