

How to Work From Home, if You've Never Done It Before

If you find yourself working closer to your bedroom because of coronavirus, here are some tips that can help.



By Jen A. Miller

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More and more companies are having employees work from home to help slow the spread of coronavirus. If you find yourself among those trying to figure out how to work from home, I can help.

I've been a freelance writer for 15 years, setting up first in the small corner of an apartment and then moving into space with a dedicated office where I could shut the door.

I love it, but I know it's not an easy transition, especially if it's not one you've been planning for. Here are some tips on how to make the best of it until you start commuting again.

Keep the Same Schedule

Start out by sticking to the same schedule as when you went into an office. "Try to get up at the same time, and do all the things you would typically do to get ready for work," said William Castellano, professor in the Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations. "Make sure you're thinking about how you're going to structure your day similarly" to how you did before. So if you made a to-do list every morning, make the to-do list. If you checked in with the same person every morning, check in with that person.

Of course, your work day can't possibly be the same, and while I admit I initially laughed at a Google employee who asked about how to get morning coffee, his experience is not unusual: Your routine will change, and you will need time to figure out how to accommodate those changes, like making coffee at home if you're used to picking it up on the way to work.

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As for what to wear in your home office, I am squarely in the "be comfortable" camp, though Barbara Pachter, author of "The Essentials of Business Etiquette" and a longtime work-from-homer, said that in the beginning, you should get dressed as if you were going into an office. It will help in giving some structure to your day, and you can change your home dress code later, as you adjust to your new working arrangement.

Set Boundaries

Pick a spot for your office. It doesn't have to have a door, but it should be away from distraction. You don't need an expensive set up. I have an office, but I'm much more likely to write at a stand-up "desk" I've fashioned with a stack of books on my kitchen counter.

The boundaries you set up also pertain to other people who may be sharing the same space. This will be especially important if a partner or roommate is also working from home or children's schools are closed. Ms. Pachter suggests that if kids are given assignments to do at home, they work alongside their parents as if they were coming to the office with you. (The effectiveness of this may vary, depending on your children's ages and needs.)

But being expected to work from home full time while also home-schooling children full time is just not going to be realistic, said Sara Perry, assistant professor of management at Baylor University. "There's a lot demanding of your time and energy and resources right now," she said. This may mean having conversations with managers about adjusting their expectations, given the extraordinary circumstances.

Schedule Breaks

Treat exercise, meals and stretch breaks as you would any other meeting: That means putting it on your calendar, at least to start. If your commute used to include walking, and now you have no reason to leave the house, you might forget to move. When you suddenly lose the pace of your day, everything can start to bleed together. You may be used to relying on cues from your workplace (i.e., other people) to remind you to get up and stretch or get lunch.

And while going to the gym may be out of the question, you may be able to walk or run outside while still practicing social distancing, or use workout videos online or on demand to give yourself some kind of workout.

Prepare for Isolation

Even introverts who work in an office can suffer from isolation at suddenly being moved home. Dr. Perry suggested proactively staying in touch with others rather than waiting for someone to reach out. That could mean emailing colleagues more often, having conference calls, video conferences, using chat tools or just picking up the phone.

The best thing I did to chase isolation away was to get a dog. Of course, it's not realistic for everyone to go out and get a new pet right now, especially if your work-from-home arrangement is temporary. I'll also put on an old movie or one I've seen many times before in the background while I work. It's not the same as working in an office, but it does provide a background hum so I'm not working in complete silence.

Put Work Away

For those who are used to working in an office, the evening commute is often a way to end the work day and begin home life. Dr. Perry said it's important to continue to make the same transition, even if you're just moving from one spot on the couch to the other. So put your work materials and your laptop away (or just shut work applications if you want to use your computer for something else).

She added that this is crucial right now because "you're already being challenged in terms of your personal resources," she said. "You still have to take that recovery time from work."

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- **What is a coronavirus?**

It is a novel virus named for the crownlike spikes that protrude from its surface.

The coronavirus can infect both animals and people and can cause a [range of respiratory illnesses](#) from the common cold to lung lesions and pneumonia.

- **How contagious is the virus?**

It seems to spread very easily from person to person, especially in homes, hospitals and other confined spaces. The pathogen can travel through the air, enveloped in tiny respiratory droplets that are produced when a sick person breathes, talks, coughs or sneezes.

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