



THE HYBRID WORKPLACE

Mental well-being considerations

The rapid conversion to working from home was one of many significant changes to the workplace precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. While some employees are now returning to the workplace, many more are expected to continue to spend a greater proportion of their time working remotely, through “hybrid” models that split time between the workplace and remote working.¹ This model extends employers’ responsibility for their employees beyond the work premises. Here, we review the current scientific evidence about the intersection of home working and employee mental well-being.

Mitigating the risks associated with hybrid working



Preventing musculoskeletal issues

Home working at ergonomically inadequate work stations could increase the risk of the development – or worsening – of musculoskeletal (MSK) issues; a problematic scenario given recognized links between living with a MSK condition and poor mental health, and lower job satisfaction.^{2,3} For employers a renewed focus on an ergonomic home setup is important. A balanced diet and regular activity can also prevent MSK issues, emphasizing the validity of a comprehensive risk-reduction strategy.⁴





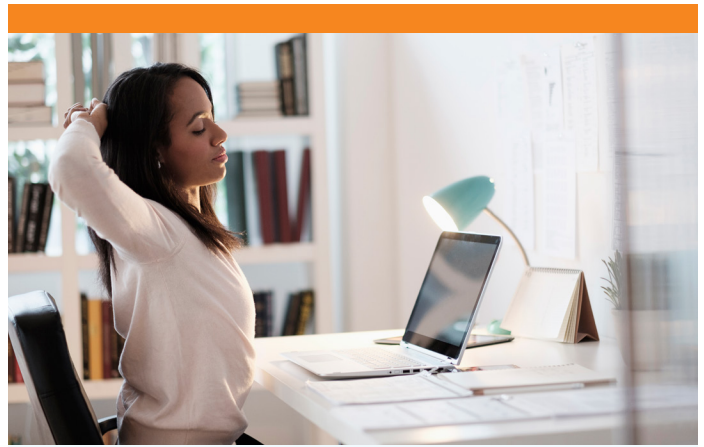
Maintaining work-life boundaries

Hybrid working may blur the boundaries between work and home, promoting an “always on” mindset that subsequently increases anxiety and stress.^{1,5} Empowering employees to feel able to fully disconnect outside office hours may help support mental health and subsequently prevent burnout.



Supporting mental well-being

Research conducted after the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak found nearly one in 10 participants reported more pessimistic perceptions of life.⁶ Therefore, repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic could have implications for mental wellness for some time to come. Actions to counteract this could include continued vital support for employees experiencing poor mental health, and dialogue regarding associated anxieties.



The move to remote working was a rapid response to a global emergency. Longer term, as we contemplate sustained home working and hybrid working models, it is essential to consider the impact on employees' emotional well-being.

Realizing the benefits

Hybrid working may benefit mental well-being. Greater flexibility can provide an improved sense of control over how employees allocate time, and home working can allow increased time for personal priorities while maintaining productivity deadlines.⁵ One study found employees given the daily option of work location during the pandemic chose the office when looking to reduce family pressures, and home to reduce

work-associated stress.⁷ Furthermore, organizations' operational costs could benefit through reduced office space, and opportunities to acquire a more global workforce could be realized.^{1,8}

The evidence suggests three key approaches that organizations and managers can take to support remote working employees⁸:



1

Use supportive management practices, such as motivational language, trust building exercises, and information sharing, rather than close monitoring.

2

Be aware of personal challenges, as research indicates that working remotely was more difficult for some. Ensuring safe space for honest consideration from both parties is key.

3

Recognize that informal communication can increase job satisfaction and help to reduce loneliness, and build opportunities for this during the working week.

How Cigna can help

Cigna partners with organizations to support employees as they embrace work-related changes. The goal is to nurture a culture of well-being for employees, to improve individual health and well-being, and enhance organizational performance. Included in our offerings are:



Employee Assistance Program (EAP): Independent support is available for a variety of issues that can affect well-being, including legal and financial concerns, relationships and family life, and substance misuse.



Global Telehealth: Convenient access to remote consultations with licensed doctors is offered in a range of languages via secure video or phone conversation.



Case Management: Clinical assistance for members (or their dependents) with chronic or complicated conditions provides advice and support and to help them effectively navigate the health care system.



Digital Well-being Solutions: This range of personalized programs is designed to support long-lasting lifestyle changes. Solutions include health assessments and targeted health improvement programs in the key well-being areas of resilience, activity, healthy eating, and sleep.

Together, all the way.®



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