

5 ways to win at working from home: You already have everything you need

You've got all the tech and know-how you need to stay on schedule. Here's how to make it come together.

You work from home now. You're free to work from bed and lounge around in a bathrobe and bunny slippers all day, skipping showers and forgetting to shave; your colleagues none the wiser. Although such unbridled sloth sounds fun, in reality there's a better way to keep yourself happy and sane in the weeks and maybe months of quarantine ahead: Stick to a routine, using tech and common sense as your guide.



Your phone, laptop, smart watch and smart speaker can help you stay sane and productive when life's normal cues disappear. Here are the five most important elements of my daily routine and how you can adopt them in your new work-from-home life.

Don't just grab coffee, take a coffee 'break'

At the office it takes me about a hundred paces to get from my desk to the coffee machine, but at home I'm literally only 10 steps away. To up my daily step count, I started setting reminders on my phone that literally say, "Take a coffee break!" because otherwise I will sit for hours on end without realizing it.



By now I've set about five or six daily reminders on my iPhone, and I'm sure to create an appointment in my iPhone calendar for anything I need to spend more than 10 minutes focused on. On Android devices, Google Assistant is just as good at setting reminders, and Google Calendar now looks stunning in dark mode.

To make sure I'm up and moving around often, I keep track of my daily step count with my Apple Watch, although your iPhone alone can track steps as long as you carry it with you wherever you go -- ditto for Android phones as well as fitness trackers from Samsung, Fitbit and Garmin.

Whatever you might need a bit of a nudge to do something -- take a break, go on a walk, start a home workout, call a friend, or even when to stop working for the day -- reminders, appointments and alarms can help replace the natural breaks and transitions you'd have in a typical work day.



Force yourself out of bed when it's time to work

A powerful morning starts with a strong bedtime routine the night before. iPhones and iPads have a bedtime tab in the clock app that reminds you when it's time to call it a night, turns on Do Not Disturb, then gently wakes you up in the morning. Android devices have a similar feature called wind down mode.

If you have any smart home devices, like an Amazon Echo (\$52 at Amazon) or a Google Home (\$99 at Walmart) speaker, now's the time to set up a solid morning Routine, which is a series of tasks your digital assistant will tackle with a single voice command.

Here's how to teach Alexa to turn on the lights, start the coffee and play music, news or weather with just one command. Or check out our guide to setting up Routines on Google Home devices here.

Here's what my Google Home morning Routine looks like:

1. "Hey, Google, good morning!"
2. Three Philips Hue color bulbs in my bedroom light up 50% in golden white.
3. My Nest Learning Thermostat changes to 70 degrees (it's set to 68 at night).
4. Google Home reports the weather forecast.
5. I get a traffic report with an estimated commute time (I've left this on, just to get a sense of how busy the streets are).
6. If I have any calendar appointments or reminders that day, Google Home lists them.
7. Finally, Google Home plays a handful of news briefs from NPR, CBS News and, of course.



Change into work clothes because it's better for your brain

Time to lose the sweats. You don't need to shrug on a button down or blouse, just wear something that makes you feel more like you're at work than your flannel PJs. And if you have a Zoom call with colleagues, the fact that you've bothered to put yourself together will show -- and maybe inspire them, too.

Why? Research shows that a change of clothes can have a positive effect on cognitive performance, i.e., the right clothes can make you feel smarter, or at least more serious about the task at hand. Another study found that formal attire improves mental acuity. (These eight best clothing subscription boxes are still up and running, albeit with extended timelines for shipping and returns.)

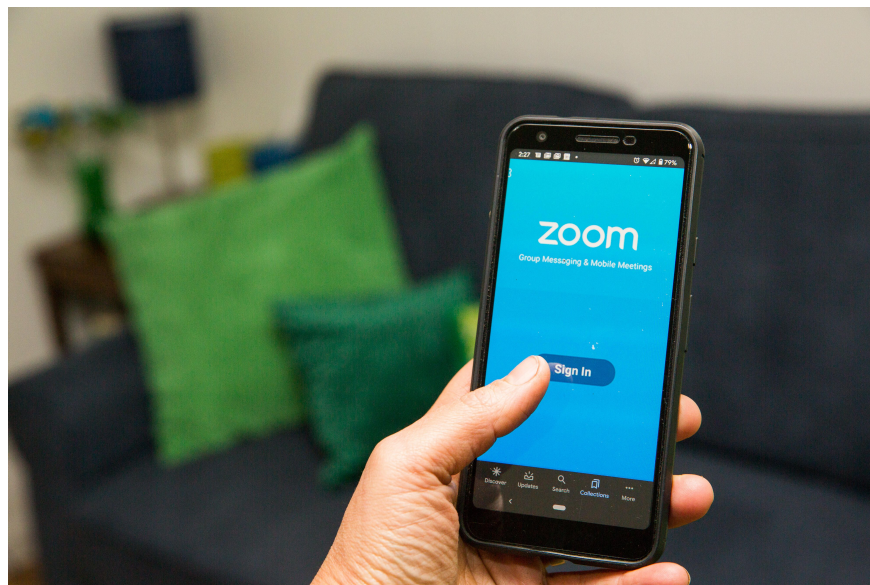
Your commute time is still 'your' time

The average American spends about 26 minutes commuting to work each way, according to data from the US Census Bureau, and coincidentally enough, so do I. Research even indicates that commutes have an overall

positive effect on our emotional wellbeing, so it makes sense that I started to miss that quiet "me" time.

I'm a huge talk radio fan, so one way I recreate my commute each day is by listening to great podcasts, either on one of my Google Home devices or in the background on my iMac.

For more ideas, check out these 10 ways to enrich and entertain yourself at home or these seven ways to stave off boredom at home for more quick, easy activities you can use to replace your commute.



Schedule calls to socialize with coworkers

You're already using Zoom, Slack, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams for mandatory meetings and one-on-ones with your boss, but how are you keeping up with the social aspects of your workplace relationships? Greasing the social gears is a powerful and important way to stave off feelings of isolation and sluggishness.

In fact, positive relationships with our coworkers have been shown to enhance both job performance and job satisfaction, so try scheduling a daily break with colleagues just to shoot the breeze, or meet each other on Zoom for lunch. If after-hours socializing is how you and your coworkers usually unwind, schedule a virtual happy hour one day a week.

Connect with your fellow humans with one or more of these six things you can do to help others during this time of social distancing. While at home, be sure you're disinfecting with these EPA-approved cleaning products. And to brush up on terms like "PPE" and "zoonotic," here's the 101 on coronavirus-related terms and what they mean.

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