

# Ergonomics considerations related to mental wellbeing while working from home during Covid-19 (and beyond)

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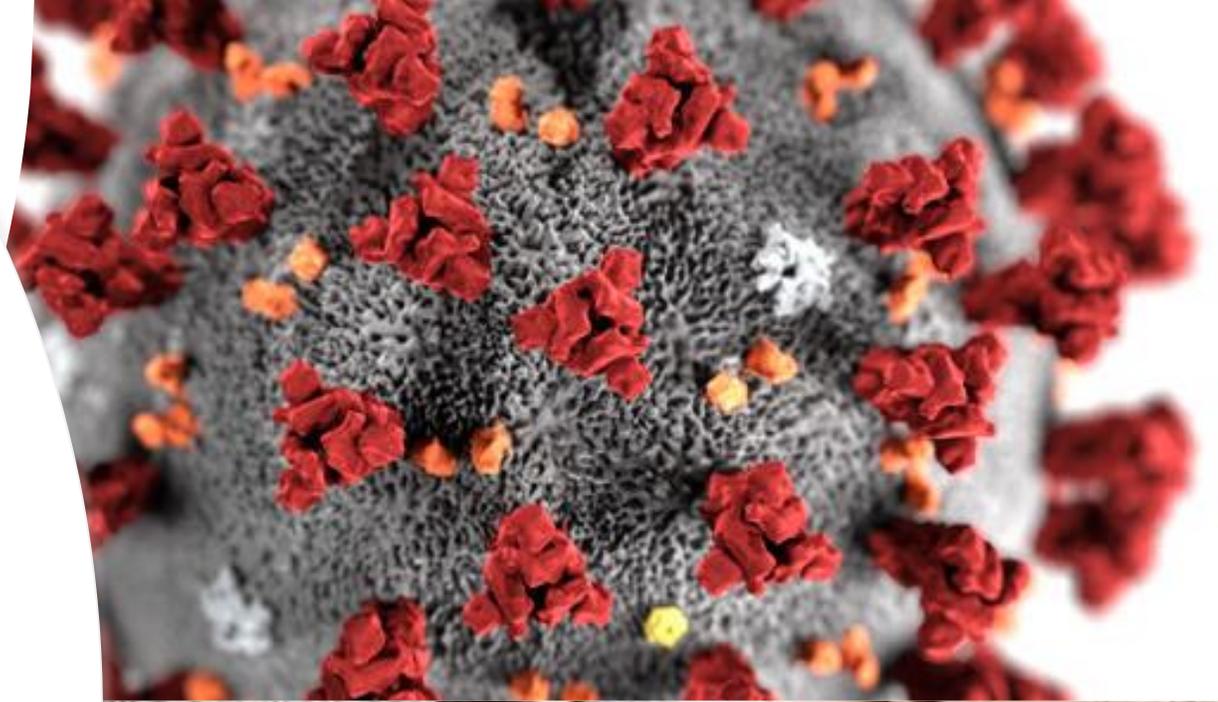
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# What will I be covering?

1. Mental workload
  - 1.1 Working online
  - 1.2 Problems with time keeping
2. Guilt and sharing
3. Depression and loneliness
4. Stress and anxiety

In each of these I will outline the mental health issue and then emphasise what we can do about it.



# 1. Mental workload: working online

- Working online feels more mentally exhausting (because it is)
- Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) – fewer “channels” to remain engaged
- Moved from a mix of visual and auditory to primarily auditory
- We miss facial expressions, body language, positioning, etc.
- We add distractions to try and stay engaged (i.e. multi-tasking)



# 1. Mental workload: problems switching off

- Working from home has many advantages (reduced travel time, comfortable clothes/footwear, no top-down monitoring)
- But it is difficult to know when to shut down mentally
- Reduced physical (a building, lights, etc.) and social (colleagues, managers, family) border keepers, letting you know when to stop



# 1. Mental workload: what to do

- Need to set up agreeable work hours (and stick to them) with work and family
- Limit screen time before and after work to help restoration
- Build time into work schedule for restoration (walks, gardening, something active)
- Don't fool yourself into thinking you can do many thinking tasks at once (you can't), rather find ways to stay engaged with one task
- We need to design better remote "work software"
- Develop apps to help with home-work time management



## 2. Time-sharing and guilt

- Especially acute for working people with small children or with older adults requiring care
- Exacerbated by Covid-19 meaning home-schooling or extra safety precautions for elderly or sick
- Because you are in physical proximity they “demand” attention
- Increases mental workload required to overcome distractions
- Guilt skyrockets as you attempt to balance competing work demands



## 2. Time-sharing and guilt: what to do

- Let your work know and negotiate with your work about what is possible
- Communicate, communicate, communicate. Let your work colleagues know. Let your family know
- Recruit extra assistance (if you can), set chores for older kids, find domestic assistance (au pairs, cleaning, drivers, etc.)
- Create physical boundaries
- Find time for yourself
- Better designed flexible work schedules



### 3. Loneliness and depression

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- Humans are still social creatures even if some of us are introverts.
- Studies of online behaviour have shown that loneliness and depression are common symptoms of social isolation (Kim et al., 2006; Liang et al., 2016; Young & Rogers, 1998; etc.)
- Depression and loneliness is often self-reinforcing
- Very difficult to self-diagnose
- Often manifests as anger, frustration, withdrawal, or sleep disorders



### 3. Loneliness and depression: what to do

- Workplaces should look to create “contact days” where people are physically present
- Design of informal online “contact” sessions during the the work day to replace casual conversations (e.g. coffee station or water-cooler sessions)
- Fun online team building activities are still required
- Speak to staff and have regular mental health check-ins



## Virtual Scavenger Hunt App

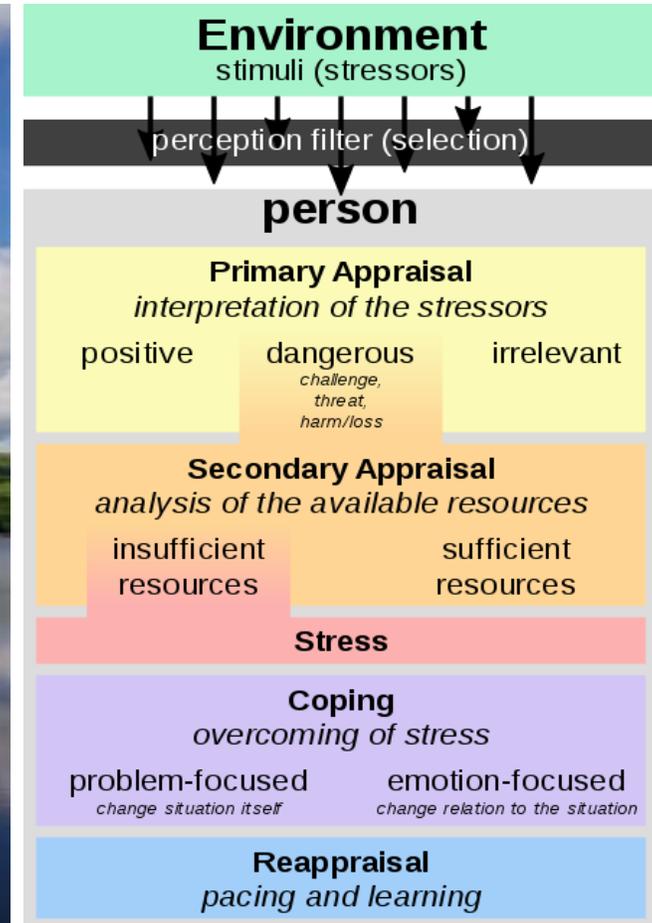
- ✓ Photos, Videos, Trivia, QR Codes, Surveys
- ✓ Auto-scoring, Leaderboard, Social Photostream
- ✓ Build Online, Turn Key Hunts, Launch in Minutes

[Learn More](#)





# Transactional model of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987)



## 4. Stress and anxiety: what to do

- Flexible work systems, workplaces designed for restoration.
- Workplaces designed for natural light and views (of nature)
- Communication, communication, and more communication. Let people know what is going on.
- Workplace-based counselling facilities.

