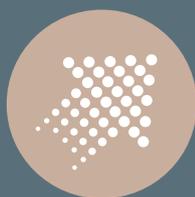




# How to Maintain Healthy Work/Life Sway During Covid

by Sandie Dennis



## BeyondEAP

Specialist employee support  
for life's toughest challenges

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# Are you suffering from ‘lockdown fatigue’?

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If you are, you're not alone... although you may feel like you are.

It seems like forever since we were officially able to hug our loved ones, or high-five our colleagues. And after a severely challenging 2020, starting 2021 with ‘new year, new lockdown’ hasn't exactly helped matters.

With ‘normal’ life probably not set to return until late spring at the earliest, the lines between work and home are becoming more blurred than ever. Never before have we faced the intense, all-encompassing challenges that we are all currently living and working through.



So perhaps unsurprisingly, work/life balance is an area that has become the main cause of concern amongst my employee clients.

Those clients are the reason why I wanted to share some of the techniques and guidance I have developed, in the hope that they will also offer some vital support to you.



# Establish a self-care routine (and breathe!)

Carving out a slice of uninterrupted time for yourself may feel indulgent, particularly when our healthcare services are overwhelmed, and our minds are in constant overdrive.

However, I'm not necessarily talking about running long, hot bubble baths (as lovely as those sound!) – rather, establishing a routine that allows you some much-needed time to breathe.

This could be as simple as getting up at the same time every morning, taking into account the time you need to shower and have breakfast...

...WITHOUT instantly staring down at your phone and setting your mind straight to work.

Instead, why not think of the time you usually start work as your first cue to check your phone?

For many people, the daily commute provided time to daydream, as we formulated our thoughts about the day ahead or just gone. We weren't at home, and we weren't at work... we were somewhere in between.

To artificially re-create this space in your mind, you could try setting a deliberate two-hour window (you can use a combination of your phone's alarm system and 'Airplane' mode to eliminate notifications and distractions during your chosen time) – and then use that precious window to shower, dress, play with your children or pets, write a gratitude journal, or just breathe!

In fact, breathing could be the best choice of all. Breathing techniques stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system (PSN) which works to balance any surges of adrenaline and cortisol stress.

In other words, when your lungs are full of air, your body cannot produce adrenaline, which means you will have no choice but to feel relaxed.

(Try it and see!)





## Divide your day into segments

Don't just use your alarm to help you wake up and breathe; try setting alarms to signal lunchtime and mid-afternoon, too.

Whenever these alarms sound, you have to leave your workspace and make a drink, stroke the dog, chat with your kids, or if you have one, simply wander around the garden.

Again, switch your phone to 'Airplane' mode while you relax, and don't forget to continue those breathing techniques, so you can ground your senses into the

present and enjoy the moment.

Before you finish for the day, you could try writing a 'to-do' list for tomorrow, to help prevent you from mentally 'working' into the evening.

Of course, you're going to set an alarm to herald the end of your working day, but this one will be slightly different. Set a 'snooze' link to go off every ten minutes... if you insist on ignoring your end-of-day call, this will act as an irritating reminder for you to power down.

(For one 'recovering' workaholic client, we arranged for his partner to knock on the door to his workspace, to supplement his alarms in a way he couldn't ignore!)

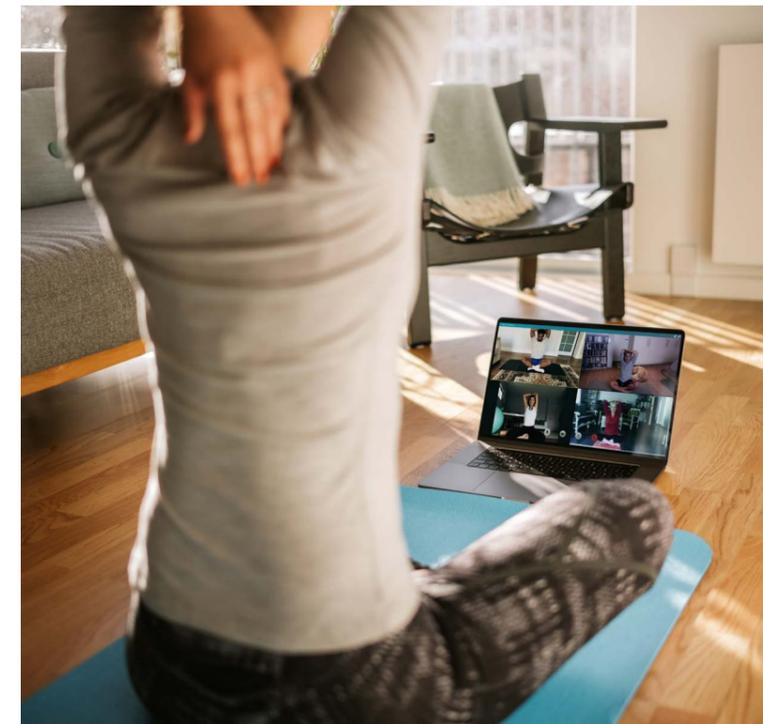
## Create boundaries for work, rest and play

The starting rules for boundary-setting are simple.

No work tools should be present on the table you eat from, nor whilst watching TV, nor in bed.

You could even create your own 'commute' by taking a walk around the block before you start work, and just after you finish for the day. Fill your lungs with fresh air, and simply enjoy being outside.

Since most of us would typically have plans outside of the house on some evenings, re-create these by joining online classes, do some exercise, or schedule in a video chat with a friend.



Note: be aware that setting personal boundaries will sometimes involve saying "no" to time-wasting people and activities. Just because we're all at home, all the time, doesn't mean you automatically have to agree to every call, or every request made of you.

Guard your time, just as you would have done before lockdown.



## Move more

It might seem strange, advising you to “move more” when lockdown means staying at home.

However, as long as you do it safely, and within the current government rules, exercise is proven to have health benefits galore.

And the good news is that you don't have to bang down the locked doors of your local gym, since a daily half-hour walk is all you need to boost both your mental health, and your melatonin levels.

Melatonin helps you to feel sleepy, and fall asleep more easily than you would if you were sat at your desk all day – making it a fantastic excuse to go out and get that daily dose of fresh air!



## Treat yourself well

People so often forget this simple, but extremely important, point.

Instead, they exhaust themselves trying to get absolutely everything done, taking care of everybody else... then they wonder why they feel so drained and exhausted!

Doing your best to eat a healthy, balanced diet, reducing caffeine, and drinking alcohol in moderation, will help you sleep better and feel more energised, so that you are more able to cope with whatever the day decides to throw at you.

To help remind yourself that you matter, set a specific diary appointment with yourself to do something you enjoy (NOW is the perfect time to mention that long, hot bubble bath!)





## Keep your connections alive

I'm not just referring to maintaining regular contact with your loved ones, although this is very important for our mental health and wellbeing.

Keeping your connections alive also means reaching out to work colleagues, particularly if you were working as part of a close-knit team.

It can be easy to forget those we work with, especially since we're not seeing them every day as we used to. So, why not suggest a round of after-work Zoom drinks, or even start a WhatsApp group, to help you stay in touch and up to date?

Don't forget to keep connected with your work, too. Doing absolutely everything from home can make even the most important tasks feel like they've lost all sense of purpose, as life and work feel increasingly like they are merging into one.

To help combat this often-directionless feeling, take some time every so often to remind yourself of the valuable contribution you're making to your company, and why you originally chose the work you're doing now.

(If you don't enjoy your job, this exercise could help you start thinking about how you could make some positive changes.)



## Let go of perfectionism

Finally, stop trying to be 'perfect', especially during times like these. Release any need you feel to control all that's unfolding around you... because you can't.

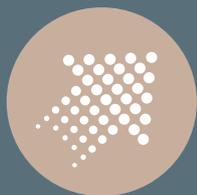
Instead, give yourself as much time as you need to complete essential tasks in a way that's good enough, rather than 100% perfect. And for every new task you add to your list, remember to strike one off.

Take comfort from life's simple pleasures wherever you can, and if you're lucky enough to live with people or pets that you love, revel in spending quality time with them.

One day soon, these strange times will come to an end. Until then, please take good care of yourself

With my very best wishes,

Sandie



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