



# Solutions for working at home unexpectedly



At the present time we are required, wherever possible, to work at home. But how should you go about this? What arrangements should you make with your employees? And what tips can you pass on about working at home?

This brochure offers a few practical tips to make working at home a lot easier.

## HOW TO SET UP YOUR WORK STATION?

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- 1 Feet flat on the ground
- 2 Seat height: hips slightly above knees
- 3 Seat length: min. 2 fingers and max. a hand's width between back of knee and front seat edge
- 4 Lower back supported just above the trouser belt
- 5 Table at elbow height



Recommended situation for teleworkers



- 6 Top of screen at eye level
- 7 Screen at arm's length
- 8 Keyboard: relaxed posture, hands and wrists supported
- 9 Mouse beside keyboard
- 10 Regular breaks to interrupt sitting down

Source: Ergonomics Belgium VerV

More tips?  
Check it out on [www.securex.be/thuiswerk](http://www.securex.be/thuiswerk)

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## TIPS FOR EMPLOYEES

### Separate workspace

Do not work on the bed or the sofa, but find a place to work where you can concentrate. Keep your work station tidy, and brighten it up or make it nice and comfortable. Pick a spot with plenty of light and room to work in. Position your screen at least 1 metre from the wall, so you can gaze past it occasionally.

### Furniture adjustment

In ideal circumstances your chair, table and screen are adjustable. But what if they are not? Well, with a little creativity you should be able to set up your work station properly: for example by:

- using an upside down bowl as a footrest;
- raising the table on wooden blocks;
- placing a cushion on your chair;
- placing your computer or laptop on a stack of books;
- supporting your lower back with a cushion, a rolled-up towel or kitchen roll.

Put simply, the message is to be creative; but check that everything is stable and above all safe!

### Structure and planning

Create structure in your day. Most people prefer a routine. For example, start work when you would normally start at the office, fix your daily working hours or divide your day into sections. Establish rules with your housemates: times when you are working and cannot be disturbed, times when you can enjoy each other's company, etc. But remember to schedule breaks or brief activities with them.

Our present working circumstances are already a drain on our mental energy: communicating without face-to-face contact, getting distracted by our housemates, wrestling with technology that doesn't always work, etc. These are all challenges in their own right. Stick to your plans, because now isn't the time to be multitasking. Try to identify times when the circumstances are not good for your concentration or when you are not being as productive as you could be.

Be understanding of colleagues with children. Try as a team to decide the best times for online meetings and take families into account. Talk the matter over and don't act as though they are not there. To feel more connected switch the camera on for online meetings: we are social animals after all. Remember to check the background against which you will appear.

### Working at home with children

Working at home with (young) children is quite a challenge. But this too can be overcome with a good plan and a clear set of rules. Try to stick to the structure of the normal school day. Create a calendar of how the day is structured (with pictures for young children).

Take a break at playtime and give the children your full attention at that point. Make it a lovely time for everyone, and forget about work for a while.

Let your children know when you are at work. If there is another parent at home you may be able to alternate: one of you works in a separate area and mustn't be disturbed, while the other works in the children's space and is available to them if needed.

If they are old enough you can give them things to do while you work: homework, follow online lessons, watch an educational programme and give a short talk about it afterwards, etc. It may also be a good time to clean and sort the toys, tidy the room or do other household chores.



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## Use your energy wisely

In these days we face many challenges at once, so it is important to use our energy wisely. The best way is to tackle one job at a time and to focus on others briefly from time to time. If the task at hand allows it, create times when you mustn't or shouldn't be disturbed, as this will help keep you focused and working effectively.

Plan to work when you have the energy and freedom to do so: if you are an early bird you can begin the day early with renewed vigour. Tasks that take up your time and concentration are best done during these peak intervals. Brainstorming sessions and meetings are best arranged before or after your attention peak.

Share your work status with your colleagues. For example, why not include an in-the-office message in your signature if you are difficult to reach. Or send out an 'in-the-zone' message to show that you are focused on work and not (immediately) available.

## Informal contact with colleagues

We probably all miss those times at work when we enjoy a laugh with our colleagues, a quick hello in the corridor or a chat by the coffee machine. Arrange ways of maintaining informal contact with your colleagues (which can help maintain a sense of working together on something) and the tools you will use to do it (chat, telephone, online video, etc.). Having social contact, hearing and seeing other people, getting ideas through posts on social media, etc. These are all important when working at home for any length of time. Make sure you incorporate them in your day. Organise things so that you strike a good balance between times when you focus on work and times when you engage in social contact.

Make time for brief informal contact, a remote group discussion, a telephone call, a virtual lunch or a virtual afterwork with a colleague. These days all kinds of tools and options are available online, which you can employ creatively: to hold meetings, for example, or to work more visually or collaborate.

## Vary your posture and exercise

Change your posture regularly: stand up after 30 minutes of sitting, stay on your feet for an online meeting, get yourself a glass of water, etc.

Make sure you are getting enough exercise every day. The World Health Organisation recommends a minimum of 30 minutes a day at moderate intensity. This includes walking at a brisk pace, as well as cycling, jogging, etc. Set aside time every day to go out (with your family) and exercise or play games.

What if you have energy to spare? Plan a good workout once or twice a week. You might also consider jogging, yoga in the garden or a good bike ride. Remember of course to stay within the government guidelines ([www.info-coronavirus.be](http://www.info-coronavirus.be)).

## Look after your mental health

The corona crisis is undoubtedly a source of stress for many. Due to worry, due to having to work at home and due to the loss of structure and the usual energy releases. So it is important to do all you can to look after your mental health. Limit the number of times you check the news every day, write up a list of all the positives that have come from the crisis, be aware of nature unfolding around you, etc.

Set time aside for relaxation, do a breathing exercise once in a while, stay active and give your mind a rest after the day's work: and switch off that smartphone every once in a while.



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## Be aware of your digital consumption

Be conscious of your use of digital media and you will find that you are under less stress, better able to focus and feeling less exhausted. It is less about reducing and more about being consciously selective in your digital consumption. It is not possible to stay permanently connected. The human brain cannot maintain concentration beyond 45 minutes. After that, it needs a rest. Plan digital-free, low-stimulus brain rests. Eat a piece of fruit, do a drawing, have a chat, gaze into the distance, listen to music, take a coffee break, meditate... or do nothing. If you don't rest your brain it will eventually switch off, and your productivity will drop off. In other words, to work more efficiently you should deliberately disconnect:

- disconnect from the internet whenever possible
- switch off the pop-ups
- limit yourself to 1 means of communication per task.
- Handling email? Switch other applications and documents off.
- Having a meeting? Switch your smartphone off.
- On the phone? Close the laptop.

## Wind down the day

Prepare your mind and body for a good night's sleep. The official recommendation is to end your screen time 2 hours before going to sleep. The blue light of tablets, smartphones and computers keeps you awake, and using these devices activates your brain. Use a blue light filter and do not use your smartphone as an alarm clock. Or, for some excitement: introduce a screen-free evening.

## TIPS FOR MANAGERS

- Make arrangements with your employees, listen to their individual circumstances and specific needs: one may have a need for structure and set working hours, another may alternate between work and private life with ease.
- Trust your employees and give them autonomy. Let them assume responsibility, by sharing tips with colleagues for example.
- Tell them what you expect of them and agree rules about:
  - When is their availability necessary, useful or unnecessary? Remember that some colleagues have children to attend to, so be flexible.
  - The best communication channel for a particular type of message.
- Plan weekly contacts with your employees through conference calls or Skype. Topics could include: task follow-ups, questions or changes resulting from the work at home, welfare of team members (such as what energises them and what saps their energy at the present time), etc.
- Check that your employees have all the right tools to enable them to work at home: laptop, headset, ergonomic equipment (extra keyboard, second screen, etc.)
- Quite a few organisations are launching and promoting new tools to facilitate a lengthy period of working from home. Familiarity with these tools varies. But under the increased stress our brains are not yet attuned to 'new skills learning'. In other words, it would make sense to invest in communication, manuals, demos, etc., about how these tools can be used, so that your people can adopt them with the least disruption possible.



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