

Apprehensions with return to work during the pandemic

COVID 19

Reading through our return-to-work guideline for the ‘new normal’ multiple times, we’ve finally reached the point of going back to the office. I had to *mentally* prepare myself to go into the office several nights before the day I was going in. This may sound silly, but many of us may also feel confused, worried, and apprehensive about going back to the workplace.

I mentally created a checklist to prepare myself and walk me through the next day: starting from leaving my residence with facial mask, to driving beyond my own neighborhood, parking my car, entering the building, sanitizing the working area and my hands, making my first cup of tea, sitting down at my desk, then finally turning on the computer and tapping on the keyboard in front of me. I needed to not only think of myself, but also others who I may come across and maintain social distancing.

Even though everyone’s situation is unique, and this pandemic is new to us, I find we can reduce our anxiety to the very basics of so-called ‘Back to Work Anxiety’. Such anxiety could come from returning to work after annual leave, just that the pandemic brought us to a different level. This means, there are things we can do to manage such apprehension.

During this pandemic, the internet could be your best friend or your enemy. For one thing, trying to limit your access so that you have room for mental breaks. Where possible, here are a few more tips³ that may help:

- **Thinking back and taking it slow.** Our fight, flight or freeze response¹ releases hormones, like adrenaline and cortisol, the stress hormones, making us feel more vigilant and alert. It is not helping if we are already dreading going back to work. It can be tough but try thinking back to the last time you were away from work. Is the anxiety you are feeling now new? We are not superheroes; take it one step at a time, remind yourself the sky isn’t falling down, and believe in yourself (more than ever) that you can adjust to this new normal more and more, day after day.
- **Take care of your body.** This can be easy to overlook but our bodies have a significant impact on our anxiety levels, and vice versa. Nutritionist Melody shares [a few simple tips to help reduce your anxiety](#) through your eating habits: avoid stimulants and reduce alcohol; eat low glycaemic load (GL) foods such as wholegrain bread, pasta and pulses in combination with protein like eggs²
- **Pause and relax.** Who doesn’t like this but who can do it? Get creative! You may need to establish your own unique self-care routines. Gluing to your screens may not help you to unwind, but listening to music/podcasts/audiobooks, or becoming inspired by others by reading may be a better choice.

- **Consider why.** If such ‘pandemic’ anxiety is invading your thoughts, it could be worth taking a step back and considering why this is happening. Speaking with a counsellor, through resources from work such as Employee Assistance Program, can be a helpful way to get an outside view into your situation and what you can do to feel more passionate and excited about your work.

Ref:

¹ <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/fight-flight-freeze>

² <https://www.nutritionist-resource.org.uk/memberarticles/eat-your-way-out-of-anxiety-three-simple-steps>

³ <https://happiful.com/how-to-beat-back-to-work-anxiety/>