How to stay sane in Corona lockdown

These are trying times for all of you PhDs in Groningen. We would like to share a few tips on how to stay sane while working from home for what seems to be a longer period.

First, some of you may feel scared because of the virus itself. If not for yourself, then maybe for your family or friends. This is a normal response. Try to limit the amount of time you spend on the news. Also a lot of people feel upset and out of balance because every normal structure in their life is suddenly gone. You miss normal contact with people around you at work and in your private life. You may feel emotional at times and unsure how to go forward. These are all normal responses to the situation we are all facing. Be compassionate with yourself, give yourself some time to adjust and be kind to yourself in this respect. And also to the people around you.

It may also be that this period of lockdown is a surprising gift to you. Suddenly you can slow down, find a bit of rest and time to reflect. All meetings and conferences are cancelled, you cannot meet up with people anymore… We hear from several PhDs that this can also work in a positive way. It has a calming effect. The hectic life that you used to lead had suddenly come to a standstill.

Of course this depends on your personal situation and personality. If you have children at home or live in a small house with others it is even harder to find time for yourself. Also if you are worried about your friends and family because they live in a country at greater risk of being infected with the virus or if you already feel unbalanced for whatever reason or feel lonely, this can be an unsettling time and it can make it even harder to motivate yourself to keep working.

Connecting

The main problem after a while for most people is feeling lonely. You could try and create a moment every day where you can meet people online or speak to them on the phone. You could use Google Hangout, Zoom or other ways to have a drink together at the end of the day or in the evening. For as long as we are allowed, you could arrange to meet someone to go for a walk with in the afternoon or run together, as long as you keep a distance of 1,5 meters. This could also work in the morning, to just meet up briefly before you start working. To feel emotional now and then in these extreme circumstances is quite normal. It is best to just let it out, cry if you feel like crying and call someone to share your emotions.

Structure

Another problem most people face is the lack of structure in their days. It can be quite tempting to stay in bed a little longer, watch TV or Netflix and stay in your pajamas. It will help you to feel better if you get up at a set time, eat breakfast and take a shower, get dressed and start your day. Most people are less productive in this situation and that's okay. You don't have to be harsh on yourself (some people work too hard and go on in the evenings): just make sure you take measures to ensure the best circumstances to be able to get to work in a balanced way.

Here are a few tips:

- First: make a to-do list for the coming weeks. What can be done from home? What is your priority? If you find it hard, talk to colleagues and ask them what they are doing.
- Choose one or two things you can do per day. Make sure your goals for the day are realistic. Otherwise cut them up in parts that you can finish in one day.

- Start the day by connecting with a few colleagues (Google Hangout) to talk briefly about how everyone is and what you are going to do today. Then start working.
- Work in sessions of 45 minutes and then take a break of 15. Do some stretches of briefly go outside. You can do about three sessions of concentrated work for 45 minutes in the morning and three in the afternoon.
- At midday: go outside and do some sports or take a longer walk, work in the garden.
- Finish at 5 or 6 pm. Do not work in the evenings.
- Through the day you can stay connected with friends of colleagues if that helps you.

How to stay fit physically

First and foremost: Exercise, especially now! We are already missing out on so much exercise at the moment – we are not cycling to work anymore or moving around while at work when getting a coffee, chatting with a colleague or heading for a meeting elsewhere.

We have several tips for you to work from home in a healthy and sustainable manner:

- Make sure that there is sufficient light at your work station. If possible, make sure that any windows are beside or behind you. Looking into daylight puts extra strain on the eyes.
- If your job requires making many phone calls, please use headphones or your phone's speaker function so that your hands are free.
- Do you have an office chair at your kitchen table? Adjust the armrests of the chair in such a way that they provide good, relaxed support for your arms. Next, increase the height of the chair's seat, so that the armrests are at tabletop height. Put something under your feet, so that your upper legs are supported horizontally by the chair.
- If the above is not possible with your furniture, try to increase the chair's height a bit in order to avoid having to raise your shoulders too much when you rest your forearms on the table.
- Rest your arms on the table, while the keyboard is a little further away. Keep your back straight and avoid leaning forward.
- Avoid typing with your arms stretched out. This increases the tension in your arm, shoulder and neck muscles.
- If possible, use a separate keyboard at your desk and raise your laptop a bit, for example by using several books, in order to ensure that the top edge of your screen is a little below eye level. Put your monitor approximately one arm's length away.
- If you are not using a separate keyboard with your laptop, please be extra alert in terms of relaxing your neck and shoulder muscles, and try moving a bit more to improve blood flow to these muscles.
- You can also work while standing up if you use a laptop or tablet by placing it on a shelf, a high table or somewhere else, and alternate this with working at the table.