

Tips for Working from Home — With or Without Kids



Even if working from home feels challenging, it can have its benefits. One study found remote workers are more productive when doing so from home. That same study found remote workers felt their work-life balance was a bit out-of-whack. You may be feeling the same way right about now. Luckily, there are plenty of ways to be productive and shut your work down at the end of the day — even if your office is less than 20 feet from your couch. It's all about scheduling, nailing your most productive time periods, and getting a bit creative. And, given current projections that 25-30% of the workforce will be working from home one to two days per week in the next few years, it's time to start getting comfortable with the idea.

Whether you're working alone or working from home with partners or kids, here's a list of tips on how to create a productive workday:

Keep a Schedule

Now that you're working from home, you're in charge of your day. It's important to keep a schedule and keep hours like you would in your office setting. That means getting out of your bed, getting dressed, and acting like you're at work — even if it doesn't feel normal.

A few ways to maintain some semblance of a schedule:

- **Show up** - Set an alarm and get out of your PJs. You obviously don't have to wear a suit and tie but getting dressed keeps a sense of normalcy. Do this for the kids as well, if you have any.
- **Make your bed** - It seems silly, but it's a great way to start your day with a sense of accomplishment. With so many unknowns right now, it's also a way to feel like you have control over a certain part of your life.
- **Set boundaries** - If possible, claim specific hours that you're working. Let your kids/spouse/roommate who know your office or workspace is off-limits during this time.
- **Time yourself** - See how long you actually need throughout the day for specific tasks. A free time tracker like Toggl is a great way to do this.

Creating a schedule and sticking to it will help you carve out the most productive work hours — even if you're doing it from the comfort of your own couch.

Make Lists and Prioritize

Now that you're in your own space (with many potential distractions that you don't have at work), it's time to learn major time management skills. This starts with creating efficient lists of priority projects.

Some tips to prioritize work:



- **Get organized** - Break out projects into tasks and make lists. This gives you an idea of how much time you need and how much you can get done realistically in a day.
- **Prioritize** - Write down one to three tasks a day that must get done. Then, divide the rest into "should get done" and "would be nice to get done." Those two columns can move to tomorrow, if necessary.
- **Go easy on yourself** - You can't expect to get the same amount of work done at home as you did in the office. Between technological difficulties and learning new communication methods, it's a balancing act. Communicate with your manager early on if you think you may miss deadlines.

Make lists in a way that feels comfortable to you. You can make an ongoing note, set calendar alerts, or even have a notebook to jot tasks down.

Have a Dedicated Work Space

While it may be comfortable to sit back on your couch and do work, it's not great for your posture or your overall work process. Instead, consider creating a space that's made just for work — nothing else.

A few tips on creating your ideal workspace:

- **Work with what you've got** - If you have an office with a door, that's the best place to get work done. But even if you just have a small kitchen table and your laptop, that can work, too.
- **Avoid the TV** - Don't work in front of the TV as it's distracting and easy to get off track.
- **Start blocking time-suckers** - Use apps to block social media or other distracting websites. Ignore your phone and check email at specific times throughout the day.
- **Create a nice environment** - Consider putting on soothing background music and decorating your space with a few things that make you happy.

When you create a dedicated workspace, it makes it easier to focus when you have what you need handy and limit distractions. It also gives you a place to flip the work switch on or off, instead of seeing your work in piles everywhere around the house.

Take Breaks Often

As nice as it would be to power through work and not take any breaks, you aren't doing yourself any favors if you do so. It will wear out your mental energy and makes you prone to creating mistakes.

Here's how to remind yourself not to skip breaks:

- **Try out time management techniques** - Explore the Pomodoro Technique or time blocking to schedule regular breaks.
- **Watch how you feel clarity after breaks** - Compare the days you don't take breaks to the ones that you do. You'll likely find you're more productive when you give your mind a chance to refresh.
- **Enjoy outdoor time** - If you're feeling stuck or need fresh air, get outside in nature. Consider taking a quick walk outside or focusing on another outdoor activity you enjoy.
- **Stretch** - If you don't have a standing desk, make sure you're getting your body up to stretch and release muscle tension or tightness.

There's a reason breaks are encouraged throughout the workday. Consider setting timers to remind yourself it's time to get up and put some space between you and work.

Keep Healthy Snacks Handy

Boredom eating is happening all over the world right now. It's easy to head straight to the pantry and consume half of your day's calorie allotment before noon. If snacking is your go-to, consider only bringing healthy items into your home so you're not tempted.

A few other healthy nibbling hacks:

- **Make it easy** - Consider measuring snacks into small containers or bags to avoid eating more than you intended. It's easy to get carried away with a whole can of nuts, for example.
- **Have some variety** - Cut-up veggies, turkey jerky, fresh fruit, granola, trail mix, and popcorn are all healthy options that are great for quick snacks.
- **Watch sugar content** - Too much sugar will make you crash unnecessarily. Read labels to ensure you're not overloading your body. Granola bars and trail mix (with candy) can have a lot of hidden sugar.

Make it hard on yourself to stress-eat. Keep temptation down by keeping unhealthy stuff outside of your home.

Exercise Daily

Keep up your physical and mental health even if you haven't stepped outside your neighborhood in what feels like weeks. Exercise will give you a natural energy boost and keep your immune system strong.

Here's why the gyms being closed is no excuse:

- **Get creative with workout options** - There are too many online options that offer step-by-step workouts for you to skip gym time. You might have to be flexible and change your routine up, but moving your body is better than nothing!
- **Start now** - If you don't have an exercise routine, now is a great time to start one! Check out YouTube for beginner workouts.
- **Make it a standing date** - Try to block out at least a half hour per day to move your body.

Every day that you're working from home is an opportunity to make a workout happen, too. You've gained time by not commuting, so consider tacking on a workout at the start or end of your day.

Honor Your Working Hours

It can be easy to work all the time at home but stick to your start and stop times and honor them. Ask that your colleagues do the same.

Tips to keep work and home life separate:

- **Shut down communication methods** - A few minutes before the end of your shift, log out of your communication channels. This may mean putting your phone down for the rest of the evening, too.
- **Think about your family** - At the end of a workday, your family wants to reconnect with you. If you have kids, they need you to be present and not focused on work.
- **Create an exit for the day list** - If leaving certain tasks undone makes you feel like you haven't finished your workday, plan to get those done. Write down anything that needs to be tackled right away the next day, so you don't bring the worries with you once you've clocked out.

With current stressful world events, you don't need to add more to your plate by stressing over work 24/7. Learn to shut it down efficiently and walk away to refresh for the next day.

Enjoy Some Self-Care

You've heard the saying before: You can't take care of your family if you're not taking care of yourself. Self-care is far from selfish, especially in these times when we need to watch our mental and physical health closely.

Ways to make self-care part of your day:

- **Get on a routine** - Consider developing morning and evening routines to find balance. Maybe that's drinking a cup of coffee on your balcony in the morning and then a meditation session in the evening.
- **Break away** - Take time to yourself when you need it. We all need alone time.
- **Actively mitigate stress** - Try deep breathing, meditation, journaling, or exercising — whatever helps you the most to unwind.
- **Give yourself (and the kids) a break** - If you're working from home for the first time, it may take some time to get into a rhythm. If your kids are home too, you're probably doing three jobs right now — worker, parent, teacher — it won't all be perfect all the time. Cut yourself some slack.

Given the current chaos at the moment, it's important to focus on creating —and relying on — at least one self-care habit daily. See how you feel after a week of implementing self-care.

Tips for Working from Home with Kids

Practically overnight, parents became teachers, too. Throw in working from home in addition to household duties, and it's enough to make even the most balanced people topple.

It's not easy, but it's likely temporary. It's not ideal, but it's reality right now.

Here are a few ways to make the transition easier:

- **Create a "school day" schedule** - If you're doing online school or temporary homeschooling, keep specific times during the day to focus on school.
- **Build-in flexibility, too** - Sometimes you'll have to change up your parenting style a bit to be able to get work done. Maybe that means your kids get a bit more TV than normal. It's okay.
- **Work during your best times** - If you know your kids are going to need all your attention first thing in the morning, don't try to settle into work during that time. Instead, get them set up for their day. Then let them know you need time to work, too. Explain when the next break is when you can all take a walk together or have a dance party.
- **Don't create huge time blocks** - Consider doing shorter work sessions for school or work; this new schedule is an adjustment for everyone. Take a break each hour to connect and relax.
- **Maximize nap time** - If you have little ones who nap, use this period of time for projects that need your extreme concentration. Schedule work calls or other important tasks for this time. Past the napping stage? Set a quiet time period meant for reading or resting.
- **Set up fun activities** - Have a hyperactive kiddo who demands attention and activities? Schedule time to go outside to get fresh air first thing in the morning. Then have a few activities ready to go once back home to hold their attention while you work for a few hours.
- **Schedule TV time** - Don't let the kids do schoolwork in front of the TV as it will serve as a major distraction. If possible, work together at the same time so there's a sense of quiet in the house at the same time. Let them know when they can watch TV to give them something to look forward to.
- **Pre-cut and package snacks** - Have healthy snacks on hand that are easy for you and the kids to grab throughout the day. For older kids, let them know where they can find these snacks in the pantry, fridge, etc. For little ones, consider setting a few options on their table. If the kids can help themselves, they're less likely to interrupt your working time.
- **Create fun cooking lessons** - School has to get done at some point. And, you have to eat. Look for healthy cookies or other snacks to bake with the kids. Make it a math and science lesson.



- **Get the family involved in exercise** - Take walks together, jog, or do an exercise video together. Exercise is good for everyone's health and reduces stress levels.

Remote Work Isn't Always Easy Work

Remote work is now a reality for many individuals. The above tips for working remotely are merely suggestions. Everyone has unique situations they're dealing with, so sometimes these won't be feasible. The most important remote work tip? Do your best. Our current world events are uncharted territory — for you, your boss, our government, and our world. If you're able to work remotely, consider yourself lucky. It may come with its challenges, but it's still a paycheck that many don't have right now. And you're safe at home.

Schedule your work around your most productive hours and expect some setbacks and challenges. Communicate — and over communicate — with your team to keep things going as smoothly as possible.