

# When home *is the office*

*If you've traded the daily commute for the couch,  
learn how to make working from home work for you*

Words: Emma Green

**W**orking from home (WFH) has become an increasingly common part of everyday life. Thanks to advances in technology, the seismic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and changing attitudes towards employee productivity, what began as a temporary solution for many businesses has now evolved into a long-term shift away from traditional office-based work.

Remote and hybrid working options are often seen as attractive perks when considering a prospective job role. From reduced commuting to having greater autonomy to design your space and schedule, the benefits are certainly boundless. WFH life isn't without its challenges, though, especially if you live alone.

"The downside is that without other people around, work can quietly expand into every corner of life," explains executive and leadership coach Leah Farmer. "That freedom requires much more intention than people expect."

A successful home-working set-up is less about *where* you work and more about *how* you work. Whether you work remotely full-time or split your time between home and the office, the key is to put systems, habits and practices in place that allow you to effectively manage your output, wellbeing and time. When done well, working from home can be incredibly rewarding – and the following pages will give you an idea of what conditions are needed to nurture just that.

## Regular breaks

When working from home, people tend to forget to take breaks – or feel guilty for taking them. Although skipping breaks might seem more efficient, the downtime is not wasted time; breaks are essential for maintaining energy, focus and creativity.

Try to incorporate different types of breaks into your workday. These might include:

- **Micro-breaks:** 1-2 minutes to stretch or rest your eyes.
- **Short breaks:** 5-10 minutes between tasks.
- **Meal breaks:** eating a proper lunch away from your desk.
- **Movement breaks:** walking, stretching or light exercise.



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## A designated workspace

One of the biggest mistakes people make when working from home is failing to establish a proper workspace. "A designated workspace matters because our brains respond to cues," says Farmer. "When work happens everywhere, it becomes harder to fully rest anywhere. Even in a small home, having one specific place where work happens can create a psychological boundary."

A major advantage of working from home when you also live alone is that you have total control over your environment. You get to design your own workspace and set the temperature, lighting, music or silence to suit your preferences, without compromise, creating a space that genuinely supports focus and comfort. Embrace that freedom!

Here are some tips for designing an effective workspace:

### 1 Make space work for you

You don't need a separate room or home office. A corner of the bedroom or living room can work well if it's used only for work. If space is limited, use a fold-away desk or storage box to shut down your workspace at the end of the day.

### 2 Keep it separate

Keep only work tools in this space to reinforce the separation from leisure or personal activities.

### 3 Don't compromise

Invest in good-quality home-office equipment such as a chair with posture support, an ergonomic keyboard and mouse, an adjustable desk and footrest, a laptop stand or even dual monitors.

### 4 Get lighting right

Good lighting, such as using a desk lamp with adjustable brightness or filling your space with warm, natural light where possible, can reduce eye fatigue and make the workspace more inviting.



### 5 Reduce distractions

Use noise-cancelling headphones, background music or white noise to reduce distractions.

### 6 Personalise your space

Personalise your work area with plants, artwork or decor that motivates you.

### 7 Keep it tidy

Reduce clutter and keep your workplace tidy by using good storage management, such as cable clips and trays for incoming and outgoing tasks, or purchasing a desk with built-in drawers and shelves.



## Firm boundaries

One of the greatest challenges of working from home can be the erosion of boundaries. When your workplace is also your living space, it can feel like you are always 'on', and without visible cues to signal the end of the day, work can soon spill into evenings and weekends.

"Ending the workday intentionally is one of the most overlooked parts of working from home," says Farmer. "Simple closing rituals like shutting down your laptop, changing rooms, lighting a candle in the kitchen or stepping outside help the body register that it is safe to rest."

Clear boundaries not only protect your personal time but can also prevent burnout and improve long-term productivity. Maintaining them requires both intention and deliberate effort across three separate realms:

### Physical boundaries

Avoid working from your bed or the sofa.

Leave your workspace during breaks and meals.

If possible, close the door or pack away equipment at the end of the day.

### Digital boundaries

Turn off work notifications outside of work hours.

Use separate browsers, apps and accounts for both work and personal use.

Schedule email send times so that messages don't bleed into evenings.

Log out of work platforms when you've finished for the day.

### Mental boundaries

Set clear working hours and treat them as seriously as office hours.

Let colleagues, clients and loved ones know when you are and are not available.

Give yourself permission to fully stop working and practise saying, 'That can wait until tomorrow'.

Learn to accept that not everything needs to be finished today.

Remind yourself that rest is productive to counter feelings of guilt about not working.

## A consistent routine

Without the external structure of the office, the workday can quickly lose its shape. It can become easy to slip into patterns of waking up later, skipping meals or working irregular hours when no one is watching. While flexibility is certainly a great advantage of the WFH lifestyle, too little structure can lead to uneven output, increased stress and a general feeling of the days merging into one.

"Routine can provide a sense of structure and organisation, especially if your working obligations are quite fluid," explains psychotherapist Eloise Skinner. "Since our bodies tend to respond well to some element of consistency in routine, setting up a daily routine can allow you to feel more productive, engaged and focused."



Structure doesn't have to equate to rigidity, though. The best routines provide rhythm, momentum and purpose, helping you to anchor your day and protect your energy.

"It might be helpful to experiment with several types of routine first, to establish what works best for you," says Skinner. "Do you prefer to start work first thing in the morning, or do you like to get in other activities first, such as exercising, spending time with a pet or catching up with personal emails, before starting? Do you prefer to take longer breaks throughout the day, or go for an earlier finish with fewer breaks? Since everyone has individual preferences - and these may also evolve over time - it's worth trying a few different things before you commit."

Here are some tips for designing an effective workday:

### 1 Set the tone for the day by creating morning routines

Waking up, eating breakfast and starting work at roughly the same time each day - as well as changing out of sleepwear - can help to signal the shift into work mode.

### 2 Begin your workday with a 'start-of-work' ritual

"Performing small routines before you begin work, such as tidying your desk, preparing coffee or reviewing your to-do list, can allow you to enter the working environment with less resistance," says Skinner.

### 3 Use time-blocking in your schedule

Incorporate 90-minute deep work sessions into your day and batch similar tasks together, such as meetings or emails, to reduce mental switching.

### 4 Wrap up your workday by planning the next day's tasks

Produce a list of approximately three to five priority tasks to focus on in order to prevent procrastination and decision fatigue the following day. It will bring your workday to a neat close.

“  
Routines help to anchor your day  
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# Sustained motivation

Motivation can fluctuate when you work alone, day after day. Without the encouragement or accountability of a team around you, it is normal to experience dips in energy and enthusiasm. The good news is that motivation isn't something you either have or don't have; it's about creating the right conditions to help cultivate it.

Here are some tips for boosting motivation:

## 1 Design your day around your energy levels

Working when you're most focused and resting when needed can improve overall performance.

## 2 Use online body doubling and virtual coworking platforms

Platforms such as Focusmate or Deepwrk help to maintain focus and accountability. Alternatively, you can use work tools such as Zoom, Discord or Slack to work quietly alongside a friend or colleague.

## 3 Celebrate the large and small successes

Celebrating and rewarding progress, not just finished projects, helps to reinforce the habit of showing up.

## 4 Change your environment every so often

Working from a café, library or co-working space can introduce much-needed variety and social presence.

## 5 Use time-based methods like the Pomodoro Technique

Committing to work for a set amount of time can feel less daunting than trying to finish a whole task - and motivation often follows action.



## Connection to the outside world

Working from home removes many of the casual interactions that come with office life. The absence of small talk, shared lunches and workroom chatter can lead to a gradual sense of isolation, especially if you live alone.

Connection, therefore, needs to be actively prioritised. Scheduling regular check-ins with colleagues, turning on your camera during meetings, or working alongside others virtually can recreate the sense of teamwork and belonging that the office provides.

Outside of work, maintaining social plans, joining clubs or classes, or simply going for a quick walk or coffee with a friend can also counterbalance the solitude of the working day.





## Minimised distractions

Living and working alone can remove distractions, but it also introduces others – the temptations of social media, streaming services, household chores and running personal errands, to name but a few. Managing distractions starts with awareness and identifying what pulls your attention away from work.

Here are some tips for reducing distractions:

### 1 Be strict

“Remove all main distractions from your space,” says Skinner. “For example, no phones in the room, turning off notifications and disconnecting from your Wi-Fi if you have a bigger offline project to focus on.”

### 2 Plan ahead

Plan personal tasks like laundry for before or after work hours to protect your focus.

### 3 Factor in breaks

“Schedule breaks in which you can engage with your distractions,” advises Skinner. “Make sure you’re fulfilling your distraction-related needs in the hours outside of work. For example, if you’re constantly distracted wanting to text your friends, make sure you’re getting enough social fulfilment in your non-working hours.”

