

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Brain Health Matters and Working from Home with Brain Health in Mind Makes a Difference

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is working to develop brain healthy communities, creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health, optimizing brain performance, and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region. Today, BHI is talking about protecting brain health while working from home.

Working from home has become the new normal for many of us. But if you feel like working from home means working more, you're right. A recent study from the Harvard Business School (HBS) confirms what we all suspected: we are working longer, attending more meetings, and answering more emails from our home offices.

[Working Knowledge](#), the Harvard Business School website, says the study analyzed the emails and meetings of 3.1 million people in 16 global cities and found that the pandemic has done away with the traditional 9 -to-5 workday and replaced it with email conversations and Zoom-type meetings. It also showed that the average workday has increased by 48.5 minutes, even though we may have had some increased flexibility during that time for interruptions from family.

Some of the findings from the study are:

- The number of emails being sent each day increased by more than 5 percent.
- More than 8 percent of emails are sent after business hours.
- The number of meetings increased by 13 percent.
- Meetings are about 12 minutes shorter.

“There is a general sense that we never stop being in front of Zoom or interacting,” says Raffaella Sadun, professor of business administration in the HBS Strategy Unit and one of the authors of the study. “It’s very taxing, to be honest.”

The HSB research team detailed their findings in the working paper [Collaborating During Coronavirus: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Nature of Work](#), released by the National Bureau of Economic Research in July.

Working from home has created significant challenges for managers. If you are managing a remote work team, the HBS study recommends the following to protect the brain health and optimize the brain performance of your employees:

- Empathize with the circumstances of your team. Know what your employees are juggling and provide the professional support they need.
- Focus on productivity, not hours. Instead of focusing on how your employees are spending their time, focus on the quality of their work.
- Expect wide differences in productivity. Some people find working from home energizing while others may not be as effective as when they are in the workplace. Allow for those differences.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO *BOOST* YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

If you're working from home, it's important to create healthy boundaries between your work life and home life to protect your brain health and prevent burnout. Here are some tips from the [Nonprofit Leadership Center of Tampa Bay](#).

1. **Create a workspace that fits your needs.** Try to find a dedicated workspace. Avoid the dining room table or kitchen counter that also serve as family spaces.
2. **Establish an office routine.** Wake up at the same time and get ready for work each day. Schedule time for lunch and break to meet with people virtually when you would have typically had scheduled meetings. Casual and comfortable is fine for a working-from-home dress code, but get out of your pajamas.
3. **Set your working hours based on your productivity.** Try to work when you are at your best. Talk with your employer and try to schedule your work time for when you are most productive.
4. **Create an "I'm busy" signal.** Let family members know when they can—and when they can't—interrupt you. Come up with a visible sign, like wearing a certain piece of clothing, that let's everyone know you are busy and shouldn't be disturbed. (As a side note: this does not work for pets. How many of you have had a pet join a video call?)
5. **Schedule breaks.** Get up every 60 to 75 minutes and stretch, move, breathe, and just break away for a few minutes. When you get back to your desk, take an additional two minutes to close your eyes, relax, take deep breaths and concentrate on feeling your breath move in and out of your body. When you open your eyes, you'll feel refreshed, calm and more focused. This is good advice wherever you are working.
6. **Talk and walk.** Integrate extra movement into your day. Take a walk while you're on a conference call. You're not chained to your desk, so take your work outside and get some Vitamin D.
7. **Remove notifications from your toolbar.** Try to check your social media and news outlets only before you start work, at lunch, and/or at the end of the day.

Remember to **adopt a brain healthier lifestyle**, including thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses and language that promote:

- Stress resilience
- Nutrition
- Physical activity
- Sleep
- Social connection
- Emotional wellbeing
- Meaning and Purpose
- Cognitive stimulation and creativity
- Engaging with nature
- General health
- Positive impacts

About the Brain Health Initiative (www.brainhealthinitiative.org)

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge, new approach to protecting brain health, optimizing brain performance, and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI works collaboratively with Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital, and the Academy for Brain Health and Performance to build brain healthy communities through education, collaboration, research, innovation, and action, with a specific focus on *brain health promotion, prevention, early detection, evidence-based intervention, and optimization of performance*. The BHI is creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the brain health movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference***. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).