

# Allianz working from home report

June 2021



This report has been independently produced for Allianz Partners by Wrkit and Truth Sayers.

## Wrkit



Wrkit specialises in the creation of better, healthier working environments using an online suite of data driven Employee Engagement and Retention tools. It is the one stop platform to nurture talent, engage and motivate staff, support their lifestyle and wellbeing. Wrkit believes passionately that nurturing employee's wellbeing and engagement results in greater productivity and overly staff performance. We solve the key challenges that businesses face by helping them gain insight into their company activity through our unique Engagement Dashboard, providing greater insights into how engaged staff are and to help focus on key areas and ongoing effective interventions.

Drawing on over 15 years' experience in the benefits sector and client feedback has led to the creation of this complete platform, offering businesses and HR leaders a method to attract, nurture and retain employees.

## TruthSayers



Truthsayers is a neurotech firm whose mission is to enable happier, more authentic workplaces for millions of organisations worldwide by fundamentally changing the way people engage at work, by giving all stakeholders a voice and leaders the tools to listen. Used by many of the world's largest consultancy practices in their client engagements, Neurotech® platform combines neuroscience with technology and data to deliver insights that simply have not been made available to businesses before.

- Uses the combined power of neuroscience, psychology, technology, and data analytics.
- Suitable for any organisation, in any industry.
- Easy to use – No technical or scientific knowledge or experience required.
- It's fast. Results are available within five minutes of respondents' completion of the survey.

# Table of Contents

<b>01</b>	The Covid-19 global pandemic and working from home	P4
<b>02</b>	Executive summary	P7
<b>03</b>	Background & Report Introduction	P9
<b>04</b>	Survey Approach	P11
<b>05</b>	Research Results	P12
<b>06</b>	Cognitive Dissonance	P18
<b>07</b>	Recommendations	P20

# 01. The Covid-19 global pandemic & working from home

The transmission of the COVID-19 virus has required businesses to respond to this significant challenge by rapidly shifting to working from home (WFH). According to Stanford research, an incredible 42% of the U.S. labour force switched to WFH full-time in 2020 (Wong, 2020).

Remote working from home is a new experience for the majority of businesses, and a huge task for employers is to ensure their employees remain engaged, physically and mentally well, motivated, and can stay connected. According to the Allianz Care and Ipsos MRBI 2020 survey, more and more people are living and working abroad, and although WFH may benefit them in terms of a more flexible work schedule, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a number of travel restrictions, with many people not been able to return home and visit family and friends as often as they typically would. This is potentially leading to a greater sense of isolation and feelings of remoteness.

The risks and impacts of WFH to date are not fully understood. Productivity and performance have yet to be fully analysed and improved analytics will help with the development of appropriate management processes and HR policies to ensure a better WFH experience. Individuals vary in the support they require - depending on their age, personality, financial situation, living conditions, family dynamic, role, experiences of working abroad and current circumstances. The aim of this survey is to provide insights directly from people WFH in order to create sensitive action plans for management when traditional in-person engagement is no longer feasible.

## WHY IS THIS SURVEY IMPORTANT NOW?

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In this report, we present the findings of our Global Working from Home Survey to provide an in-depth understanding of the impact that remote working is having on the wellbeing of respondents in the areas of Life, Mind, Food, Sleep, Work, and Active (Exercise).

We hope that our findings and recommendations will enable those WFH to identify the areas of wellbeing where they are significantly impacted or challenged, while also highlighting the areas they are handling well while working remotely and at distance. The aim of this report is to educate, inform and outline opportunities where those WFH can be assisted to overcome the challenges they may be experiencing.

## THE EFFECTS OF WFH ON WELLBEING

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Wellbeing is achieved when the social determinants of a healthy life, in particular psychosocial (mental health and social support) and physical (diet and physical activity) are promoted and protected (Naz & Bögenhold, 2018). To date, there is insufficient information available on the effects of remote working long-term, and on the wellbeing of individuals as they adapt quickly to these new conditions (Prasada, Vaidya, & Mangipudic, 2020). The changes in working conditions have immediate implications and may lead to permanent shifts that last far beyond the pandemic (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020).



*This report provides some key insights into how employees are coping in the 6 key areas of wellbeing. It is safe to say that everyone has been touched by this pandemic, making it a very human and very levelling experience. The report findings and recommendations will help businesses be able to focus and adjust further in support of their people.*

*Jason Brennan*

*Director of Wellbeing and Leadership, @ Wrkit,  
Coach and Author*



## 02. Executive Summary

We surveyed a total of 1,932 participants from Allianz. Many of those who participated in the survey are working remotely every day; in addition, many are working away from their home country for an extended period. With a combination of both traditional and new neurotech surveying, we have uncovered what these people are both thinking and feeling while adapting to their workplace changes.

1,932

PARTICIPANTS

36

COUNTRIES

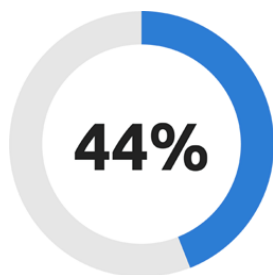
6

DIMENSIONS

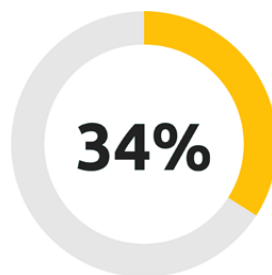
30

AFFIRMATIONS

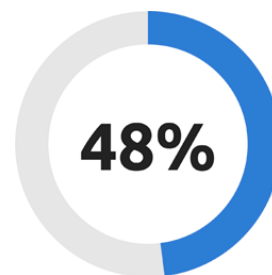
In the diagram below and throughout this report, what is being displayed as a percentage are the results of either a positive, neutral, or negative association to a set of affirmations relating to each wellbeing pillar. A 0% score correlates to a 'very strong negative association' to a statement, whereas a 100% score correlates to a 'very strong positive association' to a statement. A score of 50% correlates to 'neither a positive nor negative reaction', therefore a more neutral association.



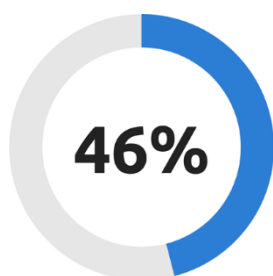
ACTIVE



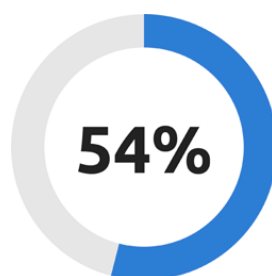
FOOD



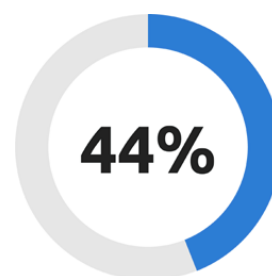
LIFE



MIND



SLEEP



WORK

## SOME KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE

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Participants are **planning their sleep routine better** when working from home.



Participants **feel physically well** when working from home.



WFH has a **negative influence** on participants in terms of **eating healthily**.



WFH has had a **negative impact** on participants in terms of **their body weight**.



Participants are **feeling more isolated** when WFH



# 03. Background

## WELLBEING SURVEY QUESTIONS

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- Wellbeing survey questions were designed by Wrkit's clinical team.
- Based on Wrkit's online wellbeing portal POWR, an evidence-based tool was designed to help users manage their overall health, wellbeing, and performance.
- POWR helps guide users through exercises in mindfulness, psychological and emotional wellbeing, nutrition and physical exercise.
- POWR has built in clinically designed behaviour plans for all 6 pillars, to both measure and enhance wellbeing in all areas.

## NEUROSCIENCE RESPONSE

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- Capturing implicit measures of feelings by Neurotech platform
- Focusing on what people feel, and not just what they think
- Using Truthsayers innovative online technology to capture users' responses implicitly
- Enabling participants to confidently and anonymously share their truth

## WHAT IS COGNITIVE DISSONANCE?

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Cognitive Dissonance occurs when there is a difference between what an individual thinks (explicit response) and how they feel (implicit response).

Traditional cognitive surveys aim to evoke rational, considered, non-intuitive, conscious-based responses (explicit), while non-conscious responses evoke intuitive, instinctive, automatic responses (implicit). For this survey, we used both standard cognitive questionnaires to assess how participants think they are feeling (explicit) and Implicit Reaction Times (IRTs) to assess how they are actually feeling (implicit) about WFH. The greater the difference in implicit and explicit scores demonstrated, the higher the levels of Cognitive Dissonance among participants in relation to WFH.

## DESCRIPTION OF ANALYSIS

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The report's analysis uses cutting-edge neuroscience to focus on six key areas of wellbeing: mind, sleep, life, work, activity and nutrition, and how the major shift to WFH in response to COVID-19 has influenced participants' overall wellbeing. With the standard cognitive survey, results combined with the data gathered through the implicit neuroscience method, this report was able to pinpoint striking insights into how participants are coping emotionally and psychologically while working from home.

This survey was launched on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and ran up until March 5<sup>th</sup> 2021. It provides a balanced and accurate sample and representation of how opinions to WFH have been influenced over time and during a global lockdown event.

## THE AIM OF THIS REPORT IS TO:

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- 01** Give leaders and decision-makers the ability to identify which areas of wellbeing people are managing and where they need specific support.
- 02** Provide insight into the effects of WFH on 6 key areas of wellbeing.
- 03** Suggest possible ways to maintain positive behaviours and improve overall wellbeing.
- 04** Identify the challenges those WFH face to enable best practice support.
- 05** Provide evidence-based recommendations for those who are working from home.

## 04. Survey Approach

We conducted our analysis using both the traditional method and an advanced online surveying approach that measures implicit reaction time (IRT).

IRT captures peoples' immediate, intuitive, gut responses, which often differ greatly from what they explicitly say. Unlike traditional surveys, IRT measures do not openly ask questions but measures reaction times to a variety of affirmations. In doing this, the IRT bypasses conscious thought processes by measuring the reaction time of the respondent to the various overt statements.

Advances in neuroscience over the past thirty years have demonstrated that emotions and feelings originate in the non-conscious part of the brain that traditional methods are often unable to access. Traditional box-ticking surveys make it difficult for organisations to fully capture honest and meaningful data. Consequently, standard surveys are unable to tap into respondents' true emotions and feelings, leading at times to sometimes biased and inaccurate responses. Below are the sets of affirmations used and the percentage difference in the implicit and explicit scores.



*A rapid shift to working from home was always going to result in new variant stressors for most people. The method of this survey allows us to measure how people are actually feeling, versus what they might tell us if asked. The implications are important as leaders and decision-makers will receive insights that have traditionally been difficult to acquire and will enable employees and other stakeholders to share what is important to them in a secure and anonymous way.*

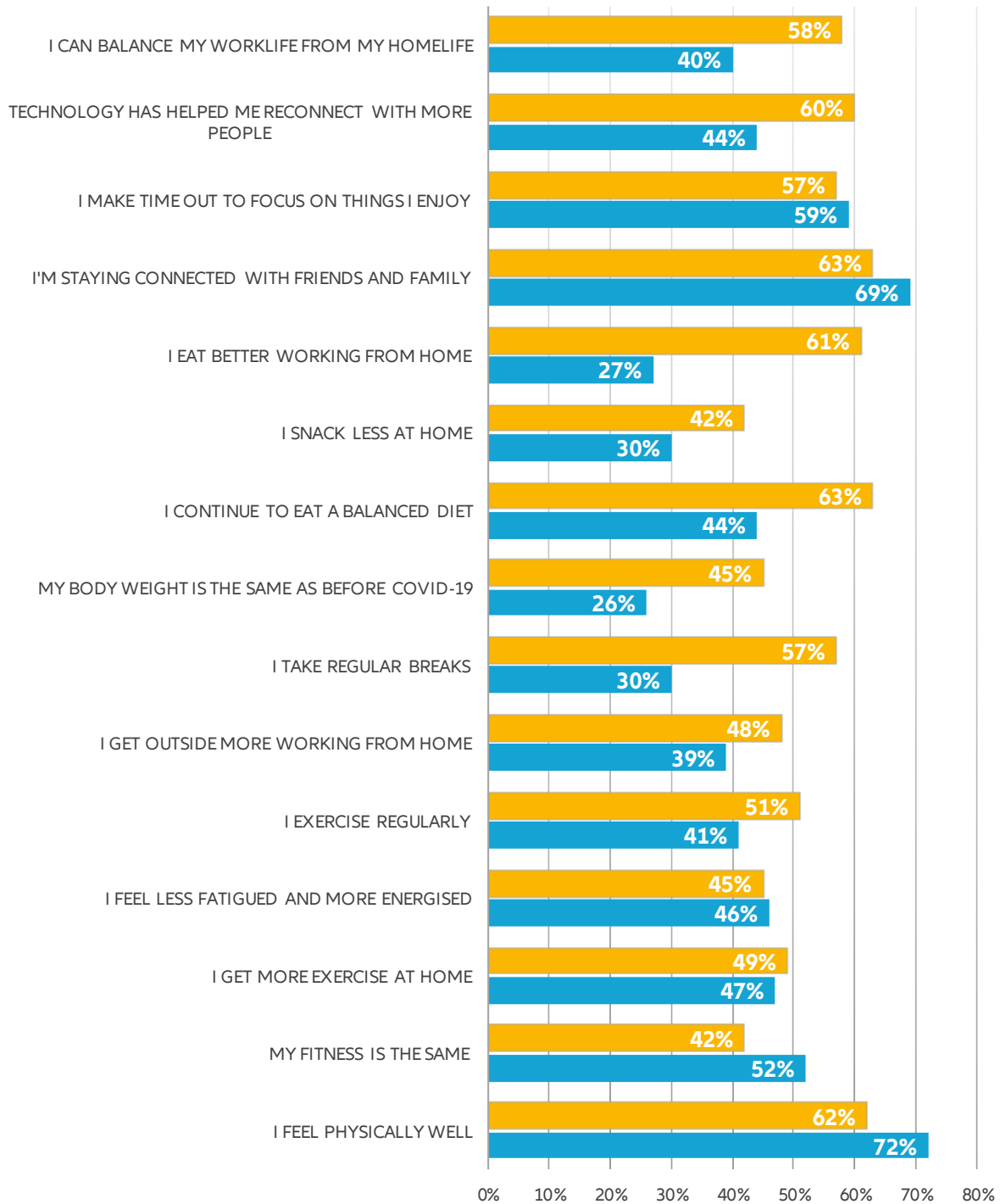
*Simon Stapleton  
Co-Founder, Truthsayers*



# 05. Survey Results

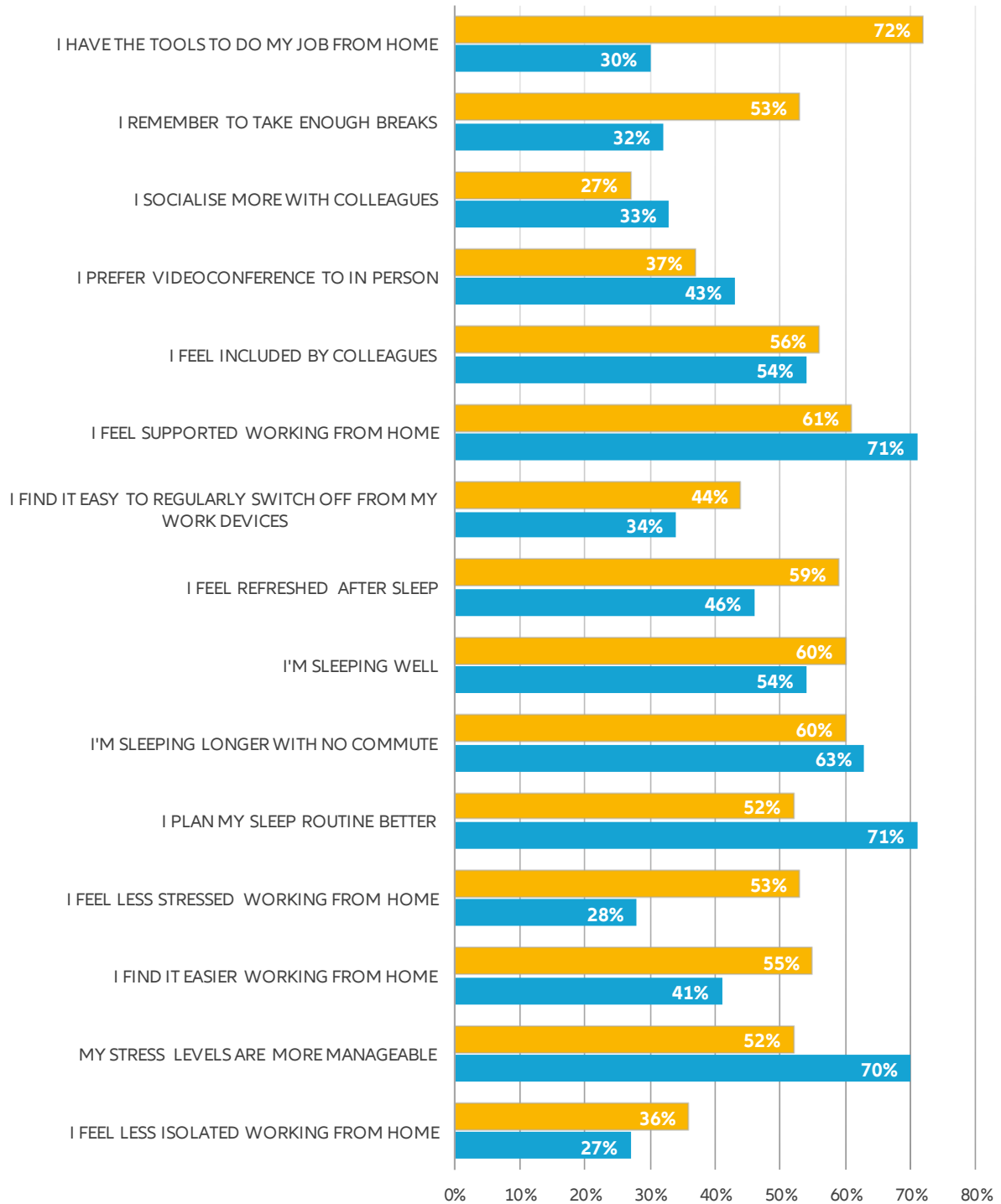
## DETAILED ANALYSIS: QUESTIONS 01 - 15

■ EXPLICIT SCORE     ■ IMPLICIT SCORE



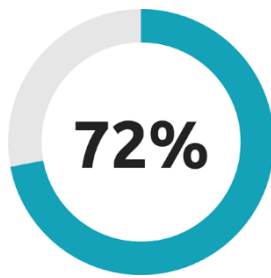
## DETAILED ANALYSIS: QUESTIONS 16 - 30

■ EXPLICIT SCORE     ■ IMPLICIT SCORE



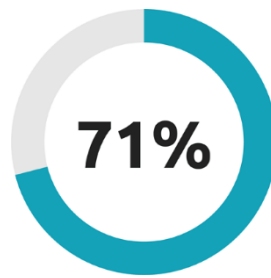
## TOP SCORING AFFIRMATIONS

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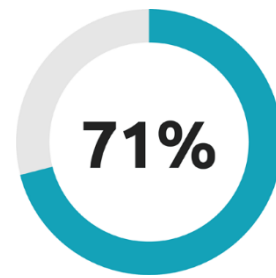
I feel physically well

ACTIVE



I feel supported working from home

WORK



I plan my sleep routine better

SLEEP

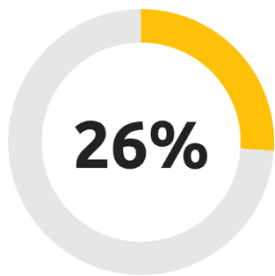
Participants agreed positively that they feel physically well (72%). There are many components that contribute to physical wellness; for example, eating a balanced diet, getting optimal sleep, health-related behaviours and mindfulness (Williams et al., 2011).

This may be due to the fact that individuals are saving time without the commute to work, allowing them more time to exercise and cook healthy, balanced meals and get adequate sleep. These results show that participants are acknowledging that there has not been a significant impact on physical well-being.

Participants also positively agreed (71%) that they feel supported while working from home. This is in line with a study conducted by MIT Sloan Management Massachusetts, in April 2020. They investigated the most meaningful actions organisations have taken to support their employees when transitioning to WFH (Sull et al., 2020) which was providing them with the tools to work from home. Employees also stated that frequent and consistent communication was crucial to the shift to WFH and allows them to feel supported and connected to the organisation. Finally, employees stated that they felt supported when their company provided support for their physical and mental health during the pandemic.

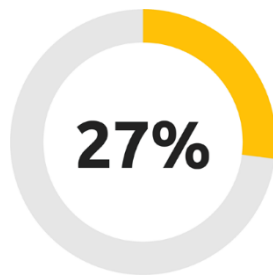
Finally, participants reported that they are planning their sleep routine better (71%). This might be because, without the commute, they have more time in the evenings to practice an improved pre-bedtime routine, such as creating a relaxing environment, reading a book, and spending more time with family, which can contribute to better quality of in sleep.

## BOTTOM SCORING AFFIRMATIONS



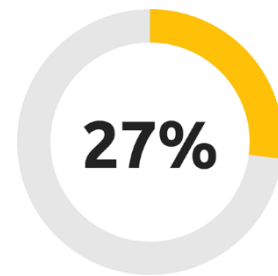
My body weight is the same as before Covid-19

ACTIVE



I eat better working from home

FOOD



I feel less isolated working from home

LIFE

The lowest scoring affirmation for participants was that body weight is the same as before COVID-19, which means their bodyweight has been affected.

With the COVID-19 restrictions, including closure of gyms, a ban on sports and travel restrictions, it is more difficult for people to remain physically active in ways they typically would.

Participants disagreed (27%) when asked if they eat better working from home. This is showing that they are not eating as well as they have been in the office environment. Food is a source of comfort in difficult times, and it is therefore not surprising that people are over indulging. However, according to nutritionist Nicola Flood,

“

*One of the most empowering things we can do at times when so much feels out of our control is to manage our health by taking charge of things like our diet. Our immune system is the most powerful weapon we have against disease and a strong immunity means our body is better able to fight off illness.*

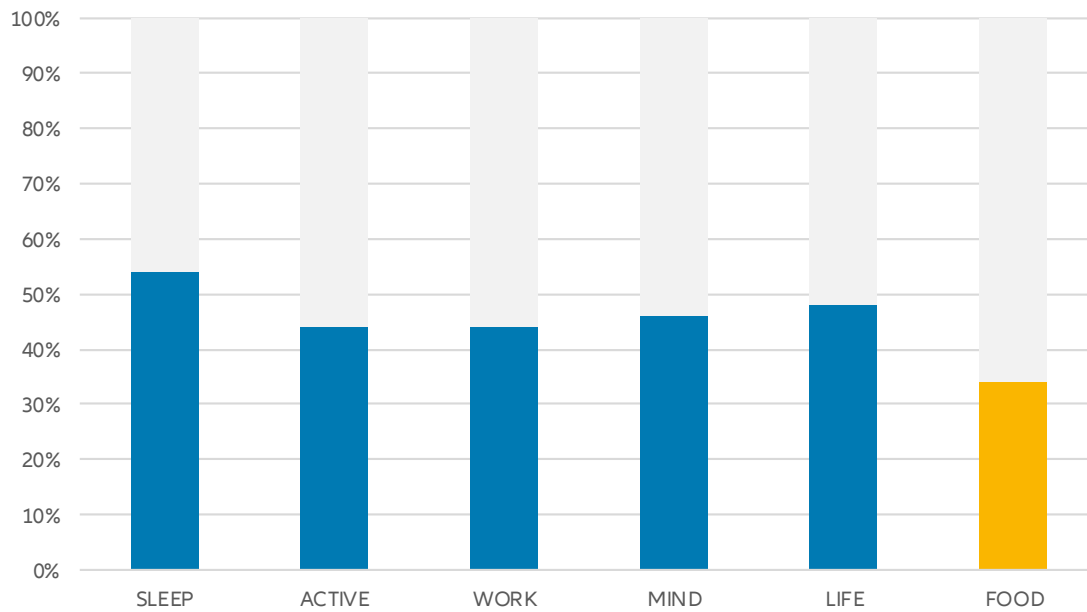
*Nicola Flood*

*Nutritionist and Owner of The Queen of Health*

”

Finally, participants disagreed when asked if they feel less isolated WFH (27%), which means they are feeling more isolated. Most individuals have a fundamental motivation to socially interact (*Beumeister & Leary, 1995*) and the reduction in social interactions is likely to have caused unfortunate self-isolation, and WFH has led to greater feelings of isolation and loneliness.

## AREAS OF WELLBEING MOST AFFECTED

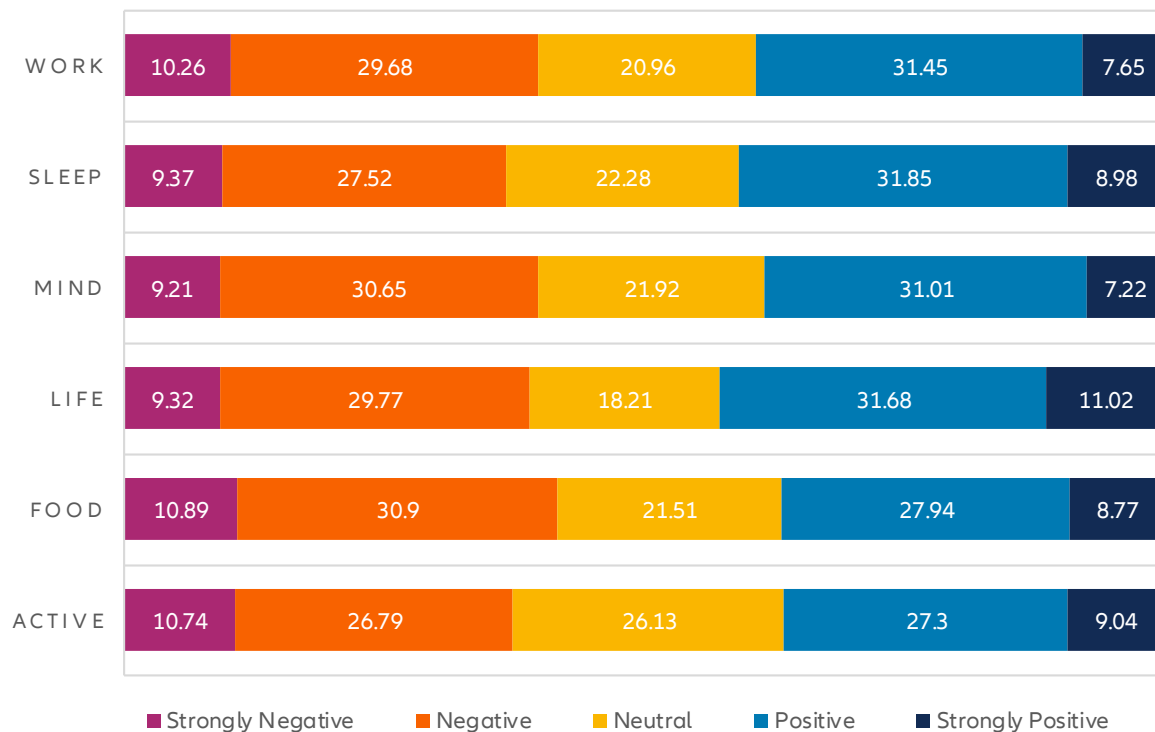


**Dimension Analysis** - The dimension breakdown chart (above) represents an aggregated overview of the areas of wellbeing with which participants have positive (**green**), neutral (**blue**), and negative associations (**yellow**).

Based on the chart, participants are feeling neutral towards sleep (54%), life (48%), mind (46%), work (44%), and active (44%) which means there was not an overly significant feeling towards a positive or negative impact either way.

Participants who are WFH had negative scores in terms of food (34%), which is quite a low score. There are many possible explanations for why people are struggling with their diet while WFH - snacks are more readily available, there aren't structured lunch hours, and possible boredom due to lack of social contact. Apart from remote working, eating habits may have been influenced by other pandemic-related factors. For example, studies have shown that stressors such as pandemic-related income loss can lead to "comfort eating". It has also been indicated that fear of infection can lead to less frequent shopping and the purchasing of foods with a longer shelf life. This reduction in intake of fresh foods negatively impacts diet and overall health.





**Dimension Analysis** - The above dimension analysis provides a more detailed description of the strength of associations that participants have with specific areas of wellbeing, giving more colour and insight than the aggregate data.

As you can see, participants had the strongest positive association with life (9.15%). A possible explanation for this is that they have more time to spend on a variety of personal pursuits due to the reduction in time spent commuting.

Furthermore, participants may feel they have more control over their lives while WFH than in an office environment and that the more structured way of office working is not as flexible as WFH, where they have more psychological freedom to adapt their work schedule to suit their lifestyle and comfort levels.

Participants WFH had the strongest negative association with food (10.97%). A recent survey by *Sato et al. (2020)* also found that WFH increased the frequency of snacking. As a reaction to stress, many people increase their intake of palatable food (*Sinha & Jastreboff, 2013*). The pandemic has been an extremely stressful event and snacking has been a coping mechanism. In addition, the stay-at-home guidelines and WFH have increased the amount of time spent sitting down and engaging in sedentary activities such as watching television, which can also be linked to increased snack consumption.

## 06. Cognitive Dissonance

### MOST COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

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Participants displayed the highest rate of cognitive dissonance when asked if they had the tools to do their job effectively from home. When asked explicitly (measure of thinking), participants strongly agreed that they had the tools to do their job from home. However, the implicit measure (measure of feelings) demonstrated that subconsciously, they did not actually feel this way. Many people who are now WFH are sharing their space with other occupants of the household, which can lead to distractions and make it difficult to focus on work tasks, when compared to working in an office (Lopez-Leon, Forero, & Ruiz-Díaz, 2020). The implicit results take into account not just the tools necessary for work, but how the person is feeling about doing work continuously in a home environment.

Participants also displayed a high level of cognitive dissonance when asked if they eat better when working from home. Although they explicitly stated that they did indeed eat better, the implicit measure indicated that this was not true. This discrepancy between their perceived attitude toward their eating habits and their actual attitude could be because participants are unaware of their snacking when WFH.

Similarly, when asked if they take regular breaks, participants explicitly stated that they do. However, implicit measures indicated that this was not the case.. This result is also in line with the Global Working from Home Survey, and a possible explanation is that participants think they should be able to balance their work and home life better as they are spending more time at home and have more flexibility to balance work and family demands (*Dockery, & Bawa, 2020*). However, with a lack of clear routine, adequate space and a proper schedule when working from home, participants might be finding it difficult to switch off from work, take enough breaks, leave their work environment (home) and focus on self-care.

## LEAST COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

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When asked if they felt less fatigued and more energised working from home, participants disagreed both explicitly and implicitly. This demonstrates that they are aware of their feelings of fatigue when WFH. Taking regular breaks, having a good sleep routine, and frequent exercise may help with these feelings of fatigue and provide a boost of energy to those who may be feeling burnt out.

Participants had similar implicit and explicit scores when asked if they feel included by colleagues. On both measures, they agreed that they feel included by their colleagues which is good news as good social support is vital at a time when everyone is being advised to socially isolate. Regular virtual meetings, phone calls, and texts enable this feeling of inclusion among colleagues.

Finally, participants also had a strong cognitive alignment when asked whether they take time out to focus on things they enjoy. On both measures, participants agreed they did. With a more flexible work schedule and not commuting to the office, working from home offers the opportunity for employees to carve out more time for themselves.

# 07. Recommendations

The data and analysis in this survey allows for a variety of recommendations to be developed by those WFH. We have broken the recommendations down into the 6 pillars of wellness.

## 01 SLEEP

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Overall, participants who took part in the survey had positive associations with sleep while working from home, with the key takeaway being they are planning their sleep routine better. There is extensive research to support that sleep has tremendous benefit to organisations because of its relationship with performance, health, and attitudes (Tice, Butler, Muraven, Stillwell, 1995). This is good news for the many participants working remotely abroad, as it demonstrates that this style of work suits them in terms of their sleep routine.

Working remotely without a commute means that participants have more time to invest in planning their sleep routine. In order to maintain this going forward, people should consider taking steps to ensure good sleep hygiene every night, even after all the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and they slowly return to the office environment.

## 02 WORK

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The pillar of work had a neutral score among participants, with the main positive factor being that they feel well supported while working from home. This is good news, especially with many of the participants working abroad not being able to get home to visit friends and family due to the COVID-19 restrictions. A supportive workplace, along with the ability to effectively support health and wellbeing, and effective regular communications, promote feelings of inclusion and social belonging. Investment in this area can boost self-confidence and productivity levels.

There are several recommendations for participants to ensure they maintain the support they are receiving. For example, taking advantage of social media such as WhatsApp and LinkedIn groups to start casual, friendly conversations and build connections between colleagues

(Lades, Laffan, Daly, & Delaney, 2020). It is also recommended that the importance of including everyone and creating time for fun and team building exercises is recognised. Team members could be encouraged to take part in trivia quizzes or casual catch ups on a Friday evening, plus sites like Air B&B have experiences that multiple teams can join in and share all over the world. The provision of regular health and wellbeing related material, plus good WFH guidelines, will help ensure the work pillar is well balanced.

## 03 ACTIVE

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The general response to statements about activity was neutral across participants. The top scoring affirmation was that they are feeling physically well which is really positive to see. There are many components that contribute to physical wellness; for example, staying active, eating a balanced diet, getting optimal sleep, health-related behaviours and mindfulness (Williams et al., 2011). In light of public health recommendations during the pandemic urging people to stay at home, it is important to partake in physical activity while adhering to these guidelines. Such physical activities can be based on online solutions like home-based exercise videos (Ammar et al., 2020).

Participants strongly disagreed when asked if their body weight is the same as before COVID-19. This could be due to a decrease in physical activity as in many countries, gyms were been forced to close, sporting events were postponed or cancelled altogether, and restrictions on movement were imposed (for example, the 5km travel limit in Ireland).

## 04 FOOD

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The change in body weight among participants may also be due to a poor diet. Food was the lowest scoring pillar of wellbeing, suggesting that people are struggling in terms of their diet and food-related habits. Participants strongly disagreed when asked if they are eating better when WFH. The closure of many food suppliers during COVID-19 has placed a burden on normal food-related behaviours (WHO, 2020). This is noteworthy because good nutrition is vital for health and wellbeing, particularly when the immune system is challenged. Anxiety, boredom, and a lack of motivation evoked by quarantine are considered risk factors for consuming more food and food of a poorer quality compared to standard living conditions (BDA, 2020).

Education is key here for people to understand the long-term impact of unhealthy eating and to help them become more conscious of their diet, alongside their exercise regimes and how they can structure their time and eating habits better while WFH. Ways to help with nutrition education include running nutrition awareness campaigns throughout the year, inviting nutrition experts to talk about healthy eating habits as part of a larger wellbeing programme, and to motivate weight loss initiatives by running programmes that last for 4-6 weeks.

Motivation to eat well during home confinement may be sourced from assistive technologies like apps, cooking videos and appropriate social media support, as well as expert assistance and advice with meal planning and how to control caloric intake using food diaries and nutrition apps (Ammar et al., 2020).

## 05 LIFE

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Participants scored neutrally in the wellbeing area of life, however they indicated that they are feeling more isolated WFH. With governmental guidelines urging people to stay home and self-isolate, it is no surprise that people are feeling isolated during this time, especially if they are away from their home country. However, there are ways to tackle these feelings of isolation and improve social connectedness. According to the Mental Health Foundation, there are several ways to harness and improve our connections with others.

## 06 MIND

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Overall, the mind pillar scored neutrally among participants. While this survey was being conducted, traditional normal mental health coping strategies such as socialising, travel, sporting activities and shared leisure time were all severely restricted and it would be assumed that the WFH mind score would have been greatly improved if these were available and a pandemic was not affecting this population.

Khosravi et al. (2020) have suggested a 7 step individual level implementation plan that would result in individual stress reduction:

1. In order to reduce COVID-19 related stress and anxiety, participants only rely on a **limited number of news sources** and avoid unofficial fear mongering news reports.
2. Ensure to **stay in contact with friends and family** on a regular bases. Set up a recurring weekly meeting so that there is something to look forward to at the weekend.
3. Continue the usual rhythm of life as much as possible by having a **regular sleeping pattern and eating a balanced diet**.
4. Ensure **personal hygiene and protection practices** are followed.
5. Make sure to **step away from work for a few minutes every hour**; this is the quickest way to reduce stress levels and to shift focus onto something else which will improve concentration.
6. **Movement alleviates stress**. As little as five minutes of movement such as stretching every hour is enough to reduce stress levels, improve focus, prevent stiffness and headaches.
7. Set up **boundaries between home life and work life** by having a specific time that marks the end of the workday, and that indicates time to relax and switch off.