



Wellness Tips and Best Practices

For Managers, Deans, Chairs, and Directors

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The new year is an opportunity to reflect on how to make wellness a priority, both professionally and personally. The pandemic continues to take its toll on our physical, emotional, and mental health.

Those of you who are caring for school-age children have likely been challenged by the temporary shift to online schooling and suspension of services and programs. Others have family or friends who require additional assistance. You or your loved ones may even have been ill.

For all these reasons, we are sharing strategies to help you reframe the start of a new year and a new term.

If you have additional wellness strategies, or any questions about how to apply them to your work at U of T, feel free to email our Integrated Wellness Consultant Richa Chodha (r.chodha@utoronto.ca).

You may also wish to subscribe to the [Wellness at U of T Listserv](#) to receive updates on wellness programs and services.

Making Space for Kindness & Hope

- Consider starting a gratitude journal, in which you identify something you're grateful for each day or each week. There is nothing too small to be grateful for—and the very act of looking can give you a new perspective and sense of hope.
- Whether you're a manager or a team member, help create a culture of trust. Model the behaviour that you're looking for in others. Follow through and deliver on what you promise; be honest, respectful, and open to others' ideas; be responsive to questions or concerns; support others' success by listening to their needs; and be equity-minded in your approach to your team and your tasks.
- Seize opportunities to be kind to your colleagues. Recent research at the University of California, among other institutions, identifies the many benefits of “random acts of kindness”: from boosting team productivity and creativity to boosting team morale, kindness can also go a long way in creating a workplace in which people feel comfortable to express themselves, be themselves, and even stretch their abilities in new directions.
- Restore your sense of hope. Remind yourself that the pandemic will end, and recognize how far we have all come in the past two years to meet the “future” of work. Take a moment to reflect on how you have adapted to a new way of working onsite, or have learned new skills in the shift to remote work. What elements could you retain or change to improve the way you work (and/or your team works) in future?

Time Management

- Whether you are working remotely or working on campus, try to create a routine that includes time for your physical, mental, and social well-being. Schedule some regular time (even if it's just 10 minutes) for fitness, healthy meal planning, and a light-hearted leisure activity. Be creative and try new ways to do this, such as following a new fitness video, or trying a new recipe or activity you haven't done in years.
- If you can, block a lunch break in your calendar and block any time needed for family obligations. Alert your manager or team members about anticipated challenges.
- If possible, try to avoid scheduling meetings between 8:30 am – 9:30 am and 11:30 am – 1:30 pm. Doing so will provide time away from desks for all and especially those who are caregivers of school-age children. (These times may be needed to get children online for classes or to provide lunch for elementary school children.)
- Schedule blocks of time in your calendar for uninterrupted time to focus on work. Being productive will also give you a sense of accomplishment and improve your general sense of well-being.
- Respect time that has been blocked off by your colleagues and co-workers.
- Determine core meeting hours for your unit and try to adhere to them, except for urgent, time-sensitive issues.
- Take frequent stretch breaks during the day and get outside for some fresh air even if it's cold out. Just 5-10 minutes can make a difference to your mental well-being.

Meetings

- Consider booking meetings for 20 minutes instead of half an hour and 45 minutes rather than a full hour to allow people to stretch, take a break outside, transition, and/or travel between meetings. Avoid booking back-to-back meetings.
- When booking a meeting, consider if there are other ways of sharing the information or gathering input.
- Invite only the required individuals to meetings; free up the calendars of “optional” attendees.
- Check calendars before booking meetings, and do not book over blocked time without first consulting prospective invitees.
- Wherever possible, provide a meeting agenda with time designated for each topic and end on time.
- If working remotely, consider phone calls for one-on-one meetings rather than video calls so participants are freer to move and be away from their computer screens.
- At the beginning of each virtual or hybrid meeting, establish that it is fine for those participating virtually to join with cameras off, or to stay on mute. Let your colleagues with children know that they do not need to apologize for any background noise and allow them to participate as best they can.
- Consider introducing walking meetings via the phone or in-person (as circumstances permit) so that you can step outside and get exercise.
- If possible, reserve one afternoon a week free of meetings for focused and uninterrupted work.

Email Communications

- Keep emails succinct and clear while practising empathy, as you never know what the receiver of the email may be dealing with.
- Use the c.c. line thoughtfully.
- Include expected deadlines for a reply or a deliverable to help recipients know what to prioritize and what is urgent.
- Consider when it makes sense to delay email delivery to reduce pressure to respond. Non-urgent email correspondence can be sent using the delayed delivery function available through Outlook.

Prioritization and Workload

- The recent rise in COVID infections may result in under-resourced teams. If staff require sick days or personal days to care for themselves or family members, approach deadlines with flexibility and understanding. Determine where project milestones and expectations can be revised rather than overextending the rest of your team.
- Prioritize your team's work. Try to gain clarity from colleagues or supervisors about what work is urgent and what can be deferred. Treating every task as critical can lead to overwork and feelings of being overwhelmed.
- Determine team capacity and bandwidth before beginning a new project proposal.

Build a supportive culture

- Keep the lines of communication open with your colleagues.
- Familiarize yourself with the supports available, such as the [Employee and Family Assistance Plan \(EFAP\)](#) for confidential counselling and other [wellness services you can find on the People Strategy, Equity & Culture website](#).
- Take vacation time, even if you do not go anywhere. It is important to have time to rejuvenate. Encourage your team to do the same.
- Set up regular check-ins—determine the best methods to connect with your team.
- Be flexible and willing to modify past practices to work more effectively.
- Be flexible and open to discussing temporary [alternative working arrangements](#) when possible, as varying or changing obligations may create challenges for some.
- Use the [Mental Health Continuum](#) to help you recognize signs and symptoms in yourself, your team, and colleagues. Familiarize yourself with the recommended actions to take at each stage in the continuum. ([Download the PDF.](#))
- Have open conversations with team members and colleagues during 1:1 meetings or as a group (whatever format makes the team more comfortable) to create a more inclusive and collaborative work environment.
- Find ways for your team to have some time to socialize, whether online or in-person (as circumstances permit). This could involve sharing stories or humour, and/or participating in a weekly group mindfulness video session.

Employee & Family Assistance Program

The Employee & Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is available to employees of the University of Toronto who are eligible to participate in the University's group benefit programs, and their dependants: spouses, partners (including same-sex partners), and dependent children.

This program is provided at no cost to you.

EFAP offers confidential short-term counselling, coaching, information, and support for all types of issues relating to mental health, health management, and achieving greater personal and workplace well-being.

Learn more at <https://uoft.me/efap>

[Download the EFAP brochure \[PDF\]](#)

To access EFAP services, call:

Toll-free [1-800-663-1142](tel:1-800-663-1142)

TTY [1-866-398-9505](tel:1-866-398-9505)

Collect [\(604\) 689-1717](tel:(604)689-1717)

Available 24 hours per day, 365 days a year