

# NerdWallet

## 7 Work-From-Home Essentials

Make your workspace comfortable and distraction-free, while embracing daily rituals.



*Citation: Bundrick, H. M. (2021, April 09). 7 Work-From-Home Essentials. Retrieved from <https://www.nerdwallet.com/article/finance/work-from-home-essentials>  
Photography by Sean Harris courtesy Thrive Farmers International*

Working from home is often a combination of comfort and chaos.

“Where people spend their time really matters,” says Matthew A. Finn, founder of Cognitive Design in Atlanta. “It makes a big difference to your quality of life ... and it really influences your behavior and your health.”

Finn’s architectural work is influenced by his time collaborating with a clinical psychologist to design therapeutic spaces for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.

“This experience was so eye-opening for me,” Finn says. “It fundamentally changed the way that I approach designing to promote health.”

Here are his recommended essentials that can help lower the chaos and increase the comfort of working from home.

### Your work-from-home setup

Finn says that your home office doesn’t have to look like an office inside your home.

“You can either work from home or — the negative version of that is — you live at your office,” he says.

His guiding principles for a more productive work environment include:

- Ergonomics
- Focused attention
- Food and drink

## Ergonomics

### 1. Sit/stand desk

Finn is a big fan of sit/stand desks. He has an Uplift desk at his office in Atlanta, but says Ikea has some affordable sit/stand desk options. A standing desk converter can be an economical choice, as can a fixed standing-height desk with an ergonomic drafting stool.

If you’re looking to invest in comfort for the long term, Steelcase has high-quality desks and chairs through a partnership with West Elm.

### 2. Adjustable-height monitor

Since monitors are often positioned too low on either a fixed or sit/stand desk, an adjustable-height monitor is essential, Finn says. He has Knoll Sapper XYZ monitor arms in his Atlanta office and a simple adjustable monitor base in his work-from-home setup. Work productivity can be an added bonus of making small but deliberate changes to your environment. During our interview, Matt notes that “different sensory inputs” can either “facilitate or interrupt” focus work. Personally, I’ve noticed that lighting certain candle scents lull me into relaxation mode, while bright piney or citrusy scents help me focus.

## Focused attention

### 3. Controlled lighting

A well-lit environment helps concentration and attention, while also relieving eye strain, Finn says. Natural light is best, so work near a window if possible. However, glare can be an issue, so you might want to use curtains or blinds to adjust your lighting throughout the workday.

He prefers wide-slat wood blinds to adjust for glare, sheer curtains for privacy and blackout curtains for total light blocking.

In late afternoon and evening, he suggests using night mode on your computer (Windows or Mac) to lower blue light, which can disrupt the circadian rhythms that enhance the transition to sleep. He also uses dimmer switches with dimmable warm glow LED bulbs throughout his house to adjust light levels from day to night, brighter to dimmer.

### 4. Sound cancellation

Sound can interrupt concentration for some people. Finn suggests Bose Sleepbuds, which generate a variety of white noise sounds and can be comfortably worn throughout the workday, or of course, at night. Or, you could have a pair of foam earplugs handy that cost under a dollar.

You can also use sound-insulating materials to quiet your work environment from children, next-room televisions or outdoor power mowers and blowers. There are applications for doors and windows.

## 5. Video call essentials

For the requisite video calls, Finn recommends a suitable background, real or virtual, that “looks the part” for your business role. He says this falls within the realm of “dressing for the job you want, not the job you have.”

For a more professional appearance and sound, he recommends a Razer Kiyo camera with built-in ring light (“so it doesn’t look like you’ve been indoors and sad for the past 12 months”) and a Rode NT-USB mini microphone.

## 6. A comfortable temperature

If you’ve ever worked in a frigid — or sweltering — office, you know how temperature can affect your mood and concentration. Rather than chilling or heating your whole home, you can tweak the temp in the room where you work with something similar to a Dyson Hot + Cool portable heater/cooler. A fan or portable heater would also work.

Humidifiers or dehumidifiers, depending on where you live, can also enhance comfort. And air filters and plants can help freshen the air.

# Food and drink

## 7. Hydration

We all miss hanging in the coffee break room or trading stories by the water cooler, and Finn says those rituals are worth keeping, in one form or another. In addition to nourishing your body, food and drink can be part of a daily routine to aid focus and provide scheduled breaks from the computer.

Water filters provide clean, healthy water for hydration. If it’s convenient and tastes good, you’re likely to drink the amount of water your body needs, he says.

“The liability of working from home is that your day is very unstructured,” Finn says. Having rituals that provide a transition from being at home to being at work can help. For example, grinding and brewing a cup of coffee forces you to take a break and savor the moment — and stop multitasking.

Cooking lunch from scratch, and sharing it with family or friends, can be another ritual that helps prevent you from sliding into an always-at-work unstructured and unhealthy lifestyle.

Finn says his suggestions can help manage health by tweaking your environment but adds:

*“There’s a real temptation to focus too much attention on the ‘stuff’ and especially the ‘stuff you don’t have’ to the point it spoils something as simply pleasurable as a morning coffee ritual with family.”*

---

Cognitive Design is a curated network of experts working together to improve people’s lives through design of the built environment.

For additional information, please visit: [www.cognitive.design](http://www.cognitive.design)

Matthew A. Finn AIA, NCARB, LEED AP is an Atlanta-based architect and Founder of Cognitive Design.

Matt is passionate about how the built environment influences human health. As a social entrepreneur and architect, Finn founded Cognitive Design in 2016 - a consulting and design firm that fuses architecture and health. Finn grew up in Atlanta (proof that natives exist) where he works and resides with his wife, Stephanie, and their two daughters. Matt’s interdisciplinary research and innovative thinking have been recognized by Healthcare Design magazine, who named Matt the 2016 HCD 10 Researcher. Additionally, Matt’s work has been featured by numerous academic institutions, media outlets and conferences.