

Quick Fixes to Make Working From Home Hurt Less

A summary of tips from our webinar to help keep your body, mind and emotions healthy while working remotely.

🕒 Read 7 minutes

This article is part of our Steelcase 360 series [Making Distance Work](#) about working remotely.

Until a few weeks ago, we thought we knew everything about working from home because many of us have been doing it for years — but this is entirely different and it's not by choice.

We can't go to a coffee shop for a change of scenery and we're collaborating online almost constantly, trying to figure out the right pace. For a lot of us, living on video all day is mentally and physically exhausting.

At Steelcase, we have researchers who've spent years learning how people do their best work — not only can they explain why we're so tired, but they can give us ideas about what to do about it. So, we invited a panel of experts to join us for our webinar, Making Distance Work: How to keep your body, mind and emotions healthy when you're suddenly remote.

If you missed the conversation, you can watch the recording anytime or read the summary of what our guests had to say below.

WATCH ON DEMAND

Our webinar, Making Distance Work, is now available to watch anytime.

Our Bodies

*Suggestions from Kevin Butler,
Steelcase Certified Professional Ergonomist*

BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT MOVEMENT AND SET A GOAL

Sitting is a reality and it's okay. Sedentary, stationary and unsupported postures are what can really wreak havoc on our physical wellbeing. We know we should get up and move more, but that's easier said than done.

The fix: Use your calendar to remind you to move and walk. Think about what activities you can do (either work or home) that allow you to move. Find the meeting where you don't have to be on video and make it a walking meeting. Also, set movement goals for yourself. Everyone talks about 10,000 steps, but Kevin says 7,000-13,000 is a great goal and about 5,000 of those should increase your heart rate a bit more. A brisk walking pace should do the trick.

SIMPLE FIXES WILL ADD TO YOUR COMFORT AT HOME

Your comfort at home is all about what postures and what equipment you have available. There's plenty you can do with what you have. Kevin offered the example of sitting down at the kitchen table. You're on a hard chair and likely hunched over to reach your laptop with your shoulders near your ears. Instead, you want your elbows closer to resting height, more support for your back, and your feet flat on the floor.

The fix: Add a few cushions to your chair to raise yourself up and get your shoulders in a better position. Grab a sweatshirt or small pillow and put it behind your lower back to bolster your lumbar. Put your laptop up on a box or a book so that it's near eye level. If you haven't already, you really need to invest in an external keyboard or mouse to separate the screen from the keys. Now, you're in better shape — but you still don't want to sit there for hours and hours.

“Your next posture is your best posture.”

Kevin Butler
Steelcase Certified Professional Ergonomist

MAXIMIZE TRANSITIONS. “YOUR NEXT POSTURE IS YOUR BEST POSTURE.”

Our habits aren't the best whether we're at work or at home. But, at least at work you're often forced to move from meeting room to meeting room. Even the walk to the bathroom takes longer at work. So, we have to be especially thoughtful about adopting good habits at home.

The fix: Kevin talked about the power of maximizing transitions — that time when you shift from seated to standing and then seated again. Take extra steps, do some squats, walk in circles, find a way to extend those moments at home. He says this concept is easy to understand, but hard to adopt. So, give yourself a mantra that you can repeatedly recite in your head. He suggests: “Move more, move often,” “Sitting is the opposite of moving,” and “Your next posture is your best posture.”

Our Minds

*Suggestions from Patricia Kammer,
Principal Researcher, Steelcase WorkSpace Futures*

CONSIDER NEW RITUALS, HABITS AND PRACTICES

Remote work is disrupting the three C’s of collaboration: communication, cadence and connection.

The fix: Talk to your team about how to establish new communication practices now that you’re remote. Consider channels for formal and informal communication. Use digital tools to make thinking visible across team members to keep everyone aware of what’s happening. While reconsidering cadence, try out a quick standup video meeting each day to create alignment. Finally, think about connection. Many people are leveraging video conferencing, but find it can be exhausting. When you use video conferencing, you tend to have a formal posture, be tethered to one spot and have a singular focus where your eyes don’t get a break. So, consider which meetings need to have video connections and which do not.

MAINTAIN FOCUS BY ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES

We tend to think about noise and what’s going on around us as distractions that prevent focus. But, anxiety and high levels of stress can also significantly impact your cognitive load. The Coronavirus pandemic is likely impacting your ability to pay attention.

The fix: Take a cue from people who practice meditation. Commit to moments of mindfulness throughout the day — even five minutes can make a difference — and recenter yourself to help regulate your emotions. Also, find ways to establish new routines and set clear boundaries for when you’re “on” versus “off” work. Use your status updates to communicate to team members when you are free to interrupt.

When we think of serendipity, we tend to think of it happening informally, but now that we're remote, we have to build in more formal structures to connect this way.

Patricia Kammer
Principal Researcher, Steelcase WorkSpace Futures

ENHANCE REMOTE SERENDIPITOUS INTERACTIONS

Serendipitous encounters we normally have in our work environment don't happen when we're remote. But, there are a variety of ways to creatively cultivate those social bonds.

The fix: When we think of serendipity, we tend to think of it happening informally, but now that we're remote, we have to build in more formal structures to connect this way. Block the first ten minutes of team meetings to catch up to enable interactions and a quick dialogue with team members. And be broad in your thinking about what a social interaction looks like — send a joke, a funny meme or share a personal photo to create that social bond.

Our Emotions

*Suggestions from Dr. Tracy Brower,
Principal, Steelcase Applied, Research + Consulting*

KEEP PERSPECTIVE AND FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

It can be hard to stay positive when so much uncertainty surrounds us. But, keeping perspective is a key component.

The fix: Stay focused on the future. Remind yourself that this is temporary and things will return to a new normal. Boston University did a study on optimism with 70,000 people. It found the more you feel optimistic, the greater your sense of wellbeing and the greater your longevity (11%-15% greater, in fact!).

NURTURE RELATIONSHIPS AND SUPPORT OTHERS

Work is fundamentally social, yet we tend to think about our technology primarily as a way to support our tasks and our productivity.

The fix: We need to expand how we think about technology so that it can serve us and enhance our relationships with others. We can connect virtually for coffee or happy hour. We can even watch movies together and comment in real time. In addition to how we use technology, Tracy encouraged us to look for ways to support each other. Research by The Ascent says that when you're more generous, your satisfaction with work will expand and your compassion will contribute to more happiness overall.

ENSURE MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL DISTANCING

Social distancing is so critical right now. Tracy encouraged us to also think about [mental and emotional distancing](#) as well. Research tells us that when we feel a sense of overwhelm and ambiguity we seek out more and more information and can end up marinating in negativity.

The fix: So, it's important we take healthy mental and emotional breaks. You can do that by taking a walk, just looking out the window, reading a book or trying a new hobby. And be mindful of gratitude because it contributes to happiness and fulfillment. Finally, don't forget the impact of really great sleep physically, cognitively and emotionally. Good habits can help us escape and feel more healthy during our work day.

For more ideas from our panel of experts, you can watch our webinar [Making Distance Work](#) anytime on demand.

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Suddenly working from home? Join the conversation hosted by Steelcase on LinkedIn.

Stay in Touch

Sign up to receive a bi-weekly email from Steelcase 360. We will keep adding stories, research, insights — anything we're learning that might be helpful - as well as new story, podcast and magazine releases.

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