



# My Whole Self

## Supporting your mental health while working from home

The nation faces a mental health crisis in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. More people than ever will need mental health and wellbeing support. Employers must act now as workplaces are key to creating a society where everyone's mental health matters.

My Whole Self is the campaign for workplace culture change from Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England. It's calling on organisations to empower employees to bring their whole self to work and support their own and other's wellbeing.

Wherever you are working from, feeling supported to choose to bring your whole self to work is better for wellbeing and better for business. As the pandemic continues to shape the way we work, human connections are more important than ever. Here are some ways to support your mental health, reduce feelings of isolation, and feel connected with colleagues while working remotely.



### Get set up

#### **Waking up**

Although you may have some extra time in bed without a commute, aim to wake up around the same time every day. This helps stabilise your internal clock and improve your sleep overall. You'll feel less tired, more refreshed, and find it easier to concentrate throughout the day.

#### **Getting ready**

Keep to your established morning routine if you can – get ready, washed, and dressed as if you are going to the office. This will help you get into the mindset that you are at work. If you're not self-isolating and are able, why not go for a walk, cycle or run before you start work for the day? This can help you to feel like you have mentally 'arrived' at work and create space between your home as an office and your home as a home.

#### **Setting up and closing down**

Try to set aside a work area separate from your sleeping area, as this will help to prepare you for work mode and make it easier to switch off at the end of the day. You don't need

a home office to do this – a small desk set up in a corner of your room, or a laptop at the end of the kitchen table can do the trick. If you're working with a small space, you could try setting up temporary 'zones' by hanging blankets or screens to visually separate your work area from your bed or living area.

Clear your work surface of clutter and set up your equipment to avoid physical strain – do a self-check using the guidance at

**[nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/how-to-sit-correctly](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/how-to-sit-correctly)**.

If you don't have a chair with back support, you could add a firm pillow.

When you've finished for the day, pack away your work area and move out of your workspace if you can. Even something as simple as putting your laptop into a drawer at the end of the day can help you to leave your work behind and switch off. You can also switch off from work by removing any apps or accounts on your phone or tablet that connect you to work when you're taking annual leave, and by unfollowing work accounts on social media.

## **Adapt your working style**

Disconnecting is just as important as connecting. You could try removing your work email from your phone to help you disconnect in the evening and encourage your team not to respond to emails out of work hours.

Make sure you take regular breaks throughout the day and try to keep your lunch hour free from meetings. You could set a 'no-meeting' policy on certain days or times, or experiment with taking ten minutes off your hourly meetings to grab a drink or stretch your legs.

Not everything needs to be scheduled, and some meetings could take the form of a quick phone call within the working day. If you are tired of sitting down, you could make your next meeting a 'virtual walk and talk'. Movement is good for your body and mind, and you may even find that a walking meeting can increase your creativity.



## **Get moving**

Including some movement into your work from home routine will help maintain your physical and mental health. You'll feel more awake and alert, and your concentration and sleep will improve.

## Outdoors

Try walking and talking meetings, using your phone if you spend a lot of time on a screen. Make the most of lunchtimes and the end of the day to get some fresh air and put a natural pause in your day.

## Indoors

If you're indoors, look online for an activity that suits you, such as a home yoga video or a fitness class. Some gyms are now live streaming their classes, so you could join a fitness community in your local area.

No matter what exercise you choose, try to take regular screen breaks and stretch throughout the day. Try to take a clearly defined lunch break and move away from your workspace.



## Get connected

### Adapt your working style

Make sure you keep communication open with your team, as often and frequently as possible. Senior leaders should role model healthy working from home habits and behaviours. Here are some suggestions that we are trying:

- Video calls instead of emailing
- Short check-in and check-out calls between managers and their teams, at the start and end of the workday
- Optional Q&A sessions for colleagues to dial in and chat through any concerns or queries they have about working from home

### Share your My Whole Selfie

Creating and sharing a My Whole Selfie is a fun way to show your authentic self to your colleagues. Show your support for #MyWholeSelf on 18 March by sharing a photo of your authentic self. Here's how to take part:

1. Take a selfie
2. Add text to that describes your whole self and words **This is #MyWholeSelf**
3. Post it on your Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn or Facebook account – you can tag us in your post @mhfaengland

## Virtual social sessions

If you usually schedule time in the workday for an activity or exercising with your colleagues, continue to make time for this over webcam or phone. Here are some ideas that members of the MHFA England team enjoy:

- Turning our morning or afternoon coffee break into a virtual coffee break
- Sharing photo updates of our lunchtime run or walk
- Video calling for an afternoon craft session
- Online quiz session

## Say hello

If you're working on the same document as another team member in the cloud, stop and say hello to each other.

## Share your space

If you'd like to share your working space, why not give your colleagues a virtual tour? Or show off your pets at the end of a team catch up.

## Relationships and support

During times of stress, it helps if we stay connected. Keep in touch with friends and family where you can. Use instant messenger to communicate with your colleagues if you are feeling out of the loop or need to talk to someone.

Look after yourself and set aside time to prioritise self-care – **find some simple self-care tips here.**

For information about mental health and coronavirus visit:

- Mental Health Foundation's **tips for looking after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak**
- Mind: **Coronavirus and your wellbeing**

If you're feeling anxious or isolated, remember that support is out there.

## Connect with your team

You may be in regular contact with your immediate team, but what about the rest of your colleagues? Making the time to socialise with people from across your organisation can help you see the bigger picture, stay connected, and boost morale. You could try coffee

mornings, a Friday 'happy hour', team quizzes, or 'three at three', where three people are randomly allocated to meet at 3pm for 10 minutes and the only rule is not talk about work.

### **Spread kindness**

Make the time to do something that will bring joy to a colleague's day. You could drop them a note to say thank you or send them a message to check how they are doing; virtual cards or themed video calls can be a great way to celebrate milestones. If you manage a team, you could try sending a gift to their homes to mark the success of a project.

### **Check in with yourself and your colleagues**

Regular wellbeing check-ins with colleagues are a vital way to support people's mental health during the pandemic. Keep your team updated with your circumstances and what is and isn't possible for you to deliver at work. We have created the My Whole Self MOT to help you regularly check in on your own and others' mental health and wellbeing.

### **Talk to your Mental Health First Aider**

If your company has trained Mental Health First Aiders or Champions, make a note of their contact details, and don't hesitate to get in touch with them if you need to. They can use their skills to support anyone struggling with their mental health by signposting them to the appropriate support, both in and outside of the workplace.

### **Speak to your HR or EAP**

If your organisation has this in place, talk to your HR or contact your Employee Assistance Programme.

### **Mental health helplines**

**Samaritans** offers free, confidential support 24 hours a day on 116 123.

**Shout 85258** is a free, confidential, 24/7 text support service. By texting the word 'SHOUT' to 85258 you will start a conversation with a trained Shout Volunteer.

Find a list of national mental health services and helplines at [mhfaengland.org](https://mhfaengland.org).