

10 Work-From-Home Tech Essentials

For many of us, the work-from-home lifestyle sounded like a dream. You wake up, brew some coffee and take your time getting ready for the day. Around 9 AM, you settle into a comfy chair and open up your laptop for a low-stress day of answering emails and working on whatever projects need to be tackled that day.

Unfortunately, the reality hasn't quite matched up to the fantasy. As it turns out, working from home isn't necessarily easier -- it just has its own unique set of advantages (and difficulties.)

The culprit can often be our home office space (or lack thereof.) Without a dedicated space set aside for work, it can be hard to buckle in and focus on the task at hand. Productivity experts agree that having a dedicated space where work happens every day can do wonders for focus and efficiency. (1)

While having a dedicated space is great, you should also consider the quality of that space, both from a practical and visual standpoint. If your home office consists of nothing more than a dingy corner desk with your laptop perched atop it, it's probably time to consider upgrading. After all, you spend a large portion of your day working in this space.

Things like natural light, greenery, and cleanliness can all benefit your office space. However, there are a plethora of tech upgrades that you can give your home office to make it a more productive, pleasant, and efficient space to work in. Here's 10 of our favorites.

1. A quality desk and chair

So it's not the most "techy" item on this list, but it's arguably the most important. Your desk and chair are two items that will make direct contact with your body for almost the entirety of the time you're working from home. You want to make sure that they're serving you well. What kind of desk should you look for? If you haven't tried one yet, a standing desk can be a great option. Some studies suggest that working at a standing desk can bring great improvements to productivity while at work. (2)

2. A good internet connection

You want an internet plan with enough bandwidth to sustain you and anyone else in your household through your work from home exploits. Look for a better deal with your internet service provider (there's bound to be one out there.)

If your internet connection gives out, consider having a mobile hotspot device as a backup plan. You should also consider investing in a Wifi booster system that can improve connectivity in your office. You don't want to spend time waiting for videos to buffer or Zoom meetings to connect.

3. Noise Cancelling Headphones

As much as we try to optimize the environment of our office space, the reality is that it's never going to be perfect. Kids and pets will still make noise, construction will continue right outside our doors, and the general hustle and bustle of life will interfere with our best efforts to get stuff done.

A great pair of noise cancelling headphones can save you hours of time via decreasing the distractions in your life. A really good pair will have features like automated pausing for conversations and active noise cancelling (as opposed to just white noise).

4. The right lighting

Lighting is a crucial factor when it comes to focus, mood and productivity. Our first recommendation in this category is rather low-tech, but still vitally important: A window. Natural light is the ideal light for focus, peace, and productivity. If your office doesn't sit close to a window or skylight, move it. Do whatever it takes to get some natural light in the space you spend time working in.

The negative effects of fluorescent lights are well-documented. (3) Apart from looking and feeling a bit drab (and reminding us of too many episodes of *The Office*, they can have serious repercussions on your mood and health. Among other negative effects are migraines, anxiety, eye strain, and general stress.

The solution? If you have overhead fluorescents, switch them off. Buy a pack of warm-colored incandescent or LED bulbs paired to a nice lamp or two. If you want a higher-tech or more customizable option, look no further than Philips Hue bulbs. They allow you to pick custom color choices from your phone, along with some other handy features.

5. Mouse, keyboard, and monitor

If you work primarily from a laptop, a large monitor can save you some serious eye strain. A quality, ergonomic mouse and keyboard can help quite a bit as well.

Optimizing your space is all about removing the small inconveniences that don't seem like a big deal in the moment, but add up over time. Replacing your old, dusty mouse with a shiny new one can make a massive difference in your productivity.

6. Diffusers and Candles

A nice essential oil diffuser can help boost your mood while working from home. It also provides a nice visual distraction -- the steam rising up from the diffuser can be oddly relaxing. Consider getting a few candles that you can light while you work for when the stress starts to build up.

7. Webcam

Laptop webcams are notoriously low-quality. If you're tired of looking at a pixelated version of yourself in Zoom meetings, invest in a higher-quality one that can help you go the distance.

8. An Ember mug

The Ember mug is a coffee mug that keeps your drink at the precise temperature that you set on your phone. If that doesn't sound incredible, you likely haven't walked away from your morning coffee for a few minutes, gotten distracted, and returned to find a cold, stale cup waiting for you. Sure, you can throw it in the microwave, but it just doesn't taste the same.

The Ember mug allows you to set a precise temperature via a mobile app. It's the perfect solution for a coffee snob newly forced to work from home.

9. A foam roller

Foam rollers that vibrate and help massage the knots in your back are a must-have, especially if you sit at a desk all day. Relieve the tension that builds up in your back and take a much-needed break from time spent hunched over a computer screen.

10. Suspension trainer / pull-up bar

Movement is essential to stay focused and productive. If you find you get antsy or restless while sitting in your desk chair all day, banging out a few pull-ups or TRX exercises can make a world of difference.