

thrive

in the zone

Comfort Zone

TELEWORKING IS BECOMING AN INCREASINGLY DESIRABLE CONCEPT, BUT HOME OFFICES OFTEN MISS THE BALANCE BETWEEN PLUSH AND PRODUCTIVE. ANGELIQUE TAGAROULIAS TAKES A LOOK AT THE SCIENCE BEHIND WORKING EFFECTIVELY FROM HOME AND CREATING A DESIGNER OFFICE SPACE TO HAVE YOU SMASHING OUT THE AS ON THE WORK REPORT CARD.

From avoiding the time and cost of commuting, allowing for greater flexibility and facilitating a better work-life balance, to limiting commercial office interruptions, it's no surprise that about a quarter of Australians are opting to work from home.

Whether you work from home full-time or from time-to-time, it's important to create a home office that's ergonomic and an environment that facilitates inspiration, creativity and productivity. Research published in the *Journal of Labor Economics* found that being happy can make you up to 12 per cent more productive – so personalising your workspace in the name of comfort and pleasure can make for happier days in more ways than one.

SO WHERE TO START?

ON ERGONOMICS

While finding the ideal mattress for a good night's sleep is a priority for many, the same attention is rarely paid to the places we work for the majority of each day. According to a study by McCrindle Research a primary concern of teleworkers is a lack of ergonomics – specifically concerns over sitting positions and poor posture. Ergonomic design is all about creating a workspace for machines and tasks to match the capabilities of the individual user.

The most important thing for ensuring an ergonomic office space is that your workstation and seating are suitable. Occupational therapist and director of Gateway Therapies, Dr Nicole Grant (gatewaytherapies.com.au), suggests opting for an adjustable chair to ensure your desk and chair are the correct height.

Career executive and HR coach Suzanne Williams (graceandgrind.com.au) agrees.

“We all love to curl up in our bed with a laptop; and while that might be fun for 10 minutes, your back and hips are going to pay for it long term. Ensure that you have a chair with great lumbar support that helps to keep you upright. Saddle chairs are the most effective, as they help to keep your legs and hips in a natural position – crossing legs or folding a leg up on your seat is a no-no,” she says.

If you do feel the need to change positions, co-founder and head of interior design at Designbx (designbx.com), Kerena Berry, suggests varying your

seating positions throughout the day to see what works best for both your body and mind.

“For example, I sit on my fit ball at my desk in the morning (bonus: I'm also working on my core strength), I then shift to a bean bag for creative thinking time, back to the desk for emails in my standard office chair, and in the afternoon I move to a standing position; standing is my favourite working position, as it helps keep my brain ticking after a long day,” says Berry.

Williams also suggests investing in a standing desk. “Decreased hip mobility, obesity, heart disease and slow brain function are all issues that may arise from sitting all day. The human body is designed to move, so where possible incorporate movement into your day,” she says. “Scientific research regarding back pain from desk setups has shown that people who use sit-stand desks are 78 per cent more likely to report pain-free days.”

One study of 40 male and female office workers published in the journal *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* also found that those with a sit-to-stand workstation reduced their sitting time at work by 20 per cent.

De-clutter your space for both easy movement and safety purposes. “It's important that your workspace is clutter free. Clutter around the workspace can impede movement of the chair beneath the desk, stop you from positioning frequently used items appropriately on the desktop and can also create trip and fall hazards,” says Dr Grant.

HAPPY SPACE

Research conducted by the University of Exeter in the UK found that being able to design and personalise your own workspace can improve health, happiness and productivity. Plus – it's pretty.

But don't fall into the trap of copying pillow to pillar from your favourite designer. Dr Grant says the best work spaces are those that are true to your own sense of identity. “Don't copy someone else's set-up because you think it's the only way. Think about a time when you felt comfortable and happy in a workspace and replicate that – even if it's not mainstream or traditional. This is your space, and you can choose how you want it to feel,” she says.

Supplement your sense of style by stimulating your other senses, including your hearing. Berry suggests playing music to reflect yours and your business' personality.

WORKING EFFECTIVELY

“Clutter around your workspace isn't great for your mental wellbeing, and can impact on your stress and productivity,” says Dr Grant.

As with many things in life, organisation is key.

“It's worthwhile taking time to organise your space, and surround yourself with items that give you a sense of purpose and professionalism. Plants and pictures can be strategically placed to give your office space a lift. Invest in good stationery and pens that are a pleasure to write with. Don't compromise on office equipment: a computer and printer that work every time you use them are essential to ensuring that you remain productive,” says Dr Grant.

“Find out what works for you and stick to it. Don't feel that you have to persevere with electronic diaries and calendars if you are far more comfortable with a diary or handwritten to-do lists.”

CREATIVE CUES

Creativity is often sparked by inspiration and what inspires one person, might be different for another. If you're a visual person, try placing vision boards, pictures and wall hangings in the room. If you like to travel, a world map might help keep you energised, or a mannequin that doubles as a coat hanger can be a cute inclusion for the fashion-focused.

"A stunning landscape and lots of natural light is ideal – set the desk up near a window as fresh air can help you be inspired by your surrounding environment," says Berry.

PRODUCTIVITY AND GOAL SETTING

While there are many positives to working from home, it doesn't come without its set of challenges.

Investigations conducted by McCrindle Research found that 14 per cent of 250 teleworking survey respondents reported household distractions to be a disadvantage, seven per cent found motivation to be a problem and the biggest negative reported by 22 per cent was professional and social isolation.

Setting clear goals and boundaries can help manage at least some of these issues.

"Create a schedule and remove distractions," says Williams. "In order to maximise your efficiency and productivity you need to set some critical boundaries for yourself and others. As you would with your schedule when you go into a workplace, ensure you have a start and finish time to keep you on track."

When it comes to goal setting, be realistic about what you can achieve and make sure your goals are manageable.

"The problem with unrealistic goals is that when we don't achieve them, it can cause a serious drop in mental health and self-esteem, making us feel like failures and that we aren't good enough," says Williams.

WILLIAMS SUGGESTS ENSURING EACH GOAL IS S.M.A.R.T:

- Specific
- Measureable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time-bound



BUYER'S GUIDE



OPTIMALLY ORGANISED

This unique range of stylish and functional pieces, including trivets, trays and platters made from quality crystal sheets and premium glass, is sure to add character to your office while simultaneously offering a place to keep your desk essentials.

Crystal Crush Collection by Stoned Crystals starting at \$149, stonedcrystals.com

BERRY NICE DESIGN

Berry's tips for creating your ultimate home office space.

1 Choose the right interior design style: find a style that complements your personality. Pinterest is great for collecting images that resonate with you. Or you can create a mood board by cutting out images of colours, textures, furniture and layouts from magazines and arranging them on a flat surface.

2 De-clutter: try the 'office in a box' approach. The digital era allows us to have less physical items to work with, so try to fit all of your business necessities into one box or

basket – making your office portable too!

3 Bring the outdoors, in: indoor plants can bring life to an office and add natural purification to what might otherwise look like a commercial space. You can also hang ferns on walls and from the ceiling if you like the natural look.

4 Lighting: this can vary depending on your profession but having the right lighting for you is important. For example, programmers

require darker spaces to ease strain on the eyes whereas designers prefer natural light to view colours and graphics.

5 Scents: place vaporisers around the office for a fresh and invigorating smell to stimulate productivity and creativity, and to keep spirits high throughout the day.

6 Tap into your creature comforts: design your space to suit your creature habits. If you get inspired in a relaxed environment, try setting oversized beanbags with lap

trays in the room to help get your creative juices flowing.

7 Treat yourself: a signature piece such as a vintage rug or a designer chair to use for brainstorming can make the space feel special to you. Williams agrees that adding a comfortable armchair to your office to think and reflect, or a day bed for a power nap, is a great way to take a break from your desk. Studies show that 20-minute power naps when the afternoon slump hits can increase productivity going forward.

POSITIVELY PLANTED

Looking to bring some greenery into your office while avoiding gigantic plants that might add clutter? This hanging basket includes a lightweight aluminium pot that nests in the steel wall hanging frame, so you can hang your plant on the wall – and out of the way.

Wall Planter Ripple Black, \$95 available in two lengths, emmasadiethomson.com.au



LUMINOUSLY LIT

If soft, sultry lighting is what you're after, this pendant will offer just that. Plus, it comes in both black and white to match your office colour scheme.

Husk Pendant \$249, beaconlighting.com.au



PURPOSEFULLY PENSIVE

"It's worthwhile taking time to organise your space and surround yourself with items that give you a sense of purpose and professionalism," says Dr Grant. This deck of 50 thought-provoking question cards offers you the power of positive thinking to help you work towards your goals. ■

Top Five Movement Question Cards \$24.99, topfivemovement.com