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Quarantine workspace: Making it more than bearable [1]

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From sheltering in place to safer at home, it can be difficult separating our work and home lives when you are limited to the same physical space! I happen to fall into a high risk population, and my May is looking a lot like March and April. This prolonged safer at home status has made me prioritize simple but effective ways to stay motivated and continue to enjoy working remotely, and I hope these are easy approaches that can help you too. Items and changes that have made my shelter in place/safer at home workspace a happier place to be include:

Natural light and a plant

I'm lucky to have some natural light in my workspace, and I added one of my favorite plants [3] to my desk to bring me a little joy throughout the day. If you aren't a green thumb, maybe some beautiful photos or artwork would add happiness to your workspace. Funnily enough, I don't have any family photos on my desk- but lately I see enough of them anyway! If natural light isn't an option for where you work, take time to go outside and get some sunshine!;

Reducing eye strain

Blue light filtering glasses make a lot of claims about reducing eye fatigue, and not all of it is substantiated. I purchased some of these glasses a few years back, and they seem to have a positive effect on me when I remember to use them. Perhaps it's a placebo effect, or maybe they just reduce glare- but I'm going to keep using them for the near future as my eyes feel less tired at the end of the day.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology [4] makes these (budget friendly!) recommendations to reduce eye strain:

- Take frequent breaks by using the "20-20-20" rule. Every 20 minutes look away from your screen and look at an object 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds. This gives your eyes a chance to reset and replenish themselves.
- Use artificial tears to lubricate your eyes when they feel dry.
- Keep your distance. Sit about 25 inches or at arm's length from your screen and adjust its height so you're looking slightly downward at it.
- Reduce glare and brightness. Devices with glass screens can cause glare. To reduce glare, consider a matte screen filter for your device. Adjusting the brightness and contrast of your screen and dimming the lighting near your screen can also help reduce eye strain.
- Wear eyeglasses. If you wear contact lenses, you already know they can increase dryness and irritation. To reduce these symptoms, try wearing eyeglasses instead when

working on a computer for longer periods.

Fun beverage cup

Staying hydrated is a must, and the need to get up for bathroom breaks makes sure I'm not parked at my desk all day. I tend to fill up a large water bottle that I pour into my clear mug decorated with Soot Sprites from Hayao Miyazaki's film Spirited Away [5]. I switch it up when I can and have a decent collection of cups and mugs with silly or funny decorations.

Ergonomic chair and footrest

I miss my desk at work. I had a nice ergonomic chair, a sit-to-stand desk, and an adjustable footrest. Prior to quarantine, I didn't do as much remote work, and we had been skating by with a metal fold out chair in the loft upstairs. COVID-19 prompted us to finally invest in an actual office chair, and I ordered a footrest online. There are multiple benefits to using a footrest [6], and increased comfort is one of them for me. I paid about $25 for mine, which was a worthwhile purchase. In a pinch, a stack of books works too!

Focus music

I don't listen to music all the time when I work, but sometimes when I really need to focus on a project, I find some instrumental music to play in the background. Some of you may be able to listen to music with lyrics while you work, but I often find myself typing the lyrics instead of what I actually mean to write!

I still struggle some days, but these small silver linings do make a difference in getting through my day. Taking care of ourselves is important, and it's easy to forget to check in on ourselves during the work day. What's been working for you to keep your spirits up?

COVID-19 [7], remote work [8]
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