



Wellness Strategies for Working from Home

Connecting Employee Wellness and Workers' Compensation

Employers have always been challenged with preventing workplace injuries and accidents. However, it's one thing to manage workers' compensation programs of safety, health, and risk control in a facility and yet another to manage these priorities while employees work remotely. Though many employers have offered work-at-home arrangements in the past, the number of employees now working from home due to the COVID-19 crisis has spiked exponentially.

Work-at-home considerations include setting up a workspace that helps avoid musculoskeletal disorder exposures (*Ergonomic Considerations in Setting up a Home Office Workplace*) and general safety in the home office (*Guide to Setting up a Safe, Healthy and Productive Home Office*). However, employers and employees also need to consider maintaining performance through health and well-being.

Our current crisis presents a unique opportunity for employers to offer wellness solutions that help employees maintain healthy lifestyles and have a positive impact on employee morale and performance. Let's examine the concept of wellness and how it can help your employees now. Click [here](#) for a copy of our helpful tip sheet for employees, *Wellness Strategies for Working from Home*.

The Concept of Employee Wellness

Wellness is about making a best effort to develop in all aspects of life and using talents and capabilities in creative and productive ways.

- Health describes a person's overall level of functioning at any particular point in time.
- Health is on a continuum.
- Wellness is made up of six segments representing the basic dimensions of life:
 - Occupational
 - Physical
 - Social
 - Intellectual
 - Spiritual
 - Emotional

Consider each of six areas so that you and your employees—can survive and thrive during these unprecedented times together.

Occupational Wellness

Personal satisfaction and enrichment in one's life through work drive this dimension. It includes whatever one does that contributes to work, society or family; be it employment, caregiving or volunteerism. If an individual senses they are performing meaningful work in important roles that support their organization and personal lives, there is a sense of personal gain—or wellness. Consider the occupational stresses that can occur in a work-from-home situation. Please view our blog post ([Guide to Setting up a Safe, Healthy and Productive Home Office](#)) that highlights some of these issues.

Occupational Wellness Tips:

- Any occupation may detract from wellness in various ways. Work may be harmful, particularly if it contributes to stress, depression or relationship problems.
- It is important to set boundaries. Managers and companies need to make employees feel comfortable disconnecting; otherwise the blurred line between home and work can result in more family conflict and intrusions on personal time.
- Employees should work in an area that they can easily separate from when work hours end. This will help avoid the temptation of doing “just one more thing” or having “one more call” when the workday is done.

Physical Wellness

The physical dimension of wellness recognizes the need for regular physical activity and a nutritious diet while discouraging the use of tobacco, drugs, and excessive alcohol consumption. The most important thing to remember here is that it is not about being perfect! If an employee makes a decision that was not the best, they can plan to do better the next time rather than just giving up all together.

Physical Wellness Tips:

Employers can offer employees these strategies for the maintenance of their physical health:

- Every 30-45 minutes, stand up, take deep breaths and walk around the house and stretch.
- Eat healthy, well-balanced meals. Plan meals ahead of time to avoid eating out of boredom and/or making random food choices (junk food, etc.).
- Good sleep should not be overlooked.
- Exercise regularly by walking or biking outside or by using sites like *YouTube* to find at-home workouts that do not require equipment.
- Be mindful of the negative effects of alcohol or drugs on physical health.
- Plan the day and take full advantage of a convenient daily “commute” down the hall. Stay on the same schedule as if at the office, set daily goals, and set specific time for work and other activities.
- Employee assistance programs can also be promoted at this time to help employees find the varied answers they may need.

Social Wellness

The social dimension encourages contributing to one's environment and community and underscores the concept that it's beneficial to contribute to the common welfare of our community.

Social Wellness Tips:

- Right now, everyone is staying home as much as possible to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 so that our communities can quickly return to normal.
- If employees have neighbors in their communities who may need help because they are in higher risk categories, they can reach out to help them get items they may need if they are venturing to a store anyway. Any purchased items can be left at the door to minimize the risk of exposures.
- Employees can take advantage of technology to call or video chat with friends and family since they cannot physically be together during this time of social distancing. They can share with family and friends in a healthy way about the concerns they may be feeling.

Let's continue this broader definition of wellness and examine the last three areas including intellectual, spiritual and emotional considerations:

Intellectual Wellness

The intellectual dimension is about pursuing intellectual growth and stimulation outside of work time. Employees may now have more time available due to being at home. For example, employees with children whose afterschool activities have been canceled can use this time to pursue other interests.

Intellectual Wellness Tips

Practical strategies can include:

- Reading books, listening to podcasts, pursuing a professional designation/certification, or taking an online course (Please see www.classcentral.com for nearly 500 classes that can be audited for free).
- Using activities like puzzles, daily word searches, crossword puzzles or sudoku to keep employees' minds sharp. Strategic board games are good options that also happen to be a great way to spend time with family.

Spiritual Wellness

Spiritual viewpoints vary widely, and employees may not want to openly share them within the workplace. In times like this, employees may need time to engage via phone or video chat in social outreach with their family and communities (e.g., church or civic organization) to find comfort with people who share similar beliefs, values and/or culture. Ultimately, spiritual wellness is about being connected to something greater than yourself and living life positively and with compassion. A healthy spiritual practice may include volunteerism, social contributions, or belonging to a group.

Spiritual Wellness Tips:

An employer can reframe spiritual wellness and think of it as:

- Understanding how employees' beliefs play a role in their personal wellness
- Helping employees find meaning and purpose in their work
- Respecting employees' beliefs and building a culture that fosters respect and tolerance across the workforce. Practices such as meditation, yoga, prayer, and even connecting with nature by taking a walk outside, are examples of ways that employees may reduce anxiety and stress. Many apps are available to help in this area.
- Helping employees stay connected to the mission and vision of your organization through video conferencing and calls that reinforce the importance of each person's work and contributions.
- Discovering new ways to recognize employees can go a long way and instill a positive cultural experience for all team members.

Emotional Wellness

The emotional dimension recognizes awareness and acceptance of feelings. This is the degree to which employees feel positive and enthusiastic about their lives. It includes pursuing and maintaining healthy relationships, being able to manage stress and express and manage feelings.

Emotional Wellness Tips:

- At a time like this it is important to take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Repeatedly hearing about the pandemic can be upsetting.
- For some people, working from home can put their mental health at risk, causing feelings of isolation and disconnection. When your normal workplace is "off-line," opportunities are missed for regular social interaction and connection with co-workers.
- This can make other areas already discussed like setting up a designated work area, setting a schedule, and exercising during the day even more important for emotional wellness.
- If employees have tried the other recommended strategies provided here but are still feeling unhappy in their current situations, they should consider accessing resources with the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and talking with a mental health counselor.

Next Steps

During this unprecedented time, employers have been challenged to change gears quickly to keep operations running smoothly. Now that employees are settling into a "new normal" for the foreseeable future, delving further into wellness strategies can be a practical next step.

PMA Risk Control offers employee wellness services that link wellness strategies with *claim outcomes*. Our customized wellness solutions help clients go beyond controlling physical hazards by helping them establish workplace health metrics that studies have shown can impact an organization's results (e.g., comorbidities and psychosocial risk factors). For additional information on the ever-growing connection between workers' compensation and employee wellness, please reach out to us at heretohelp@pmagroup.com. Click [here](#) for *Wellness Strategies for Working from Home*.

