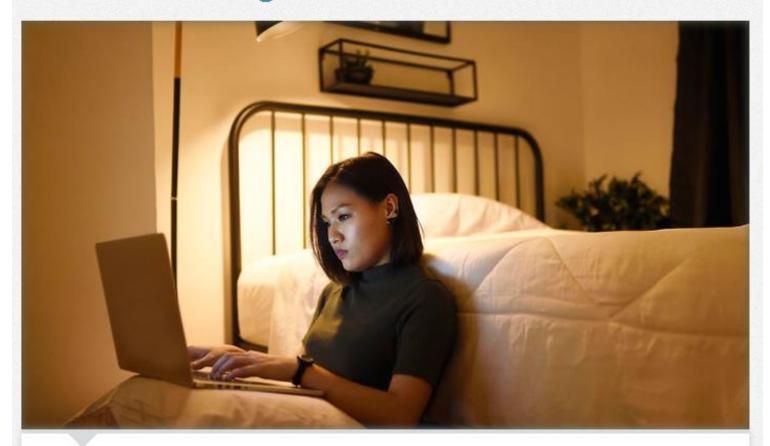11 JUN 2020 - 11:15AM

Five ways to stay healthy while working from home

IMAGE | VIDEO | AUDIO

Staying healthy when working a demanding job is always challenging, but when you add to that the complexities inherent in working and living in one place, it can be even more complicated.

By Karen Gately

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Let's face it. Life has changed and is unlikely to go back to the way things used to be, before COVID-19 forced many of us into isolation.

While most of us are likely to return to the office, how often we do that and the extent to which we continue to work part-time, if not full-time from home, is yet to be seen. What we can assume is that working from home for some people will become the new normal.

Staying healthy when working a demanding job is always challenging, but when you add to that the complexities inherent in working and living in one place, it can be even more complicated. The formula for staying healthy isn't complex, it's our ability to apply it consistently that's typically the problem. Eat a well-balanced diet, get plenty of sleep, engage in regular moderate exercise and you've pretty much got it covered.

So why do so many of us struggle to stay healthy, especially when working in a demanding job from home? The simple truth is because we don't make our well-being matter enough. Among the most important steps any of us can take to make our health a priority and avoid the all too common physical and psychological consequences of overwork, include these:

Manage your energy

A common challenge for people working from home is maintaining a routine that includes breaks. While it can be tempting to get into your home office early and work through lunch before even getting dressed for the day, that approach is unlikely to help you maintain the strength of spirit needed to keep going when the demands of your job keep coming.

We wouldn't fail to fill up on gas and then expect your high-performance car to win the race. And yet all too often people push themselves to keep going when they are running on empty. Getting away from technology and taking the time to eat, get some fresh air and connect with energising people are essential to our capacity to perform at our best from home.

Move every day

Right now, isolation and social distancing rules no doubt make getting out and about a challenge for many of us. The reality is though you don't need to get to the gym or go for a walk in an overcrowded park to give your body at least some of the exercise it needs. If you spend a lot of time sitting at a desk or locked away in your home office, take every opportunity you can to get up and move.

Mix up your day between sitting down, standing up and moving around. We are living in a time when technology allows us to keep working even while on the move, so there really isn't any excuse for being glued to one spot for hours on end.

Create the space you need

If you're working from home struggling to deliver on a demanding job while also sharing work space with your partner, or home schooling your kids, its likely there will be moments when stress or tensions build. Communication in these circumstances is key. Engage in constructive conversations and negotiate terms under which each family members needs can best be met. For example, agree on blocks of time when one parent will work and the other will take charge of the kids.

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Depending on the age and nature of your kids, contemplate also the conversations you can have and agreements you can reach with them. It's a great time to influence the ability for kids to be focused, disciplined and responsible for the impact their behaviours have on the people around them. As a martial arts instructor to young children for many years, and a parent of three kids of my own, I appreciate the inherent difficulties in doing this. But in my experience kids can be inspired to be part of the solution so give it a go.

Choose your thoughts

The ways in which we choose to perceive our reality and respond to circumstances has a profound influence on the levels of stress and anxiety we ultimately feel. While of course far easier said than done, your ability to release tension and keep stress at bay are essential to not only your work performance but long-term health.

Reflect on how your thinking influences the stress you feel and choices you make. For example, is concern for your job security driving you to give more than you need to? Is your fear of failure or letting others down, causing you to go well beyond the standard of contribution other people expect from you, particularly through these highly unusual times?

Keep things in perspective

Of course it takes ownership for delivering on the promises you have made to your employer to get your job done. But remember also how your job fits into the broader scheme of your life and what's important to you. Recognise that while in many jobs there are times when you need to dig deep and give more, no reasonable employer will expect you to maintain that pace without periods of rest. If you're working for an unreasonable employer, that's the first problem you need to fix.

Karen Gately is the author of The People Manager's Toolkit: A Practical guide to getting the best from people (Wiley).