

Virtual Healthy Meeting Guidance

Social distancing has required many of us to stay at home and work remotely. This isn't a normal way of working for many of us.

Doing a small amount of remote working can actually increase productivity, however working remotely for a prolonged period of time can sometimes impact our personal well-being, leading to feelings of disconnection, loneliness and impact on our sense of being able to perform at our best.

Working at home can also blur our boundaries between worktime and personal time, which is important to enable us to rest and recuperate. Remember that we all adjust to change in different ways and at different speeds.

Following the tips in this guide will help you and your team to overcome this by staying connected and quickly getting the best out of remote working.

1. Prioritise: Not all meetings are “urgent” or necessary to attend. Be selective about the meetings you need to attend. Avoid scheduling continuous meetings even if it is easier for you to get it over with in one go. If we wouldn't do that during in-person meetings, why are we doing it now? Our brains still need the same break in between, if not more.

2. Keep your video off: If you are feeling overstimulated, turn your video off during the meeting and simply keep your audio on. This will give you a break from staring at the screen and help reduce the load on your brain's ability to attend fully to the source of information.

3. Your Posture is important. You can relieve tension by stretching head, neck and shoulder muscles which impacts positively on your body. You may not have the same available equipment as you do in your usual workplace, such as an office chair, desk and display screen. It's important to ensure that you set up your home workplace as best you can to keep you healthy. If it's difficult to find a comfortable desk and chair, consider taking extra breaks, doing exercise and doing stretches to keep physically fit. Don't forget to move, stretch and flex regularly and you can always stand up in meetings!

3. Take measured breaks in between: If you have numerous meetings in a day, try and ensure that you take small, intentional breaks in between to give yourself a break from the stimulation. Movement breaks are especially important—not only does it help you feel less lethargic, but it also gives you a brief change of scene (even if it means going from your bedroom to your living room!). It's important to take regular breaks to engage in short mental and physical distractions to re-energise. Keeping hydrated during the day is important, so don't forget to get yourself a drink between meetings.

4. Really switch off: It's important to make it a point to cut off from work as much as is possible after the work day is over and truly have the opportunity to unwind. For instance, you can let your colleagues know that any emails sent after a certain time will be attended to during the next working day. You can also have an honest conversation with your immediate boss about the work-life balance that you need.

This is an unusual time and we need to remember that we are not simply working from home. We are living through a pandemic and trying to work and we need to strike the balance that is healthy for us, individually.

Top Tips for hosting Healthy virtual meetings:

Mindful Start – check in with your team. In virtual meetings, people still need a chance to settle in and reconnect socially before working through the agenda. At the start of each meeting hear something from everyone to ‘get their voice in the room’, and at the end leave five minutes for everyone to say a few words to disconnect at a personal level. These ‘virtual handshakes’ are crucial to connectivity and trust.

Incorporate the informal. Don’t be totally task or agenda led. Allow time for people to share news, chat about parts of the meeting that spark interest, etc. You can’t have a virtual coffee, but you can have coffee virtually!

Don’t start on an hour or finish on the hour, helps give people breaks between meetings. Consider holding a 50min meeting instead of 60min to give a 10min break every hour. If longer meetings are over 60 minutes, plan dedicated breaks for people to stretch legs, pop to the toilet or make a quick drink.

Hydration – ensure your team to have fresh water to hand and take frequent sips. Treat it like a normal meeting: Whilst it may feel different, try to run it like a normal meeting. Bringing a cup of tea to them is fine!

Encourage staff to stand or move about by using wireless headphones or raise the laptop. Especially for longer meetings.

Have an agenda/structure/purpose: Keep focused, flexible and ensure everyone is clear on the purpose of the meeting, what you need out of it and make sure you’re recording who said what, time frames and who’s leading the work. It’s also good to have regular video calls with the simple intention of just checking in on each other too!

Encourage inclusive conversation: It may feel strange at first, and that’s ok. It’s even harder if you just use audio, as you can’t see each other. Remember, we communicate mostly through our body language, so try and use video calls where you can. You may need to exert extra effort to talk/engage in the virtual meeting at first if this is not something you are used to.

Take notice, remember to ask how other people are, in addition to focusing on work tasks. Is someone taking up all the airtime, while others are quiet? Are there issues that could be addressed outside the meeting. If you see someone struggling, pick up the phone and check in on them after a team call, as they may not want to say how they feel on camera.

Share documents: Most video chat software enables you to share screens and/or share documents. This enables you to visually work on things together and brings focus to your meeting.

Size of group: Adapt your agenda depending on the size of the group. For example, 1-to-1 and small groups are likely to be able to have more focused and exploratory discussions. However, larger groups are better suited to giving information. For very large information giving meetings, you may want to disable voice conversations and use chat boxes for comments, as it can be difficult to manage too many voices at once.

Finish on time. It all well and good saying a meeting is 1hour but if it keeps going over or into 2hours it’s not good for anyone’s wellbeing! Try to stick to time or finish 5 minutes before scheduled to allow breaks before their potential next meeting.

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