

21020 How to work from home and stay healthy

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More and more people are working where they live and living where they work, attracted by the promise of greater flexibility. In the UK there are 4.8 million freelancers, mostly home-based workers, making up a significant 15% of the workforce, and companies are increasingly allowing employees to work remotely.

But there are problems with blurring the line between work and home, as London-based academic Frances Holliss found during her systematic analysis of “the work-home” for her doctoral thesis. After interviewing everyone from a professional juggler to a building surveyor who worked out of a garden shed, Holliss found some common disadvantages and negative impacts: mental health suffered (anxiety, stress, depression), isolation was rife (not being in a team), and it was hard to have self-discipline.

Working alone may mean greater flexibility and fewer interruptions, but it is in those small interactions with colleagues that connections are made. The loneliness that comes with the territory is one of the reasons that freelance editor Louise Goss, based in Northamptonshire, recently launched the *Homeworker*, a new magazine catering for those in what she calls “a hidden economy” – all the people plugging away in their domiciles. Beyond the obvious interest in curating relevant resources, from support with self-assessment tax returns to desk-based pilates, Goss also wanted to foster a sense of community: “Just that feeling that, even though you’re on your own, you’re not alone.”

Of course, the biggest hurdle when you are alone is that there is no one to help you regain perspective when things are not going to plan. Not knowing when to say no to work – or how to switch off for the day – can quickly lead to being overwhelmed. Figuring out how to balance life and work in the same space is difficult for everyone, although research published last month in Germany suggests women have it harder.

Self-confidence is key to successful home-based working of any stripe, as is knowing how to communicate clearly (so your distant bosses and colleagues know what you are up to), learning to work consistently (in the absence of feedback you might otherwise receive in an office environment) and, crucially, recognising when you need to go for a walk, work out or otherwise just take a break.

In spite of the obvious challenges and tough learning curve of bringing your work home, it seems it is worth it: the vast majority of remote workers report enjoying the way they live and work.

(408 words)