

Returning to the office



Since the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent adjustments to daily life, many of us have had to make significant changes in the way we work, live and interact with each other.

As restrictions ease, vaccines are introduced, and life begins to return to the “new normal” some of us will begin to return to the physical office or workplace. Just as you were asked to adjust to working from home, you may now need to prepare to re-adjust to returning to work in the office.

For some of us, this may be a welcomed return that brings excitement, possibility and anticipation. Others may feel neutral about this, and not feel impacted either way. And for some, returning to the workplace may bring up feelings of uncertainty, unease or even concern. Furthermore, some people may have not only become accustomed to working from home but may have enjoyed it or found it allowed them to achieve and be productive in other areas of their life such as juggling family and other commitments. Returning to working from the office will impact people in different ways and in varying capacities, just as it did when you were asked to work from home.

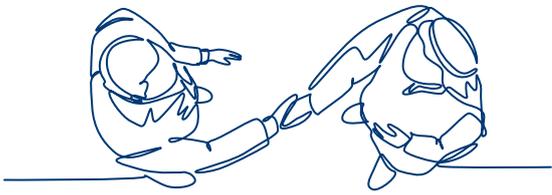
The impacts of COVID-19 have left many people feeling a loss of control, choice and

the inability to plan and prepare. The return to the office is yet another change, and one you may also feel you have little choice in or feel apprehensive about. With change can come an array of challenges but also rewards. If you are feeling uncertain or unsure about the return to the office, this is understandable.

Some things to be mindful of as you begin to return to the office are:

- Your office and workspace may look different than before due to social and physical distancing requirements and restrictions in your local area.
- Other aspects of your work may have changed to comply with physical distancing and hygiene requirements.
- You may have become used to working in your home alone and free from distractions, noise and incidental interactions with colleagues.
- Be prepared for additional stimulation to your senses. Seeing and speaking with people regularly or additional noises from other colleagues talking or in meetings.





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- Yours or others heightened awareness or alertness to issues such as hygiene.
- You or colleagues may hold strong opinions about the pandemic or how it was handled, so strong opinions maybe something new to navigate.
- Returning to planning and the mental load that comes with it! Prior to working from home you may have planned out a routine, yours and your family's lunches, organised school drops offs, gone to the gym or for a run and spoken to family living overseas all before you set foot in the office. Be kind to yourself as you ease back into this way of working and allow yourself time to adjust to a new routine.
- You or some of your colleagues may have lost loved ones during the pandemic, or may still be separated from family or loved ones due to current travel restrictions and as such may be experiencing grief and loss.

Some suggestions on ways to manage as you return to the office:

- Ask your manager or relevant staff member for a plan of what the office will look like so you can feel prepared.
- Ask for the return to work plan from your manager or relevant staff about what protocols and precautions are in place to align with the current requirements.
- Be respectful of others opinions and beliefs. Remaining respectful of difference and open to such alternative views will ensure you remain professional and adhering to your workplaces code of conduct. Whilst this may be challenging and bring up strong emotions in you, ensuring we are respectful and professional in our workplace is essential. Remind yourself of your workplaces policy around these issues and access additional support and guidance from your manager or appropriate staff member.
- Show yourself and your peers compassion, patience and kindness as you return to the office and this way of working – allow yourself time to adjust.
- Be prepared that it might not be a smooth transition and be kind to yourself as this is another big change. If you used to plan and achieve a lot before work in the past, gradually reintroduce these activities as you return to the office.
- Draw on your planning skills to ensure you can create this new routine and manage the impact of the return of the mental load, but also to return to working in the office with the potential distractions and possible challenges and adjustments. Think about how you were able to deliver and achieve results in the past both personally and professionally – did you set aside time the night before to prepare? Did you write a to-do list? Did you set up a meeting with a peer to problem solve the issue? Do what works for you.
- If possible, make a gradual return to the office that aligns with your own and your employers needs and requirements.
- Consider and prepare for your new routine – what does your commute and travel look like? What will your regular and planned breaks be? Ensure you are still prioritising self-care strategies around this new routine for example time with family, exercise or other activities.
- Reach out to your manager or the relevant supports within or external to your organisation if you are struggling with this return and adjustment.