



WELL-BEING RESOURCES

The New Remote Workforce: Maintaining Employee Well-being During a Pandemic

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As federal and local governments discuss and develop plans to return to business as usual, employers and employees continue to grapple with the new realities imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. While many are adjusting to their new work from home routines, millions of Americans remain furloughed or otherwise unemployed under strict stay-at-home orders. Stress and anxiety, already high, paired with an unexpected financial strain and the sudden shift in work-life balance will begin to take its toll against the well-being of your employees, which will, in turn, negatively impact engagement and productivity. During this period of disruption and social distancing, employers now more than ever have a critical role to play in ensuring employee well-being.

We encourage you to leverage the tools and resources you may already have to address multiple aspects of employee well-being and keep employees focused and engaged during these challenging times.



For additional employee well-being resources, [contact us](#).

AT A GLANCE

Maintaining personal well-being is critical in these times of high stress and anxiety. Employers can leverage tools and resources to help employees address multiple aspects of their personal well-being:



Physical – Physical activity, healthy eating habits and better sleep can all impact your employees’ physical well-being and help alleviate anxiety and stress.



Emotional – Left untreated, mental health issues may contribute to absenteeism and disengagement and adversely impact employee performance.



Social – Feelings of loneliness can affect physical well-being through lack of sleep, reduced activity and poor eating habits, and can also have a negative impact on work.



Financial – Employees report personal finances as their number one source of stress, affecting physical and emotional well-being.



Work – HR experts recommend basing performance evaluation of remote workers on work output and completion of objectives, rather than based on time.



Technological – Since employers have implemented work from home policies in an effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, 40% have already reported seeing an increase in cyber attacks.

MANAGING YOUR WELL-BEING



During a pandemic, it is especially important to take care of your well-being.

Social distancing measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have disrupted many aspects of daily life. In times of high stress and anxiety it can be difficult to remain focused and feel a sense of purpose and connectedness. Managing your personal well-being can help you relieve some of the stress and anxiety and focus on what really matters to you and your family.



Physical

Eat healthy, get plenty of sleep and find ways to stay active.

Emotional

Recognize mental health symptoms. Use your employee assistance program (EAP) benefit.

Financial

Stay the course; review retirement investment strategies to ensure you are on the appropriate path.

Technological

Be wary of email scams. Keep software updated and use strong passwords. Avoid over-sharing on social media.

Work

Maintain a routine. Budget your work time and prioritize important work.

Social

Leverage technology to stay connected. Find ways to give back.

Contact your employer to learn more about what programs and resources are available to help support your well-being.



PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Encourage your employees to maintain good physical health

There is no doubt that physical wellness can have an impact on emotional and financial wellness. Good physical health can help reduce stress and the risk of certain chronic illnesses, and associated costs. Physical activity, healthy eating habits and better sleep can all impact your employees' physical well-being and alleviate some of the anxiety and stress of social distancing and disrupted routines. Encourage your employees to maintain good physical health, including the following:

Eat healthy

What you eat every day has a direct impact on your health. Your diet can help you to reach and maintain a healthy weight, reduce the risk of chronic diseases (and related medical costs), such as heart disease and high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and certain types of cancer, and promote overall health. Even people at a healthy weight can enjoy these benefits of a healthy diet.

Employees can access healthy eating guidance and recipes online from the American Heart Association, Fruits and Veggies for Better Health and Eating Well.

Get moving

Regular physical activity can reduce the risk, severity and associated costs of certain chronic illnesses, reduce depression and can improve sleep. Health benefits start immediately after exercising—even a shortened workout session can be beneficial to your overall health. According to *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, there are substantial health benefits from 150-300 minutes per week (30-60 minutes, 5 days a week) of even moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking.



Physical activity, healthy eating habits and better sleep can impact physical well-being and alleviate stress and anxiety from COVID-19.



As physical activity increases in intensity, frequency and duration, the more benefit to your overall health.

With social distancing in place, employees may be feeling hard pressed to get any physical activity, let alone enough. Fitness providers are getting creative with their offerings as many facilities remain closed. Many are providing audio and video work outs at no cost. Employees can access a number of resources online or by mobile app from fitness providers such as the YMCA, Fitness Blender and Gold's Gym. Employees may already have access to apps, videos and other content through their current gym membership.

Get plenty of sleep

Getting enough sleep can bolster the immune system and improve brain function. Adequate sleep can also help improve your mood and fight depression, and is beneficial for your mental health. The National Sleep Foundation advises setting a routine and provides other tips at [sleepfoundation.org](https://www.sleepfoundation.org).

Your existing wellness providers and initiatives may already have resources available or may be able to provide recommendations or access to additional physical wellness resources for your employees.



EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Communicate existing mental health resources

With the complete disruption of normal life imposed by stay at home orders and social distancing measures, daycare closures and schools forced online, unexpected financial strain, and just plain fear and uncertainty over COVID-19, your employees are under a considerable (and understandable) amount of stress and anxiety.

Employees with existing mental health conditions may feel those symptoms more acutely. Other employees may be experiencing conditions like depression and anxiety for the first time. Left untreated, those mental health issues may contribute to absenteeism and disengagement (also known as “presenteeism”) and can have an adverse impact on employees’ performance including the ability to focus and make decisions, manage time and complete tasks, and interact and communicate with other employees. Encourage your employees to maintain good mental health, including the following:

Recognize signs and symptoms

Most mental health issues are left untreated because employees do not recognize signs and symptoms. Mental Health America offers free, confidential screening tools online at mhanational.org that can help employees assess their risk factors and seek treatment, as needed.

Leverage existing education materials

Your workplace wellness program or health benefits providers may already have tools and resources you can leverage, including handouts and articles, webinars, and/or cognitive behavioral therapies or digital coaching to address a variety of mental health issues.

Communicate the availability of these resources to your employees and how to access them.

Leverage existing EAP resources

In addition, most employers have access to an employee assistance program (EAP). Even employers that do not have a standalone EAP benefit might still have these services available through a health plan or ancillary benefits provider, such as long-term disability. Most EAPs provide telephone and online resources to help employees address mental illness and other stressors. Most offer telephone access to licensed counselors who can help with short-term problem resolution. Many also offer non-clinical resources that can also alleviate some stressors such as legal and financial services, as well as childcare and eldercare information and referral. Sometimes basic services include free face-to-face mental health sessions. Communicate the availability of this resource with your employees and how to access services.



Left untreated, mental health issues like depression and anxiety, may contribute to absenteeism and disengagement (also known as “presenteeism”) and can have an adverse impact on employee performance.





SOCIAL WELL-BEING

Help employees feel connected and maintain a sense of purpose while working from home

Stay at home orders and other social distancing measures can leave your employees feeling isolated and disconnected. Without that personal connection to colleagues, employees may begin to lose a sense of purpose which can lead to reduced engagement and productivity. According to a study examining loneliness in the workplace, benefits carrier, Cigna found that of employees who said they always or often feel lonely or isolated said it affected their ability to do their job. Loneliness can also have a negative impact on your physical well-being through lack of sleep, reduced activity and poor eating habits. Employers have a significant role to play in ensuring employees feel connected and maintain a sense of purpose:

Find ways to connect

Leverage video conferencing technology to encourage face-to-face interactions. Encourage teams to establish or keep up routine check-in meetings as a group and one on one.

Find volunteer opportunities

The pandemic may be limiting in-person volunteer opportunities, but non-profits, especially those serving vulnerable populations, are still in need of assistance. From monetary donations to volunteer work from home, there are plenty of opportunities to give back without increasing your risk. Employees can find local volunteer opportunities and ways to get involved through their local United Way.

Leverage EAP resources

Like with emotional well-being, your EAP provider can connect employees to counseling and other resources to help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation and increase connectedness to their work and colleagues. Communicate the availability of this resource with your employees and how to access services.



Loneliness can also have a negative impact on your physical well-being through lack of sleep, reduced activity and poor eating habits. 33% of employees who always or often feel lonely or isolated say it affects their job.





FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

Financial security is essential to employee well-being

Employees report personal finances as their number one source of stress, affecting physical and emotional well-being. According to a the 2019 Employee *Financial Wellness Survey* report by Pricewaterhouse-Coopers, 35% of employees are distracted by personal finances at work, and of those, nearly half spend 3 hours of more at work a week thinking about or dealing with personal financial issues.

Additionally, a Federal Reserve Board Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households indicates that 4 in 10 adults would either borrow money, sell something, or not be able pay if faced with a \$400 emergency expense. Those unable to cover an emergency expense outright most commonly would use credit cards or borrow from friends or family.

Your employees are concerned about their medical coverage, their ability to cover next months' mortgage payment or rent, and saving for future financial goals such as their ability to retire, especially during these uncertain times. Employers can help reassure employees by providing the tools they need to manage personal finances.

Access personal financial management tools

Your retirement plan or financial wellness providers may already provide personal financial tools, such as calculators or coaching resources to help employees better manage their day-to-day expenses and a tighter personal budget.



Employees report personal finances as their number one source of stress and admit to spending 3 or more hours a week at work dealing with personal financial issues.



Review investment strategies

Financial experts agree: during times of uncertainty and market volatility, it is prudent for plan participants to “stay the course.” Current market conditions rarely provide a clear direction as to the future performance. Selling off early is often detrimental to reaching future long-term retirement goals. Instead, employees can take this time to review their investment strategies to ensure they are on the most appropriate path:

1. What is my risk tolerance?
2. When will I retire?
3. When will I need this money?

A new course of action is only warranted if it is more appropriate than the current path.

Leveraging existing resources

Remind employees of the tools and resources available to them through your retirement or financial wellness benefits. Help take an active role in your employees' financial well-being by communicating the availability of retirement planning or financial wellness resources to your employees and how to access them.



WORK WELL-BEING

Help employees set boundaries between work and home

Remote work has been just as much of an adjustment for employers as it has been for their employees. As an employer, you must walk a fine line between allowing your employees the flexibility to do their work and micromanaging. Micromanaging employees while they're working from home can cause them to feel like they're not trusted to do their work, which can lead to disengagement and productivity issues.

According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), HR experts recommend basing performance evaluation of remote workers on work output and completion of objectives, rather than on time worked. Additionally, blurred lines between home and work may lead employees to feel like they are always "on" which can lead to burnout. Employers can help encourage employees to maintain productivity and avoid burnout, including the following:

Maintain a routine

According to research from Arizona State University, when you put on your work clothes and drive to work, you are doing more than just a routine. You are crossing the boundary between "home" you and "work" you. While you may not actually be going to the office, it is still important to maintain those "boundary-crossing" activities. Continue to dress as you would for work and consider a walk around the block as your "commute."

Set a work-time budget

While keeping a 9-5 schedule may not be very realistic, especially with the added burden of child and/or eldercare and home schooling, it is important for employees to try to maintain those "temporal" boundaries between work and home life as much as possible. Harvard Business Review recommends in *3 Tips to Avoid WFH Burnout*, employees create a "work-time budget" that works for their schedule, being mindful of others' schedules, and setting expectations using "out-of-office" replies to define working hours or communicating that response times may be slower than usual.



Micromanaging employees while they're working from home can cause them to feel like they're not trusted to do their work which can lead to disengagement and productivity issues.



Focus on important work

Instead of slacking off, your employees actually may feel compelled to appear productive at home by focusing on busy-work—but this can be counterproductive in the long run. Encourage employees to prioritize and focus on important work and core tasks.



TECHNOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Protect employees from cyber attacks

Scammers and cybercriminals have been relentlessly taking advantage of the fear and uncertainty from COVID-19 in an effort to part employees with their personal and financial information, or worse, gain access to employer networks and data. With the sudden spike in remote workers and limited IT oversight, cybercriminals have found fresh targets for phishing, business email compromise (BEC), ransomware, and other cyber scams. In a recent work from home survey conducted by [Threatpost.com](https://www.threatpost.com), since employers have implemented work from home policies in an effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, 40% have already reported seeing an increase in cyber attacks. Remind your employees to be careful about what they click and the information they share both at work and on their own time.

Identify suspicious emails

Train your employees to spot red flags and report suspicious emails. Remind employees to use caution opening emails from people they don't know and avoid clicking on any links. Additional email red flags include misspelled email addresses and domains, messages riddled with spelling and grammatical errors, attachments with suspicious file extensions, links that don't appear to point to the URL displayed in the email text, or any requests for personal or financial information.

Keep software up to date

Remind employees to keep their operating systems, apps and antivirus software up to date, including any routers or other equipment used for remote work.



40% of employers who have implemented work from home measures have already seen an increase in cyber attacks.



Encourage privacy protections

Where employees may be working on sensitive or confidential information, remind them to follow privacy protocols by shielding their monitor from view and locking computers when stepping away. Encourage password-protecting routers and other internet-facing devices. Passwords should include letters, numbers and symbols and be hard to guess.

Avoid over-sharing on social media

So much of our lives are now available for public consumption on social media platforms. Remind employees to be careful what they share online and to review and adjust privacy settings to limit what's visible to their networks and the public. Remind them to also use separate passwords for each of their accounts. Hackers often use information shared on social networks to guess passwords—which are often used on multiple accounts, like email, retailers and online banking.



The COVID-19 pandemic and mitigation strategies have disrupted many aspects of daily life. In times of high stress and anxiety like we are currently experiencing, it can be incredibly difficult to remain focused, and feel a sense of purpose and connectedness. Help your employees take care of their personal well-being so they can focus on what really matters.

For additional resources regarding employee well-being, please [contact us](#) today.

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