

# WELLNESS AND THE HOME OFFICE

*Experts weigh in on tactics for health and wellness while working from home*

Picture the perfect home office: sprawling wooden desk, latest high-definition monitor, plush leather chair, and of course, that perfect built-in bookshelf as a backdrop for Zoom meetings.

Though pleasant, this vision is far from reality for most people working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. More likely are long hours spent at improvised workstations — laptops on stacks of books, the kids' old crafting table or a dining chair. Meanwhile, children play in the background or attend virtual schooling, spouses work shoulder-to-shoulder.

This new reality of working from home can be chaotic, mentally draining and unhealthy.

*MiBiz* recently hosted a free webinar with occupational therapy practitioners Anita Joy Edwards, Kara Wong and Sydney Lyng of health consulting firm **GIG Design LLC** to discuss the importance of wellness in mitigating the physical and mental toll of working from home.

Even with a dedicated home office, working from home in the COVID-19 era has created myriad health challenges. Increased chair time has led to weight gain, chronic pain, depression and other adverse impacts. Endless Zoom calls and increased screen time have led to digital eye strain and anxiety. And unclear work-life boundaries have yielded longer hours and increasing burnout. According to a study from staffing firm Adecco, social burnout from the pandemic is estimated to cost the global economy approximately \$323 billion annually.

Experts believe the work-from-home transition fueled by COVID-19 will become a regular part of professional life in the future. As such, both workers and employers alike need to adopt wellness practices to keep everyone healthy in the long-term. Ultimately, health and wellness largely come down to social interactions, said Edwards, founder and president of GIG Design.

"There's an old saying that 'It's better to eat Twinkies with friends than a salad alone,'" Edwards said. "This means that the quality of relationship with others and ourselves has a greater impact than following dietary rules. The salad is obviously a healthier option (but) a shared experience with trusted peers is the healthiest option compared to experiencing something alone."

## Employers' role in wellness

Employers have adopted a variety of tactics to promote social interactions among their employees and ease the burden of the pandemic. Lyng and Wong, both occupational therapy students at the Chan Division for Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy at the **University of Southern California**, noted some companies host virtual happy hours. Others hold "health circles" — meetings among peers in a safe environment where they can openly discuss challenges they face in the new work-from-home environment. Outside of promoting social interactions, some companies also issue stipends or bonuses related to health and wellness.

However, the speakers indicated the most essential thing employers can do for their worker's wellness is to listen, empathize with their employees' concerns and troubles, and above all, remain flexible.

"There's a positive correlation between flexible work schedules and proactivity," Wong said. "It's important for companies to avoid setting very stringent schedules and deadlines. The emphasis on clock time can cause unnecessary stress on employees and encourage a company culture that may not be beneficial."

The speakers also suggested employers exercise caution and weigh the impacts on employee wellness when making certain decisions. Many companies have turned



to software to track employee activity and monitor their activity at home. While these programs can be effective from a profitability perspective, they also easily blur the lines between clock time and personal time and risk total surveillance of their employee and the employee's family.

"Using such technology is heavily cautioned," Lyng said. "It's crucial to not only request explicit consent from employees but also weave privacy preserving features into the design of their technologies."

## Personal Tactics

On a personal level, Edwards and the other speakers noted that individuals can take small actions throughout the day to promote physical and mental wellness.

Incorporating micro-breaks, standing and stretching, performing squats or other aerobic exercises once an hour, and placing the printer away from the desk, are all ways being people can intersperse physical activity through the workday. Additionally, purchasing ergonomic equipment to maintain proper posture can also help the physical impacts of working from home.

Though the COVID-19 pandemic has forced both employers and their workers to adapt in unfamiliar and uncomfortable ways, incorporating wellness techniques and strategies into daily life can help everyone improve their physical and mental health.

GIG Design offers top wellness tips for employees who are working from home. The wellness consulting firm also offers a variety of health and wellness services for employers, including an employee wellness survey and follow-up consulting services.

*GIG Design is a team of health consultants who help individuals achieve their personal, health, and wellness goals. Our approach is client-centered and process-oriented in order to create the best potential for long-term success that sticks. Visit [www.gigdesign.me](http://www.gigdesign.me).*

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