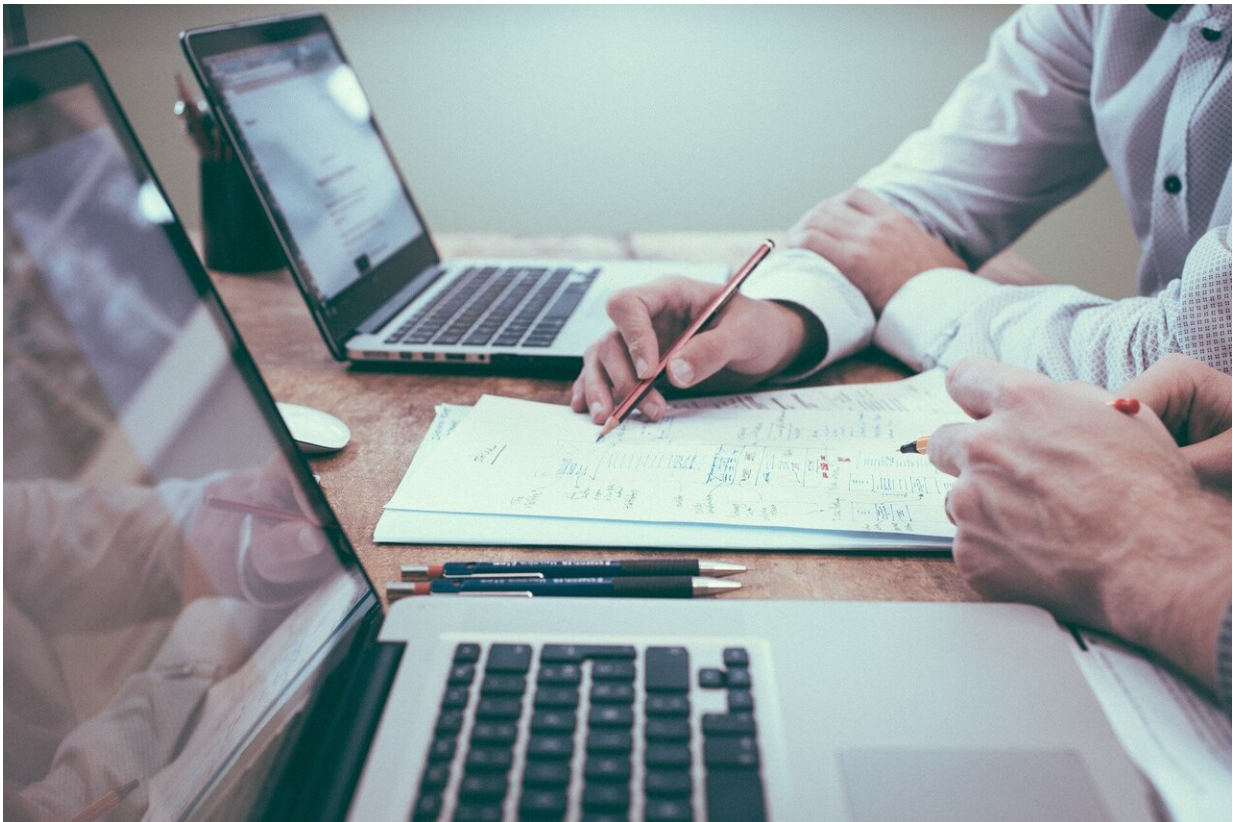


Q&A: Integrating work at home

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DEAR MAYO CLINIC: I have been working from home since the COVID-19 pandemic began, and my company recently shared that we would be continuing to do so. In the beginning, it was difficult for me to juggle working remotely with my children's online schooling and finding

time for myself. Do you have any suggestions for finding a better work-life balance?

Although many people worked remotely before COVID-19, the ongoing pandemic has resulted in more people working from home than ever before. As physical boundaries between work and personal life blur, it can become difficult to manage the two worlds, especially when you have children.

Instead of trying to separate your professional and [personal lives](#), focus on ways to effectively integrate them. The concept of work-life balance is not necessarily the focus since that implies a 50-50 split. In reality, prior to COVID-19, most people probably weren't typically working 50% of the time away from their family and then spending the other 50% focused on their home lives.

Since each family and each person is different, finding the right mix to effectively integrate or blend work and personal life is a personal one.

That said, it is also important to recognize that what works for you may not be exactly what works for your spouse or children. Have an honest conversation as a family to identify areas that are valuable to each of you. With the whole family taking part, you're more apt to achieve your goals for navigating remote work, schooling and other priorities.

A crucial step in achieving good work-life integration is to create and maintain a routine. Make a list of the things each day that you need to do or want to do. Build a schedule around those items.

For instance, before COVID-19, you may have gotten up in the morning, gone to the gym first thing, come home, showered and then went to work. I suspect that for many people, their routine changed due to that the fact that gyms were closed in many areas because of COVID-19. If

you were working at home, as well, it became easy to just get up, maybe skip the shower and start working. Now is the time to reset your routine. Put it on your calendar that at 7 a.m. you will go outside for a walk or a run. Or if your local gym is open, put it on your schedule to go for your workout. Then come home, shower and go to work.

Creating a routine helps by allowing you to know when work begins and ends, and when you can integrate activities that are important.

Many patients talk about missing meals because, despite working from home, they are tied to phone calls and video chats, and forget to take a break. Schedule time to get up, stretch, and get a drink or snack. Your mind will be rejuvenated.

Another strategy that can help you better achieve good work-life integration is to adopt a concept called "delegate, delete and do."

People often begin to feel anxious or overwhelmed when they are juggling too much. I recommend pausing and taking inventory of all the things on your plate, whether it's work-related or not. Write it down on a list. Look at each item on the list and honestly ask yourself if this is something that is important, something you need to do, or something that can wait. Often people find there are things that could be delegated. Other things can simply be deleted or taken off of the priority list.

Sometimes when we look at that list, simply keeping things on the list can build anxiety for us. But if we can say, 'Let's just take this off the list for now,' it can make a huge difference. Worst case, you can always add it back to the list later.

Finally, there's 'do,' which is really about understanding priorities. That is, it's what has to get done and when.

There are certainly distractions when you are working from home versus a traditional office. Whether it's a child asking for help or a pile of laundry, it can be challenging to remain focused. This is where your routine and reviewing that list of to-do items is helpful.

Creating a strategy where, no matter what else is happening, you know that you have two or three things on your list that must get done today—and then doing them first if possible—can help you manage feelings of being overwhelmed. To allow for better integration of your work and personal life, remember to include tasks or priorities from your personal life, as well. It may take practice, but it is important to schedule time for the seemingly small things, whether it is making a grooming appointment for your pet or a reservation for a family dinner.

Consider a few other tips that can help you feel more organized and in control while working at home:

- Create a space to work that is free from distractions. Clutter and noise can make it difficult to concentrate, potentially affecting your productivity.
- Schedule in breaks. Although you might not schedule your bathroom breaks while at the office, get into the habit of taking breaks to stand up and stretch, grab a coffee, or go for a walk.
- Close the door. If you have a space where you can physically do so, at the end of your work time, close the door. This can help signify that it is now personal time.
- Avoid working when it's family time. Resist checking email at the dinner table or when you're watching a movie with the kids. And while the worry and changes brought by COVID-19 have many people reporting fretful sleep or insomnia, refrain from logging in and doing work when you can't sleep. Instead, read a book or take a brief walk.

If you continue to struggle with managing work and home life, reach out to your primary health care provider or a trusted community source for additional resources.

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