

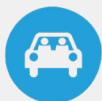


TWIN CITIES
Telework

Commuter Services



Mental Health Recommendations for Teleworkers



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For many, working from home seems like an ideal situation. Commuters tell us they like not having the commute, they save time and money, and feel more productive.

The truth is, working from home can come with its own set of stressors. Here are a few comments Commuter Services has received in our recent surveys: “The day never ends. I work longer hours.” “There are no boundaries. I’m always ‘on,’ and don’t take a break or end the workday.”

Remember those days back in the office? When your computer and work stayed

behind when you left at the end of the day? That very act of leaving helped you shift your mindset from work to your personal life.

You had what many now refer to as “work/life balance.” But now your computer is home and so is your work. Left unchecked, you work longer hours and the work/life balance can spin out of control. It’s a recipe for stress, for sure, as well as anxiety and depression.

Twin Cities Telework by Commuter Services has developed this list of day-to-day tips to help teleworkers find the balance between work and life.



Get up. Get ready. Get in the right mindset.

Sure, it's easy to roll out of bed, turn on the coffee maker and sit down at the computer, in that exact order. But are you really ready to face your workday – and your colleagues?

Changing out of pajamas and going through a personal hygiene routine is a great way to start the workday refreshed. A little self-care in the morning can help you feel more confident and ready to take on your day.

Take your time “going to work”.

If your home life and work life seems to have become one in the same, try leaving your house before sitting down at the computer.

Use the time you spent on the road to do something outside of your home before you start your workday. Take a walk. Go to a coffee shop for a cup o' joe and a muffin. Water your garden. Go to the gym. Shovel your driveway (we ARE in Minnesota, after all). Take your mail to the post office. Attend a sunrise service at your church. The possibilities are endless.

Consider your morning outing as a makeshift “commute” and return to your home workspace fresh and ready to work. Likewise, consider using any opportunities for activity outside the home as a clean break for the end of your workday.



Try the 20-20-20 Rule to prevent eye strain and headaches.

Looking at a computer screen all day can cause eye strain, resulting in things like eye watering, blurred vision and headaches – all of which make it harder to concentrate. To combat this, try using the 20-20-20 Rule to break up the constant focus on your monitor.

The “rule” says that for every 20 minutes of looking at a screen, you should look at something 20 feet away for approximately 20 seconds. Or, as an alternative, you could try closing your eyes for 20 seconds.

While it's not a full break from your work, using the 20-20-20 Rule also gives you the opportunity to think about something else for just a bit, allowing for a short mental break, too.





Schedule breaks or a buffer between online meetings.

We've all learned how exhausting online meetings – especially several in one day – can be. After all, “Zoom Fatigue” has become one of the new phrases of telework.

Schedule yourself some time afterward to step away from your computer. Get a glass of water or a cup of coffee, have a quick snack. Do some controlled breathing or stretches away from your desk. Take a few minutes to mentally center yourself before you head into your next meeting.



Take breaks. Period.

Chances are, you had quite a few little breaks when you were at your worksite in the past. You stopped to say hello to a colleague or consulted with a coworker on a project. You visited the restroom and you got a snack or some coffee. You took a lunch break.

You got up, you moved. You took your mind away from the work you were doing. And if you're not doing that while you're working from home, why not?

Eat your lunch away from your desk. Set time aside in the morning and afternoon for a short break or two, and then keep that appointment. Maybe you walk the dog around the block or return some text messages and schedule appointments. Just be sure to get up and get away from your computer.

Focus on living a healthy lifestyle.

Your mental health is closely related to your overall health. It is important to exercise or be active, eat nutritious food, incorporate healthy snacks into your day, drink water every hour during your workday, and try to get eight hours of sleep.

That doesn't mean you have to go join a gym or restock your pantry all at once. Find a healthy solution that works best for you. Don't like the gym? Take evening walks or practice yoga in a spare room. Talk to your doctor about your diet and supplements for vitamins you might not otherwise get. Consult a nutritionist for help in identifying a diet plan that works with your body.



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Keep your lines of communication open.

One of the biggest concerns expressed by teleworkers is that they feel disconnected from their colleagues and supervisors. And let's face it: Working from home can be very isolating, even downright lonely.

Communication is a two-way street. You will get from it what you give. If you have a question, ask it. If you need time for more discussion, schedule a meeting. Be proactive in setting up time to iron out details with your colleagues.

If your team does not have a plan for how soon to respond to emails and phone calls, ask your supervisor to have the conversation at a staff meeting. Some may want to respond the second they receive an email, others prefer to respond within a day or two. Ask your supervisor to memorialize that plan so everyone can manage expectations.

Don't shut yourself off from others or avoid returning emails or phone calls. If you're unable to respond to a request right away, let your supervisor or teammate know that with a quick email or phone call. Be sure to let them know when you can respond, too – their time is as valuable as yours.

Feeling stressed? There's an app for that.

In this day and age, there are no shortage of apps and free videos to help you find balance during the workday. With a little searching, you can easily find apps to guide you with everything from meditation to improving sleep. YouTube and some television streaming services also provide free videos to guide you through yoga, meditation, stretching exercises and more.

Not big on too much screen time? Try a music app to find your favorite background sounds. There are even apps that mimic sounds from an office setting!



If you need a vacation, take one.

Employers give employees vacation for a reason – so they can rest and mentally reset. Make sure you use your vacation time or paid time off! Employees have experienced unprecedented stressors since March 2020. It is essential for your overall wellbeing to not only take a day or two here or there, but to set aside time for a real, relaxing, rejuvenating break from work.

Supervisors, urge your employees to take vacations. And take your own. Lead by example.



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Set your workday hours and stick to them.

One of the great things about working from home is that daily schedules can be flexible. Give yourself a clear start and end time. Many teleworkers had an “end of the day” prior to the pandemic. It was a signal to head home, to move to that different mindset. Set your end of the day and wrap up your work as close to that daily deadline as possible.

Consider this: You would have left it behind at the end of your workday before, so why not now?

Pay attention to your inner voice.

How do you talk to yourself when you get stressed out? Do you start to doubt your skills, your knowledge or worse yet, yourself? Or do you chide yourself for not having done something differently, or mull too long over less than positive feedback from others?

That’s called your Critical Inner Voice, and it can lead to distraction, hostility, anxiety, depression and a host of other negative emotions that will affect you and the people around you.

Stop listening to the negative, nagging inner voice and give yourself a break. Remind yourself that this, too, shall pass. Give yourself grace and self-compassion. And then talk back to that Critical Inner Voice with positive affirmations. If it says, “You can’t do this,” tell it, “Watch me!”



Keep your work out of sight and out of mind after hours.

Every time you walk past your desk or your eye falls on your laptop after working hours, you think about the work you left behind. With that constant reminder of projects unfinished and things left to do, it’s hard to fully disconnect from that work-related mindset. Your work is just always there.

Close the door to your office. If you work from your laptop in your bedroom or another space in your house, put that laptop into its computer bag. File your papers. Have a monitor staring at you when you walk by? Turn it off. Worst case scenario, drape a towel or light sheet over it. Out of sight, out of mind.



Take advantage of your company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

If you're struggling emotionally, it is a good idea to talk with your supervisor or human resource officer so they know and understand your situation. But talking with management or a well-meaning coworker can only go so far when it comes to mental health.

Many companies offer free counseling for depression and anxiety, and your coworker or manager isn't likely to have the expertise you seek. It's important to turn to educated, qualified counselors when you are really struggling, so take advantage of your company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) whenever you need to.



Remember – your house is your home, first.

Above all, remember that your house is your home. It's where you sleep, it's where you eat. Where you spend time with your family and friends. It's where you make memories and where you go to feel safe.

If working from home makes you feel anxious about being in your home, it's time to talk with your supervisor or human resource officer and consider other arrangements.



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