

Work From Home “Burnout”: What it is, How to Manage it

Remote workers are allotted more flexibility to take breaks when they please because, for the most part, they are setting their own schedules – or at least have less rigid structures than they did while being in the office from 9 to 5.

But perhaps ditching the commute and “going to work” in your sweatpants isn’t all that it’s cracked up to be. Though there are advantages to the work-from-home lifestyle, sleeping and working in the environment can make finding a work-life balance more difficult.

If anything, it’s starting to stress Americans out. In a recent survey by Monster, a job search website, 51% of respondents admitted to experiencing burnout while working from home during the coronavirus pandemic.

And that’s despite taking breaks for “self care” every day. In the same survey, 71% of respondents said they were stepping away from work for things like walks or spending time with family.

“The lines between work and non-work are blurring in new and unusual ways, and many employees who are working remotely for the first time are likely to struggle to preserve healthy boundaries between their professional and personal lives,” wrote journalists Laura Giurge and Vanessa Bohns in the Harvard Business Review.

Vicki Salemi, a Monster career expert, told CNBC that the main culprit for burnout is a lack of structure and routine to your work day.

The World Health Organization warns of loneliness and isolation as a cause for experiencing spurts of depression while working from home.

There’s also the added stress of “proving” to your employer that you’re still working hard even while you work from home.

“There is still that, ‘I need to work while I’m making money now and also to show that I am a good employee so they keep me on,’” Melissa L. Whitson, an associate professor of psychology at the University of New Haven, told CNBC. “There is that added pressure onto it.”

Burnout is more than being stressed about a job. It can cause an array of mental and physical conditions, too, including high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline and more.

So how do we avoid it?

Be kind to yourself

It's harder than it sounds.

“The first thing you should do is to be kind to yourself and know that the stress manifests itself differently in different people,” Whitson said.

Since you can't change your external factors, try making internal shifts to improve your day. Make a list of three self-care activities you can revert to when you start to feel yourself mentally slipping throughout the day. Mine include yoga, playing the guitar and going on a run.

If you feel that “burnout” mentality creeping in, force yourself to do one thing on your list. I promise you, you will feel better.

Set office hours

Human beings like structure. Without it, it’s easy for us to feel lost, aimless and depressed throughout the day.

Implement office hours by silencing notifications and activating an “out-of-office” response outside of certain time blocks and set boundaries around your time.

It’s OK to respond to an email on Monday morning that you received at 6 p.m. on Friday. In fact, you’ll be happier because of it.

Take time off

It’s less tempting to take time off during a worldwide pandemic. It’s even less tempting when you’re “time off” will likely be spent at home... Where you’ve been working every day since March, if not longer.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't do it. Time off can refresh your mind and enthusiasm for your work. Even if you stay at home, you'll be amazed by how much more relaxed you feel by not having to open your inbox at the start of the day.

Unplug. Turn off all notifications. Take a vacation at a safe distance. Treat yourself to takeout from your favorite restaurant. You deserve "you" time now more than ever.

Have a hobby

Most of us that are working from home are spending time on our computers all day, and that makes unwinding on our computers or other electronic devices after work less enticing.

Pick up a hobby that forces you to unplug. Try something that involves working with your hands and falling into a "flow" mindset. Knitting is a great way to zone out; so is running, playing music or any other hands-on activity you can think of.

Though these few “solutions” to avoiding (or curing) burnout may sound easy, it takes intentional thought to integrate these practices into your daily work-from-home lives.

But that doesn't mean it isn't possible. If you can relate with the “burnout” mentality, make the decision right now to take the necessary steps and precautions to improve your work-from-home lifestyle and mental wellbeing.

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