



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
Office of Work/Life

Caring for the Virtual Workforce

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This project was initiated by Lara Langweiler, Talent Sourcing Manager and Nava Wexler, Learning & Organizational Development, both at Columbia University Irving Medical Center. Both Lara and Nava provided much of the information for this guide and were instrumental in seeing that it was developed and completed.

Thank you, Lara and Nava.

There will be updates to this guide on a timely basis so please check back periodically.

Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak has changed the way we work and interact with others. We are practicing social distancing while needing support more than ever. While we are working remotely and avoiding physical contact, we can still socialize and try to mimic what is known as the “watercooler effect” now missing in our lives --- seeing each other and having built-in communities. According to gallup.com, isolation is structural, and loneliness is emotional, but isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness and anxiety. This guide contains some well-being and mindfulness tips, ideas, and resources to help us through these perplexing times.

Practicing Well-Being at Home

Working in a remote workspace may pose some challenges related to schedule, space, and tools, as well as engaging in healthy habits. Here are some ideas to optimize your workspace at home that can promote productivity, comfort, and overall health and well-being,

- **Follow a regular schedule** – Create and maintain a routine during the weekdays to encourage efficiency and put a flow to the day. Allocate time in your schedule for focused work, meetings, lunch, and other non-work tasks. Use your regular calendar as an efficient tool for planning weekday schedules. Here is an example of a schedule from the American Psychiatric Association:

7:00 a.m. - Wake up, stretch, take care of kids/animals

7:30 a.m. - Breakfast and family time (technology free!)

8:30 a.m. - Work and check on updates with small breaks every 30 minutes or so

12:00 p.m. - Lunch break, get fresh air, stretch & exercise

1:00 p.m. - Work with breaks every 30 minutes, check in with co-workers

5:00 p.m. - Dinner and screen break! Call a friend, family, or loved one

7:00 p.m. - Self-care time

- **Maintain an ergonomic posture** – Position your body to offer support and remove unnecessary strain on the musculoskeletal system. Bring the keyboard and mouse close to the body, relax the shoulders when typing, keep arms in a relaxed posture and close to the body with a bend at the elbows, place feet on the ground, sit back in the chair keeping full contact to the back of the chair, maintain the neck in neutral, and avoid awkward repetitive motions.
- **Take movement breaks** – Take a break once or twice every hour. This can include a quick stretch, marching in place, or going for a walk if circumstances allow. Work breaks can improve musculoskeletal health by increasing blood flow and decreasing muscular tension.

- **Rotate workspaces** – Alternate your working position throughout the day to promote movement. For example, start the day seated on the couch, then move to the kitchen table, try standing at the kitchen counter or take a standing or walking meeting. Use the different spaces in the home to avoid prolonged static work postures. Working from your bed is not recommended unless there are no other options.
- **Optimize nutrition at home** – Stick to regular meal and snack times (eating every 4-5 hours) rather than grazing throughout the day to promote energy and adequate nutrition. Choosing nutrient-dense foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean and plant-based proteins, and healthy fats can support immune function as well as overall health and well-being.
- **Focus your attention** – Intentionally limit distractions to help improve efficiency throughout the day. For example, put your cell phone some distance away from you so that you have to get up to answer it, turn off the television, and refrain from doing house chores during allocated work hours.
- **Create an engaging atmosphere** – If possible, work near natural light or well-lit areas. Listening to calming music not only increases focus but also creates a pleasant space to work. Try streaming services or YouTube for available background music.
- **Rest your eyes** – Practice the 20/20/20 rule to reset your vision and care for your eyes. Every 20 minutes remove your eyes from your screen and view something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.
- **Hydrate** – Maintaining hydration can help boost performance, energy, focus, and mood. Aim for 8-10 8-ounce glasses of water per day.
- **Practice mindfulness** – When you are able, take a minute to reset by focusing on the natural pattern of your breath. Focusing on the breath can help support relaxation while bringing your attention to the present moment.

To learn more about well-being and ergonomics in general, visit the pages below:

[Office of Work/Life Well-Being](#)

[Columbia University Ergonomics](#)

Other Work/Life Resources and Tips

The need to maintain well-being is paramount. There are many resources available to promote the health and well-being of our community.

On this listing, the first sets of resources are from the Office of Work/Life website, and the second sets are ones that are available through the community.

- [Yoga @ Work Guided Practice](#): Relax mind and body with these 5-10-minute restorative yoga sequences designed to support you at key intervals throughout the day.
- [Guided Mindfulness Meditation Audio](#): Take a few minutes to follow your breath or imagine you are on the top of a mountain or seated in front of a lake with these guided meditations. Additional meditations are available from a community organization, [Mindful Harlem](#).
- [Meal Planning Resources](#): Use these resources to fill your plate and shopping cart with foods that are essential to supporting overall health and well-being, energy, and mood.
- [Green Housing Tips](#): As we spend more time at home, here are some ways to keep the home environment as healthy as possible.
- [Employee Assistance Program](#): Explore this network of free services, provided by Humana, to help you and your household cope with everyday issues at work and home. Licensed Master's or Ph.D. level counselors are available to speak to you one-on-one.
- **Stretch Guide**: Schedule as stretch breaks once or twice per hour to enhance comfort, safety, and musculoskeletal health—whether you are working on campus or remotely. (Please see the following two pages for more.)

TAKE 5

Part 1: *Sitting or working in one position for an extended period of time may cause minor muscle tension and aches, reduce circulation and cause fatigue. Take a moment to add some movement and stretching into your day, and get more energized.*

Source: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/workprocess.html>



Shoulder Packing

May help prevent shoulder and neck discomfort, may strengthen upper back muscles.

Stand or sit in an upright position pulling in your abdominal muscles. Bring the shoulders up and exhale as you roll your shoulders down and back. Avoid arching your back. Hold for 5-10 seconds. Repeat.

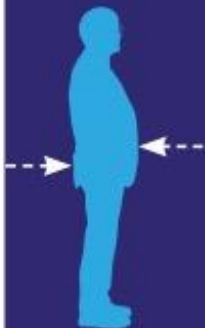
Source: <https://www.acefitness.org/acefit/exercise-library-details/8/205/>

Side Neck Stretch

May help prevent shoulder, neck discomfort and help promote healthy posture.

Looking straight ahead, tilt your left ear to your left shoulder and apply slight pressure to your head with your left hand. Hold for a few breaths. Relax and repeat on the right side.

Source: <http://www.acefitness.org/acefit/healthy-living-article/60/3785/5-workday-stretches-that-relax-your-mind-and-body/>



Pelvic Tilts

May strengthen the abdominals and stretch lower-back muscles.

Stand against a wall or lie on the ground and bend your knees. Tighten the glutes and abdomen muscles and tilt the pelvis upward so you are flattening your back. Hold for a few breaths. Relax and repeat.

Source: <https://www.acefitness.org/acefit/healthy-living-article/60/5131/core-strengthening-exercises-that-help-with/>

TAKE 5

Part 2: *High repetition tasks or jobs that require long periods of static posture may cause stiffness. Try short rest breaks (micro breaks) that may include standing, stretching and moving around. This could offer rest and enough muscle recovery time.*

Source: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/workprocess.html>



Standing Thigh Stretch

Helps stretch the front of the thigh and hip.

Standing upright, hold onto your desk and grab your right ankle. Bring your foot close to your buttocks while keeping your knees parallel. Hold the stretch for 15 seconds. Relax and repeat with your left leg.

Source: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/multimedia/stretching/sls-20076525?s=8>

Seated Figure Four Stretch

May help stretch the glutes and the external rotators of the hip.

Sit upright in your chair and cross your right leg over the left. Lean slightly forward. Hold the stretch for a few breaths. Relax and repeat with your left leg.

Source: <http://www.acefitness.org/acefit/healthy-living-article/60/3785/5-workday-stretches-that-relax-your-mind-and-body/>



Forearm Stretch

Helps stretch the forearm musculature.

Hold the right arm out straight in front of you with the palm facing down. Apply slight pressure with the left hand on the right wrist pushing the hand towards you. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat with the left side.

Source: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/multimedia/forearm-stretches/vid-20084698>



For more tips and information on ergonomics please visit.
<https://humanresources.columbia.edu/ergonomics>

Talk with your doctor before starting new activities or significantly increasing your activity level. Not all exercises are right for all people, especially if you have any musculoskeletal or other medical conditions. Ask your doctor what activities may be best for you.

This health and wellness program should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. The information provided through this health and wellness program is for informational purposes only and provided as part of your health and wellness. The health and wellness team is not a substitute for your doctor's care. Your health information is kept confidential in accordance with the law and may be used to provide health and wellness recommendations as applicable. The health and wellness program is not an insurance program and may be discontinued at any time.

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ErgoPro



Caring for Virtual Employees

According to the [Harvard Business Review](#), a lack of engagement amongst employees can create diminished productivity and excessive stress. The Columbia community can engage with colleagues and friends to decrease stress and bolster morale during these times. More than anything, we need to support one another.

Virtual Socializing Platforms

- Microsoft Teams is a collaboration app that helps your team stay organized and have conversations—all in one place.
 - [Download Teams](#) for your desktop, iOS, or Android or just use Teams on the web at <https://teams.microsoft.com>.
 - [Video](#) illustrating the benefits of using teams, especially during this isolation period
- [Zoom](#)
- Skype
- Google Hangouts (for LionMail users)

If you have any trouble with technology being utilized for team connectivity, please contact CUIT here: <https://cuit.columbia.edu/service-desk>.

Connecting with Employees Virtually

There are also some creative ways to connect with your colleagues. Here are some ideas for different channels and/or conversation starters:

- Share pictures of your pets or children “assisting you” while working from home.



- Share book, television, and movie recommendations before or after a meeting.
- Continue to provide recognition of peers and colleagues for a job well done.
- Managers can set up weekly "phone trees", "roundtables", or "community of practice" groups for remote workers organized around a workplace topic. The topics can range from overcoming remote work challenges, navigating change, project practice, etc. Employees can propose topics for these meetings.
- Managers should ensure they check-in with employees so they know that they may be out of sight, but they are certainly not out of mind.

- Host different contests such as best ergonomic work from home space, cutest professional pet, or best gif to represent working from home; something to engage employees and add a sense of levity.
- Hold virtual coffee meetings, lunches, and happy hours (but make sure that it is clear that non-alcoholic drinks are fine, too).



You can get creative with your virtual connections but staying connected to each other during this time is paramount!

Exercise and Fitness at Home

- **Down Dog** - Down Dog, Yoga for Beginners, HIIT, Barre, and 7 Minutes are extending a free period trial until July 1, 2020, for anyone with a “.edu” email address so that they can have access to wellness at home. To access the free membership, please sign up with your .edu email address. at schools@downdogapp.com. More info can be found [here](#).
- **CorePower Yoga on Demand** - CorePower Yoga on Demand has made its online catalog of classes available for free during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Obé Fitness** - (\$27 a month) Obé offers live and on-demand fitness classes — At Home through unlimited access to daily live and 4,000+ on-demand classes.
- **Classpass Fitness** - (\$45 a month, but free for new members) Classpass includes in-app access to audio and video workouts. Many of these workouts can be done for free indoors by utilizing their free trial period.
- **Peloton Fitness** – Normally \$12.99 a month, Peloton is inviting new users to try the app for free for the next 90 days. Even those with other types of at-home fitness machines can still use the app by signing up for the Peloton Digital membership. There are live and recorded video and audio workouts for yoga, strength-training, guided runs, meditation, and cycling.

Mindfulness and Wellness

Columbia University Office of Work/Life: The Office of Work/Life website lists many resources to assist with mental health. Essential to overall health, positive mental and emotional well-being allows individuals to realize their full potential, manage stresses of life, work productively, and make meaningful contributions to their communities. For more information visit: <https://worklife.columbia.edu/content/mental-emotional-well-being>.

Columbia's Employee Assistance Program (EAP): The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a network of free services, provided by Humana, to help you and your household members cope with issues experienced in everyday life. Services include short-term confidential counseling, well-being resources and tools to help you be successful in the workplace. To learn more about Columbia's EAP, visit: <https://humanresources.columbia.edu/employee-assistance>.

Other Resources, Websites, and Apps

- **Talkspace** – Virtual therapy that offers many different paid plans, but currently is offering a Special Offer: Get \$100 off with code 1004U and a two-week free trial. It is also free for all healthcare workers currently and you can learn more [here](#).
- **Coping with virus anxiety** – Free resources for anxiety and your mental health in a global climate of uncertainty.
- **Webinars for mental health** – (some free, some require payment)
- **Headspace Meditation** - (\$12.99 a month / free for all healthcare workers currently and [this link](#) will tell you if you are eligible)
- **Calm** – (\$12.99 a month) Calm is a nature-inspired competitor to Headspace that also provides guided meditation recordings.
- **Balance Meditation** – Balance is making its services free for one year and you can email access@balanceapp.com for instructions.
- **Moodkit** - (\$4.99 one-time payment) MoodKit is a cognitive-behavioral therapy-based app that allows you to track your mood, activities, diet, thoughts, and social engagement.
- **Mindful Online Learning** – (Free until June 30, 2020) Mindful Online Learning offers 30 days of mindfulness to calm anxious thoughts, strengthen emotional resilience, and cultivate compassion and connection.
- Deep, conscious breathing in times like these is a simple way to find some zen, and a few simple apps can help you remember to do this. The Apple Watch has its signature breath function. On the iPhone, there's Breathe and the Breathing App. On Android, try out the Breathe app.

Parenting Resources

Our temporary reality is difficult and complicated for us, but even more confusing for children. Children's routines are important and put structure in their lives. Many programs and schools have certainly risen to the challenge by developing and sharing remote learning resources tailored to their individual curriculums. [Click here for our list of](#) parenting resources and activities for children.

Back-up Child Care

- Managing your children and your work is always a juggling act – but it is facing its biggest test now. For eligible employees, there is Bright Horizons backup care. They are trying to meet as many needs as possible through their programs. Please follow this link to learn more about it and please note that you *must* be registered to take advantage of their resources: <https://worklife.columbia.edu/backupcare>

For additional tips and resources, please continually check our website at <https://worklife.columbia.edu>.

Other Resources:

<https://humanresources.columbia.edu>
<https://www.cumc.columbia.edu/hr/>
<https://cuit.columbia.edu>
<https://www.it.cuimc.columbia.edu>