

Health and Wellbeing When Working from Home

Exercise, Nutrition and Breathing

Movement is medicine to create change. It is important to remember this while many staff are currently adapting to working from home due to the current public health situation. While adjusting to a new routine, exercise can help us cope with stress and give us a welcome break from work, energising us in the process. See the HSE website for the latest official public health advice: www.hse.ie.

Exercise and Mental Health

It has been clearly demonstrated that physical activity has many benefits for the mind and mental health. During challenging times exercise can give us a real boost to help us increase energy levels, health and positivity. We know that being active is good for physical health, but there are also significant mental benefits to be gained. These include buffering against depression, better memory, quicker learning and delaying the onset of dementia.

A Natural Chemical Boost

Physical exercise triggers chemical reactions that lessen pain, increase positive mood and counter stress. People who engage in regular exercise experience an increased feeling of wellbeing and less symptoms of depression.

Physical Health

Regular physical exercise is a great way to build and sustain muscular and cardiorespiratory health, as well as bone density, energy levels and weight control. Exercise helps reduce the risk of many serious diseases. Exercise causes fat cells and inflammation in the body to shrink.

A Good Night's Sleep

Regular training of your body can assist you in going to sleep at a proper time and getting a better quality sleep. However, don't exercise too close to bedtime.

Looking Good, Healing Good

Aerobic exercise delivers a boost of oxygenated and nutrient rich blood to the skin which, improves the health of your skin and assists in the healing of wounds. Moderate exercise may actually slow the ageing process at cellular level. It has been demonstrated that fitness can add to both length and quality to life.

I don't have time for exercise

Those who are willing and able to perform High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) can achieve the same results as those who engage in steady state cardio exercises like jogging, in as little as a fifth of the time. If you have an exercise bike or can run on the spot, you have all you need to do some HIIT training. Any amount of time spent exercising is better than none.

Which Exercise?

The best answer to this question is – the one that you like most. Many home workouts can be found online. Here are some suggestions of things you can do at home:

- Stretching
- Walking or running on the spot
- Body weight exercises like press ups, lunges, crunches or squats
- Aerobic exercises like star jumps
- Floor exercises, yoga, pilates
- Weight training

Remember, the best exercise is the one that you enjoy as you are more likely to stick with it.

None of these are for me

Try gardening, vacuuming, sweeping or mopping, cleaning out a wardrobe or cleaning windows. Do everything you do with more energy and vigour. You could even try walking on the spot as you stand by an open window. Any movement that increases the heart-rate will help.

How much do I need? Should I set goals?

The Health Service Executive (HSE) Healthy Ireland guidelines suggest at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise, five times a week, for all adults. This could be three 10 minute periods of activity. The World Health Organization (WHO) supports the target of 150 minutes per week. It is a good idea to schedule some exercise time into your day and to set goals. Don't aim too high but build up your levels of activity and exertion.

I'm too old for exercise

Physical exercise is beneficial to all ages. Continuing to exercise as we get older benefits us in areas such as osteoporosis, reducing blood pressure levels, protecting the heart and protecting against certain cancers. It has been shown that 90 year-olds can see gains in strength and power with the correct exercise programme. We can all take measures to improve fitness and health. See the HSE Older People Keeping Active page [HERE](#):

The Social Aspect

There are now various challenges available on line. You could participate in these to keep things fresh. It might be fun to involve children, where appropriate, or to exercise with family members. The social element of exercise can be recreated at home through video links, online classes etc.

Nutrition

The WHO has recommended proper diet, sleep and exercise. There can be a tendency to ease up on good eating habits when we feel stressed, isolated, lonely or down. However, good nutrition during challenging circumstances actually fortifies us. The HSE recommends using the food pyramid for a guide on the types of food you need to eat and for portion sizes. In general, adhering to healthy eating principles can reinforce the body's immune system and promote recovery from illness. Eating breakfast every day while also having a diet consisting of plenty of fruit, vegetables and protein will help to maintain good health. Eating a 'rainbow' of different coloured fruit and vegetables can help to ensure we get sufficient vitamins, minerals and fibre. Staying hydrated is also important for concentration and general health.

Breathing Exercises

Apart from physical activity, there are other wellbeing habits which you can incorporate into your routine. These include activities such as mindfulness, meditation and breathing exercises.

Breathing techniques can be useful in decreasing anxiety. Like all new habits they can take a little getting used to but, with practice, they can be part of an overall calmness and wellbeing routine. In general, breathing exercises should be practiced for at least 3 to 4 minutes before they will begin to have an impact. While performing these exercises, breathing should ideally be focused on the diaphragm or stomach area, rather than the chest.

The 7-11 Breathing Exercise

This involves breathing in through the nose for a count of seven (fill up your tummy with air) and breathing out through the mouth for a count of eleven. Sometimes we need to build up to these intervals – the important thing is to have a longer out-breath. Concentrate on the out-breath to slow down your breathing. This exercise should be attempted for at least three minutes.

Exercise can be a great way to boost your energy levels, maintain positivity, gain fitness, stay healthy and to have fun. In these times remember, we need to keep both a healthy body and a healthy mind as best we can. Keep safe, keep active.