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SPECIAL ISSUE: YOUR RETURN TO WORK GUIDE

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GOING BACK TO WORK? CONSIDER THESE SAFETY TIPS

If you've recently been given a return to work date, you may be feeling nervous or anxious about your safety at work. This is normal, but remember that knowledge is power; while the onus falls on your employer to establish prudent new protocols and safety measures for your workplace, you can also take an active role in mitigating your own risk of getting sick.



Of course, maintaining proper physical distancing at all times and continuing to be diligent about frequent and effective hand washing are vital in protecting ourselves and others. We encourage you to consider these safety tips, too:

1) Before you return: Ask your employer about the new protocols that will be in place at work, including cleaning procedures, scheduling changes, workstation setup and PPE use (for instance, will gloves and masks be provided, or are you expected to bring your own?). Having a clear picture of what to expect may help reduce uneasy feelings about going back, but if you ultimately do not feel safe about returning to work, contact your human resources department to discuss next steps.

2) On your way to work: When the weather is favourable, consider walking or cycling to work if possible, while being mindful of keeping extra space between other pedestrians and cyclists (more than two meters) in order to avoid droplets left in their pathways. If you need to take public transportation, wear a mask, sanitize your hands immediately before and after use, and do not board a vehicle that is too crowded to maintain proper physical distance between passengers.

3) In the elevator: Best practices for taking an elevator include wearing a mask, sanitizing your hands before and after pushing the button and ensuring no more than one other person is in the elevator with you.

4) In the bathroom: Because bathrooms typically contain a high concentration of viral droplets and aerosols, don't use the bathroom right after someone else. To improve air circulation, leave the fan running and keep the windows open if there are any. If there is a toilet lid, close it before flushing to prevent viral aerosols from dispersing. It goes without saying that washing your hands thoroughly after using the washroom is essential, and be sure to use a paper towel to open the bathroom door upon exiting.

5) At lunch time: Many workplaces will be closing or restricting use of common kitchens within workplaces, but even if yours remains open, consider avoiding it. Instead, pack a lunch and snacks that do not require heat or refrigeration and eat outdoors at your workspace, where you can ensure surfaces are sanitized. If you do eat near your desk, take care to create as much separation from work as possible while you enjoy your meal; close down your computer, listen to a great playlist or podcast, and do your best to treat lunch time as downtime.

Note: If you're a coffee drinker and your office kitchen is open, use your own mug or thermos, and use a napkin or paper towel to push the buttons on the coffee machine or to handle the coffee pot. Wash or sanitize your hands before and after use as well.

6) Around your work station: In addition to keeping surfaces clean and sanitized, proper ventilation is a fundamental part of maintaining safe work spaces. Studies show that the spread of disease is reduced when ventilation is increased, so keep windows in your workplace open if possible and use a high-quality air purifier if available.

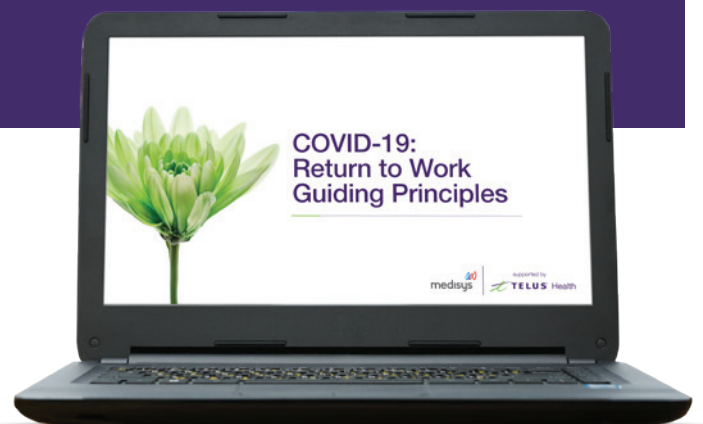
If your employer hasn't already reconfigured the setup to maximize space between employees, take it upon yourself to reposition your work station (or insist that your employer do it), so that other employees are not directly facing you – even if they are six feet away. We know most droplets land within this space, but many don't. Plexiglass or a physical barrier is key if employees need to be face-to-face, and is also important for side-to-side workspaces.

7) At home: When you return home, always leave your shoes at the door to avoid bringing contaminants from outside the home in, and wash your hands immediately before interacting with loved ones. Unless you work in a high-risk environment (in which case you would be aware of specific practices), it is not necessary to wash the clothes you wore to work; transmission through clothing is unlikely in low-risk workplaces where proper safety protocols are in place.

It is to be expected that, for those of us returning to work, this change in routine may lead to feelings of uncertainty and/or anxiety. Some of the most effective ways to protect our health during times of stress begin at home: prioritize sleep, nutrition, exercise and emotional well-being. **Check out** our blog for great resources on these topics.

Are you an employer?

Download our free
Return to Work Playbook
designed by our medical and
occupational health experts.



OPTIMIZE YOUR ENERGY LEVELS THROUGH YOUR DIET

By Andrea Stokes, Registered Dietitian, Medisys Health Group



If you've been working from home for the last several weeks, your diet has likely fallen into one of two camps:

- 1) Survival mode eating, characterized by snacking throughout the day and relying heavily on convenience foods, or
- 2) Inspired chef eating, relishing in the ability to prepare great meals in your own kitchen in the middle of the workday.

There is no shame in falling into the first camp; this pandemic has challenged us in countless ways, and many of us have had to stay the course in survival mode. If you've been eating really well while working from home, I salute you – and I expect you may already be mourning your time in the kitchen as you get ready to return to the office.

No matter your current nutrition situation, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a common effect on us all: we are very tired. And while everybody knows that poor nutrition can lead to weight gain, most underestimate the role that diet plays in our energy levels throughout the day.

We need as much healthy energy as we can get during the home stretch of this pandemic marathon, and by ensuring our diets are balanced with the proper amounts of protein, fibre and healthy carbohydrates, we can maintain consistent energy and optimize productivity all day long. Get started with these five strategies:

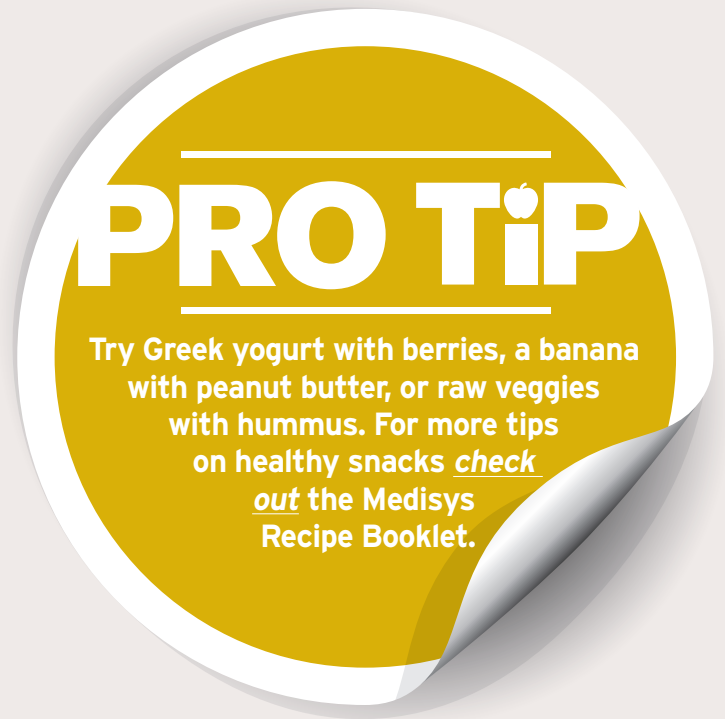
1) Include protein and high-fibre carbs with each meal

Avoid a sugar rush – and crash – by combining a filling source of protein with healthy, high-fibre carbohydrate sources.

- Great protein sources include: lean meats, fish, Greek yogurt, eggs, milk, cheese, beans, lentils, nuts, and seeds.
- Fibre-rich carbohydrates include: fruits, veggies, oatmeal, bran, brown rice, beans, peas, lentils, and whole grain breads and crackers.

2) Add snacks between meals

Keep your energy up with regular snacks that include a good source of protein.



3) Avoid added sugars

Added sugars in our food and drinks cause drastic spikes and dips in energy that actually make fatigue worse – what goes up must come down! So, stick to natural sources of sweetness, like fruit, and avoid highly-processed items such as cookies and sugary pop.

4) Stay hydrated

Dehydration is common and can be a huge drain on energy. Aim for at least 8-10 cups of water per day. Keep a water bottle with you to encourage you to drink throughout the day. If you need some help with kick-starting your water intake habits, [join](#) our 9-Day Hydration Challenge.

5) Stick to natural foods

At least 80% of what you eat should be natural, minimally-processed foods. Avoid foods with long ingredient lists and stick to mostly single-ingredient items. Think fruits, veggies, meat, fish, eggs, beans, lentils, nuts and whole grains.



Chronic fatigue can be an indicator of various mental and physical health issues.

If you feel increasingly tired, contact your primary care provider or use the [Akira by TELUS Health App](#) to speak with a health care professional today.



KEEPING YOUR COOL DURING THIS PHASE OF COVID-19

By Dr. Diane McIntosh,
Chief Neuroscience Officer, TELUS

As we move into a new phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, where many of us are going back to work or gradually going back out into public, remember that our anxieties are heightened and most of us have barely left home for months. As a result, it's little wonder some of us are going to be in a "heightened emotional state," better known as grumpy.

When confronted by an ill-tempered friend, loved one, co-worker or boss, particularly when we're not in the best of moods ourselves, there's a greater risk of reacting impulsively and in an equally ill-tempered manner.

When dealing with potentially less forgiving people, it's essential to manage our responses, now more than ever.

Before sharing some tips on managing the angry or anxious people in our lives, it's important to keep this point in mind: we can only control ourselves. We can't control our partner, child, colleague or mother-in-law. For those of us with children, consider how, immediately upon entering the world, they generally turned life upside down. You couldn't control them then and you can't control them now. Trying to control anyone else is fruitless, frustrating and also harms relationships.

The way you choose to react to a situation is entirely within your power, including what you think, say and do. It might not feel that way sometimes, but it's absolutely true. Learning this life skill, even later in life, is not only possible - it's essential. We must also teach our children these skills, both directly and by modelling the behaviour.

Below are a few tips for managing difficult situations involving emotionally charged people - at work, at home or out in the world. However, it's an unfortunate reality that no matter how hard you try, a small number of people will continue to be unreasonable and cannot be placated.

1. Manage your own brain before you engage

When you are responding to an angry or anxious person, it's essential to recognize and accept that you are not responsible for their emotional reaction. Not owning someone else's emotions will help you to stay calm and respond with your rational brain rather than your emotional brain.

There's no "one-size-fits-all" response that will settle a distressed or angry person; you can't rescue someone from emotional distress with magic words or specific actions. The most effective tools we have are to listen attentively and demonstrate empathy and patience.

It's also helpful to remember that while someone may be really fired up in the moment, they won't stay in that emotional state forever. They will eventually decompress, at least to some degree. Thinking this way will help to reduce the tendency to take on another person's emotional distress, which will reduce your own stress level.

2. Remain calm, which will help you to calm the person you're supporting

By staying calm and relaxed (which is not the same as being indifferent), you will nonverbally increase the likelihood of calming and relaxing the person you're supporting. Especially if you know it's likely to be difficult, try to enter the conversation calmly, by employing passive relaxation. You can also use these tools during the conversation, while the other person is speaking:

- Take deep slow breaths
- Let your shoulders drop and lengthen your neck
- Let your hands and arms relax...stretch and relax your fingers
- Feel your feet on the floor and relax your toes
- Relax your face and jaw

Once the conversation is over, take care of yourself by using the same techniques. At the same time, try to visualize a time when you felt very confident and relaxed. The combination of these physical and emotional activities can be a powerful remedy. You can take yourself into this peaceful zone any time - it takes just 90 seconds!

Like all good things, it takes a little practice to make this a "go-to" skill you can employ during high-pressure situations. Trying it out several times a day, during lower stress times, can help to make it a natural step in keeping yourself calm during stressful interactions.

3. Speak a little more slowly

If you have a tendency to speak quickly, try to slow down your rate of speech just a little, use shorter sentences and avoid using complicated language. You can show empathy and understanding by paraphrasing what they've said and connecting their words to what you think they're feeling emotionally.

4. Remember that our past experiences can predict our emotional reactions during difficult times

As a psychiatrist, I frequently meet people who are highly distressed. This can be expressed many ways, including overt anger, tearfulness or withdrawal. It's essential to recognize that an individual's personal history may influence how they feel and react during these stressful times.

For those whose lives have been impacted by significant past trauma or hardship, this crisis may reignite their historical fears or exacerbate their feelings of powerlessness. While there is no excuse for rudeness, understanding possible explanations for poor behaviour has helped me to cope and not personalize other's objectionable or rude comments.

A special thank you to Dr. Randy Mackoff for his contributions to this article.

HOW TO STOCK YOUR OWN OFFICE PANTRY

By Richelle Tabelon & Jessica Tong, Registered Dietitians, Medisys Health Group



With cafeterias, food courts and communal kitchens being closed during this phase of the coronavirus pandemic, it's wise to start bringing a lunch to work if you are going back to the office.

But if "brown-bagging it" full-time feels like a drag, consider creating your own mini pantry near your workspace so that you can re-stock it on a weekly or biweekly basis – instead of having to pack a lunch every night. The best part? Following this pantry checklist will ensure you're eating nutritionally-dense lunches and snacks to optimize your energy and brainpower all day.

- ☐ Your own trail mix (toss some low-sugar dry cereal, nuts, seeds and dried fruit with no added sugar together in an airtight container)
- ☐ Kale or apple chips
- ☐ Nut or seed butter
- ☐ Unsweetened apple sauce
- ☐ Canned tuna or salmon (opt for the 85g flavoured ones – they pair perfectly with whole grain crackers!)
- ☐ Roasted lentils or chickpeas (the brand Three Little Farmers offers them in 50g snack packs, which contain the same amount of protein as two large eggs!)
- ☐ Low-sugar protein bars
- ☐ Whole grain bread or crackers
- ☐ Plain popped popcorn
- ☐ Canned unsweetened fruit in water
- ☐ Beef jerky
- ☐ Homemade muffins (they will last a few days or up to one week without refrigeration)
- ☐ Roasted seaweed snacks
- ☐ Cherry tomatoes (they are the firmest tomato variety and do not require refrigeration)
- ☐ Firm avocados (they will ripen throughout the week)
- ☐ Dark chocolate-covered almonds (just be sure to avoid candied or praline almonds, which are high in sugar, and opt for 70% or higher dark chocolate)
- ☐ A bowl of fruit (bananas, apples, pears, peaches and plums do not require refrigeration)



Eating well during times of stress can be a major challenge. Our team of Registered Dietitians is available to provide individualized guidance and support virtually. [Learn more here.](#)



As provinces gradually reopen economies, planning for Return to Work (RTW) is top of mind for most employers. But it can be a daunting task fraught with unknowns.

We are here to help.

[Download the COVID-19: Return to Work Guiding Principles Playbook](#)

