

Managing the Stress of Social Distancing and Working Remotely

As COVID-19 spreads and more of us are working from home, it's time to establish new norms. Here are a few tips on how to work from home to manage or avoid feelings of isolation, boredom, frustration, or anxiety.

TIPS FOR WORKING REMOTELY

- 1. Ritual/Routine.** Structure your day like you would in the office. Create personal events in your calendar to make sure tasks are completed.
- 2. Consider Your Home Office Space.** As much as possible, create a separate, physical work space at home. Try to decrease distractions. Consider ways to make it physically comfortable and emotionally pleasant.
- 3. Communication.** Stress and anxiety are prevalent right now as we juggle kids, work, worry and lack of normal routines. Re-read your messages before you hit send to make sure you are not communicating unnecessary emotion. Instead of "Call me" try, "Great suggestion. Call me and we can discuss how we can add them to the draft."
- 4. Schedule Time for Informal Chats/Collaborations.** We are used to impromptu discussions and the "discussions that follow the meeting." This is often where great ideas emerge. Make time to have those discussions on the phone or video chats.
- 5. Take Mini Breaks.** The best way to relax and stay focused is to step away from your computer for 5 minutes. Take some deep breaths, do some grounding exercises, stretch, and move.
- 6. Check on Your Coworkers.** Take a virtual break together. Eat lunch together, virtually. Check in and compare tips.



SUGGESTED APPS:

Most apps have a free version so you can try it out.

- Headspace
- Insight Timer
- Meditation Studio
- Calm
- 100% Happier
- Woebot

Online Movement Options:

- [Peloton App](#) (90 days, no equipment high intensity interval training HIIT)
- [FitOn](#) has all kinds of workouts that are always free
- [CorePowerYoga](#) is offering free streaming classes
- [TrainerJenBenton](#) is posting free body weight workouts on her Instagram
- [Austin Prenatal Yoga](#) is hosting online prenatal and postpartum yoga
- [Studio Satya](#) is hosting online yoga and meditation



EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL SELF CARE

1. Create a Ritual to Transition from Work to Home.

When you work at home, you live in your office. It can be easy to overwork. Set a time to stop working and then stop. It is important to differentiate work time from personal time, especially if you are working from home. When you are done working let your coworkers know and turn off your computer and phone.

2. Develop Meditation or Relaxation Rituals. Notice your breath. Mindfully identify what you are thinking and feeling and how your body is responding. If you are holding your breath or if your breathing is shallow, take a few minutes to breathe deeply. There are apps that will guide you through meditation or mindfulness activities. Try this [relaxation audio in English or Spanish on the EAP website](#).

3. Prioritize and Develop a Regular Sleep Routine. Check out this [information about sleep on the EAP website](#).

4. Work Towards a Healthy Diet. Make conscious choices, take a break while eating, slow down and incorporate food that tastes good and makes you feel good. [Farmhouse delivery](#) is an option for UT employees to have local produce delivered to home. UT Employees get a 10% discount.

5. Focus on Your Pets. Whether sitting down and petting them, playing with them or taking them for a walk, pets help us focus and can provide us comfort.

6. Keep a Journal. Research shows that writing can be a stress reliever and may improve your mood. Incorporate a gratitude journal or simply focus on three things that you are grateful for daily.

7. Remember to Engage in Non-work Hobbies. Even short amounts of time participating in a hobby gives your mind a break and helps you to increase moments of pleasure. Prioritizing pleasurable hobbies can contribute to emotional balance, especially when some meaningful activities may be on hold with social distancing.

8. Use this Time to Learn a New Skill. Whether it is professional development, a hobby you want to try, or an area of personal growth, use this time to develop something new and positive for yourself.

9. Limit the Time You Spend Reading the News and Social Media. It is readily available and can be overwhelming. While staying aware of current developments, make a conscious effort to limit how much time you focus on this and make sure it comes from a reliable source.

10. Engage via Phone and Video Chats with Friends and Family. Friends and family can help us to keep our fears and worry in perspective and they may help you identify when you are catastrophizing. Be intentional to choose friends and family who will be positive and uplifting. This is especially important when you are working from home or self-isolating.

11. Examine your thoughts. Notice what you are focusing on and try not to catastrophize, recognize if you are focusing on worst case scenarios and redirect your thoughts to things you have control over. Remember times you have coped well in the past, nurture a positive view of yourself, and maintain a hopeful outlook. Focus on the altruistic reasons for social distancing.

12. Exercise regularly. Create an exercise routine, find something that you enjoy, it can be a sport that increases your heartrate or something brief or gentle like taking a walk or restorative yoga. YouTube has numerous videos for guided exercise, yoga or dance.

DON'T HESITATE TO REACH OUT FOR HELP

If these ideas seem difficult to incorporate or you are experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety, or are unable to sleep or function well, don't hesitate to reach out to for help. UT's Employee Assistance Program is available to provide confidential remote counseling at no charge to benefits eligible employees and their dependents. Go to eap.utexas.edu or call 512-471-3366 to make an appointment. The [BCBS MD live](#) line not only has counselors, but also doctors and nurses you can talk to with no charge. It is part of your benefit package as an employee.

OTHER EAP RESOURCES

Check the [EAP website](#) periodically for additional tips and resources to build resilience and support your emotional health.

- [Dealing with Personal Stress and Change](#)
- [Stress Management](#) – introduction to mindfulness video (middle of page)