**Title: Six tips to prepare for a winter of working from home**

*Tile description: With summer over and the nights getting longer, find out six simple ways you can adapt to help get through a winter working from home.*

The sunny tentative optimism over the summer and the need to get the economy back up and running saw calls from many quarters to start to get people back to their usual place of work. Unfortunately, with escalating cases of infections, the government has quickly pivoted back to the “work from home if you can” mantra.

So after more than 6 months, how are you feeling about working from home? Some may have been loving the flexibility and making the most of the benefits of not commuting. The honeymoon period of this increased flexibility may be waning, and you might be itching to get back to some normality and some actual colleague to colleague (rather than face to face video) interactions. There will be others who have been more desperate to get back to the office for structure and a physical separation of work and home.

Wherever you sit on the spectrum, one thing is for sure, working from home during the winter is going to feel a whole lot different to working from home during those warm and sunny months.

What can you do to help combat the winter blues and prepare for the storms ahead?

**Make a new routine**

With dark mornings and shorter days, think about making a new routine where you can find time to get away from your desk and enjoy some fresh air and exercise – whatever the weather. Motivation can be hard when its miserable outside and you’ve got a full inbox, but fresh air and exercise are so important for both our mental and physical wellbeing, so make it a priority and block out time in your diary.

**Make the most of any savings**

If you’re saving on commuting costs, don’t let these go to waste. Look at your income and expenditure, and consider using the excess income to pay off debts and boost both your rainy day savings and longer-term savings, including pensions if you can afford it.

**Be comfortable**

You might be worried about the cost of the heating on all day. If so, think about cheaper alternatives for keeping warm before you hit the switch. A snuggly blanket and hot water bottle could keep the cold at bay without being seen on zoom! But don’t suffer, remember the savings you’re making on commuting costs and don’t forget you can claim tax relief on a working from home allowance of £6 a week.

But if you’re in the black and benefiting from making commuting savings, think about treating yourself to enhance your workspace – a simple plant, picture or ornament can enhance your mental wellbeing by helping you feel connected.

If you suffer from the winter blues, make sure your workspace makes the most of any natural light, and think about investing in a natural daylight lamp.

Wherever your workspace, try and make sure you can either physically or mentally shut it away at the end of the day to give you that break between work and home life.

**Eat well**

When it’s cold and miserable and you’re too near the kitchen it’s easy to seek comfort in food. Being prepared and planning your lunchtime meals can help to stave off the temptations – soup can be a warming, nutritious and a relatively cheap meal to keep you going.

If you find yourself regularly reaching for the kettle for a cuppa to keep you feeling comforted and warm, don’t forget to watch your caffeine intake. Think about investing in caffeine free alternatives or natural fruit and herbal teas.

**Re-invention is key**

Let’s face it, the usual winter traditions are likely to be different this year. Whether you look forward to Halloween, Bonfire Night, Christmas or New Year to keep you going through the dark days and spend time with family and friends, try to re-invent old traditions and stay connected and have fun in a different and COVID-safe way.

**Be kind to yourself!**

This is a challenging time for all of us. It’s OK to not be OK - but make sure you speak up and seek help and support if you need it. Your employer should have various support services available to you, including an Employee Assistance Programme who are there to listen, and give you access to professional help.

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