

STAYING SANE WHILE STAYING HOME



You thought taking your work home would be better than this. You always imagined flexibility and freedom but instead you feel like you're under house arrest. The fact is that remote working can be a challenge even for people who choose it. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic chooses it for you, you're suddenly in a totally different mental space, that's hard to process and potentially extremely stressful. Don't underestimate the adjustment. This is a very unusual one-off situation so before you set up your workspace, you need to ensure you have coping strategies in place to safeguard your mental health.

WHAT YOU MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT FEEL

Depending on your relationship with work, your stage of life, your values and your personality, your response to being isolated from the office will vary. Whether you love your job or hate it, a workplace addresses many basic human needs. Amongst other things, going to work provides routine, structure, a social life, stability and the reassurance of belonging to something as well as information. You'll start to miss things that annoy you and people you can't stand. You'll still moan on Monday, but now the reason will be not going to work. You may feel a sense of loss and mourn. This is normal during major change.

Without the immediate personal feedback, you'll start to question whether you are doing a good job and wonder what people are really thinking. And yes, you will probably think you're going crazy. While it's a test for everyone, COVID-19 is an event where managers can either shine or lose their lustre, depending on how they communicate and support their staff.

Managers should take note of the first two points as they are essential to the welfare of their teams.

Strategies for mental wellbeing:

- **Communicate more than usual**

According to Derek Thompson, writer for The Atlantic magazine, it's essential for managers and workers to get communication right. He says we need to over communicate because things we assume about others or usually see won't be obvious. If you're taking a break, let your team know. It's all about removing ambiguity and uncertainty where you can.



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- **Use Face-to-Face technology as much as you can**

Managers need to understand that a rapidly fired off email just won't cut it when people are anxious and disconnected. If you want to speak with your boss about an idea or something you've submitted, text or email can be counter-productive, especially if you're the insecure type. You see the word 'maybe' and it looks negative, whereas if you can see the other person via Skype or Zoom, you'll be able to see their body language and feel reassured that you have it right.

- **Create a boundary between work and leisure**

That couch that you looked forward to after a day at the office is not your office now. If you start writing articles and having meetings from the place that was a big part of your relaxation routine, your life will be more chaotic than it needs to be. You have to leave your couch and go to 'the office' in order to work, even if the office is your kitchen table.

- **Find your tribe**

If you're feeling lonely and need to reach out check out Facebook for groups. There are tons out there for people working from home. Why not create a group for your workmates. Make it private and use it as a place to let off steam and post those silly memes. Have Skype coffee breaks every day with a colleague.

- **Work in short bursts**

The Pomodoro Technique is a classic and has been around for a long time. And it's simple. You set a timer for at least 20 minutes, remove all distractions and work through a set body of work until the signal. After the buzzer you get 5 minutes to do anything you like before resuming work.

- **Practice self-care**

While a little dose of stress is a healthy push to hit deadlines, constant stress and anxiety can have an adverse effect on your mental and physical health. Add that to the loneliness you will inevitably experience, and you can go downhill very quickly. Smart self-care habits like eating healthily, connecting with a loved one or practising meditation will help you.

- **Get help earlier rather than later**

There is absolutely nothing wrong with admitting you need help. People who wouldn't normally get depression may get it because we have the perfect storm of isolation and uncertainty. Symptoms you need to watch out for are:

1. **Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.** You feel like nothing will get better.
2. **Loss of interest in daily activities.** You don't care anymore about pastimes, social activities, or sex. You can't find any joy or pleasure.

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- 3. Appetite or weight changes.** Significant weight loss or weight gain—a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month.
- 4. Sleep changes.** Not sleeping or waking in the early hours of the morning. Also oversleeping
- 5. Anger or irritability.** Feeling agitated, restless, and unable to tolerate very much.
- 6. Loss of energy.** Your whole body may feel heavy, and even small tasks are exhausting or take longer to complete.
- 7. Self-loathing.** Strong feelings of worthlessness or guilt.
- 8. Reckless behaviour.** Substance abuse, reckless driving, or a sudden interest in dangerous sports.
- 9. Concentration problems.** Trouble focusing, making decisions, or remembering things.
- 10. Unexplained aches and pains.** An increase in physical complaints such as headaches, back pain, aching muscles, and stomach pain.

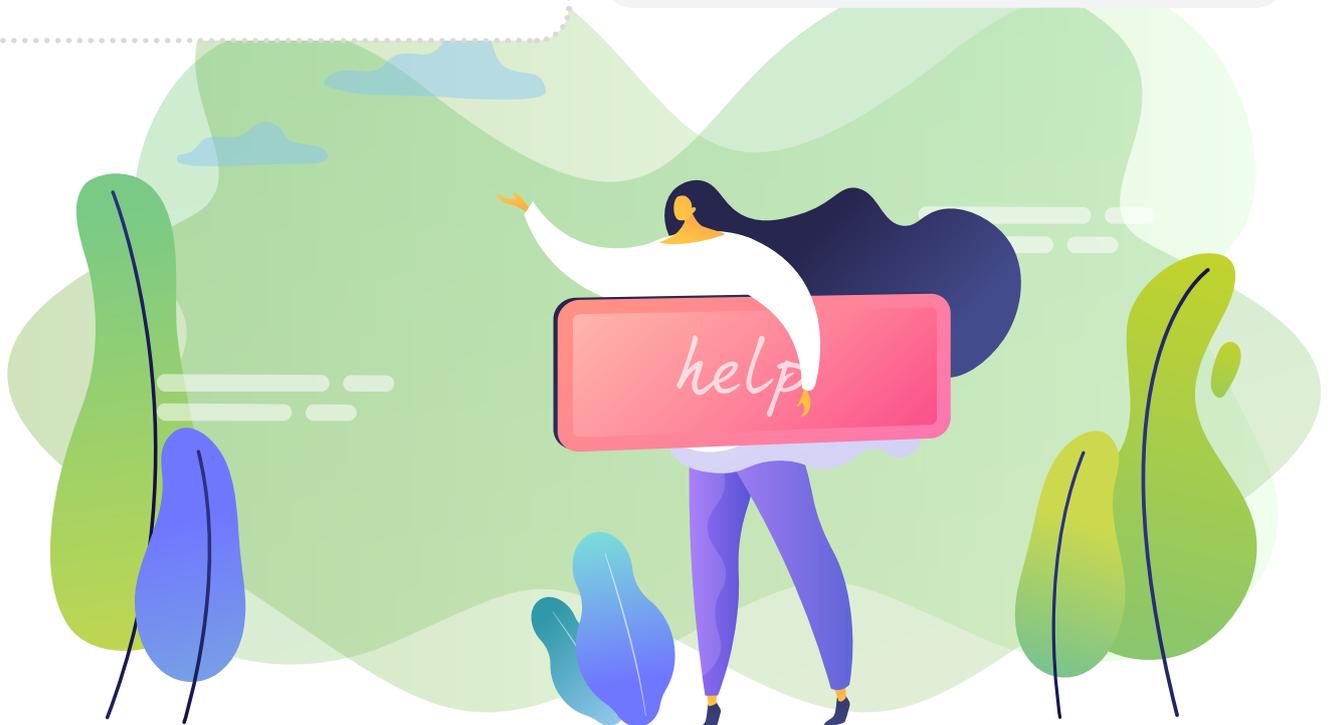
You can call your EAP provider in the first instance, see your GP or another mental health practitioner. If a medical professional suggests you may need to take anti-depressants or other medication, please don't dismiss it. There's no weakness or stigma in doing so. It's just like having diabetes or high blood pressure.

You don't have to suffer alone. We're in this together.

HOW TO REACH OUT FOR HELP

Converge offers 24-hour, 7 day a week counselling support. The great thing is, because we offer phone and videoconferencing facilities, we can provide that support for you, even if you're at home.

To access the EAP services, simply call **1300 OUR EAP (1300 687 327)** to make a time to speak with one of our team.



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