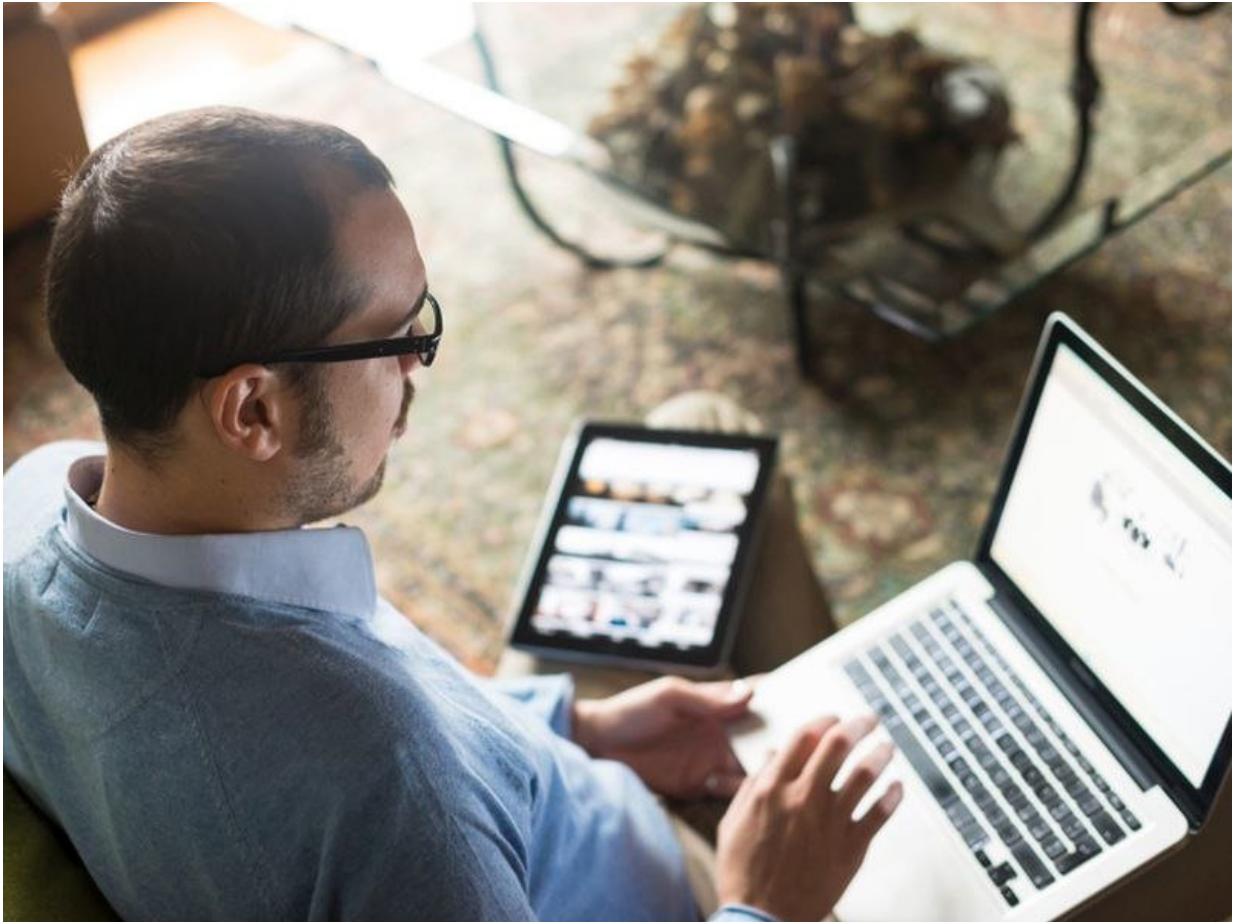


# The upsides and downsides of telecommuting

October 19 2017, by Dennis Thompson, Healthday Reporter

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(HealthDay)—Workers who "telecommute" appear to have a lot more job satisfaction than folks who report to an office every day.

But that positive comes with tradeoffs. Remote employees may also have a harder time separating work from their personal lives, and they can become socially isolated, researchers report.

"The upside for workers is that they are happier when they are not tied to a fixed place of work," said study author Alan Felstead, a research professor of social science at Cardiff University in Wales.

But, "while workers love working remotely, working this way carries costs, in that work and home often overlap, and it may therefore be difficult for workers to turn off," Felstead added.

Computers, smartphones and other advanced technology have allowed more Americans than ever to telecommute, said David Ballard, the American Psychological Association's assistant executive director for organizational excellence.

"Work is no longer somewhere you go from 9 to 5. It's something you do," said Ballard. "With available technology, that means we don't necessarily have to be sitting at a desk in an office to do that."

In the United States, the share of workers performing some or all of their work from home has grown from a little less than 20 percent in 2003 to over 24 percent in 2015, Felstead and his colleagues said.

Workers are responding well to this newfound freedom, the researchers found in survey results of British employees:

- Seven out of 10 remote workers said they would not move to another company for higher pay, compared with six out of 10 brick-and-mortar employees.
- Telecommuters also were likelier than [office workers](#) to report their jobs as more pleasurable and stimulating. And they were

significantly more enthusiastic about their jobs.

These findings mirror those of U.S. workforce surveys, Ballard said.

"People reported that being able to do that enhanced their productivity and gave them more flexibility," Ballard said of telecommuting.

However, there are downsides.

"It is difficult for workers to draw boundaries between work and nonwork when work is no longer fixed to a particular place," Felstead said.

Remote workers are more likely to worry about job problems than office workers, and often work longer hours, the researchers found. Nearly 40 percent of telecommuters said they often work extra time to get the job done, compared with 24 percent of office employees.

Telecommuting "makes it more difficult for them to stop thinking about work and take a break," Ballard said. "That's really important for people's work stress levels ... They need to have time where they're not thinking about work."

Ballard recommends that telecommuters set boundaries like specific hours when they work, when they have their cell phone on, or when they will answer e-mails.

"There's no one right way to do it. It really depends on the individual and their needs and preferences," Ballard said.

And it's important to communicate those boundaries to bosses and co-workers, he added.

Remote workers also need to fight social isolation, both on a personal and professional level, Ballard said. They should use video conferencing and instant messaging to attend meetings or stay in touch, and regularly get out to do [work](#) elsewhere.

"Stay connected to members of your team," Ballard said. "That's a challenge when somebody's telecommuting. It's easy to get isolated, and it's easy to be left out of the loop."

Finally, telecommuters should remember to take regular breaks, and not get caught up in multitasking.

"We all think we're good at multitasking, but really we're just dividing our attention, which means it's taking us longer to get things done and we make more mistakes and errors," Ballard said.

The new review was published recently in the journal *New Technology, Work and Employment*.

**More information:** Alan Felstead, research professor, social science, Cardiff University, Wales, U.K.; David Ballard, Psy.D., assistant executive director, organizational excellence; American Psychological Association; Oct. 4, 2017, *New Technology, Work and Employment*

For more on telecommuting, visit the [American Psychological Association](#).

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