



Health Matters Well-Being Toolkit: Environmental Well-Being at Work

Enrich your working environment to help you feel more energized and productive.

WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Whether indoors or out, your environment is made up of everything that surrounds you. Environmental well-being is all about creating clean, safe, and healthy surroundings. We do not always have control over the physical structures that make up our workspaces, but there are many things we can do to help cultivate a positive working environment. Use the simple tips in this toolkit to help you make small changes to enhance your space no matter where you work.

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CUT CLUTTER

Physical clutter in our environment is stagnant energy. It takes up space in our brain, compromises our mental well-being, and influences our physical health. One study found that people tend to eat more unhealthy foods, such as cookies, when they are in cluttered and chaotic spaces. Simply tidying up your working space could help you avoid that 2:00 pm junk food craving and make you feel less stressed. Try one or more of these clutter-cutting strategies:

- **Invest time in clutter control.** Add de-cluttering to your “to do” list for times when you need a brain break or have just a few minutes between meetings.
- **Give everything a home.** Everything that is on, in, or around your desk should have a dedicated space where it belongs. Store like-things together and use containers and dishes to store miscellaneous small items like paperclips and thumb drives.

- **End each day with 5-minutes of tidying.** Schedule the last five minutes of your workday to be a time to tidy up your space so you can start the next day off in an organized environment. Make a rule that your desk must be clean before you can leave.

PERSONALIZE YOUR SPACE

Most of us have items in our workspace that remind us of things we enjoy outside of work. Pictures of family members that make us smile, artwork that inspires us, or knick-knacks that remind us of a special time. However, as humans we are constantly adapting and becoming habituated to our environments. In other words, we get used to seeing the same things around us. One consequence of this is that the photos and mementos we display to bring us joy eventually fade into the background of our day-to-day. We can counteract this by simply moving those items around every 3-6 months. Rearranging your valued personal items triggers a new response in your brain and can help you see them with a restored appreciation.

Remember to consider clutter when personalizing your space. Too many items around you can register in the brain as clutter. Be thoughtful about the items you introduce to your environment and avoid things that only take up space.

BRING THE OUTDOORS IN

Biophilic design incorporates aspects of the outdoors in interior design. Studies have shown that people who surround themselves with natural wood surfaces and green plants are calmer and more productive. We all have an innate attraction to nature; this is why dentists' and doctors' offices often have fish tanks and landscape paintings in their waiting areas. They are considered "positive distractions" because they help the brain think of nature and reduce nervous energy. Whether or not you enjoy spending time in nature, being around elements of the outdoors has a calming effect on the brain. Incorporating bits of nature into your environment has been shown to not only reduce stress, blood pressure, and heart rate, but also increase productivity, creativity, and self-reported rates of well-being. Bring the outdoors into your office space by adding a plant or two (fake is fine if you do not have a green thumb), hanging a photo of an outdoor scene, or rearranging your desk to allow you to look out a window.

SOURCES

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