Setting up, organizing, and working comfortably in your home workspace

Working from home can be safe, positive, and productive with a well-planned workspace.

It's important to use equipment in a way that helps you work in a healthy and safe manner. You will reduce the risk of injury if you maintain your body in a neutral position while sitting at a work surface. Maintaining a neutral position means you should be relaxed with your joints aligned (i.e., no twisting or awkward angles) to minimize stress on the body. Some relatively simple modifications can be made if you don't have the same adjustable equipment at home as in your workplace.

Here are some tips to help you achieve correct posture and reduce the risk of injury while working from home.

Setting up your workspace

Choosing a chair

- The chair you use should be stable with a back rest. Try using a small cushion or rolled up towel behind your lower back for additional lumbar support.

- You should be able to put three fingers of space between the back of your knees and the front of the chair. If not, add a cushion to the back to shorten the seat depth.

- Sit with your buttocks all the way back against the backrest. Your back should be nearly upright.

- Make sure you sit with your knees and hips at the same height to avoid pressure on the back of your thighs. Consider using a raised footrest (for example, a stool, box, or book) to support your feet. Make sure your footrest does not raise your knees higher than your hips.

Using your keyboard and mouse

On a work surface:

- Make sure the work surface you choose allows for a neutral posture and is not too high.

- Use an external keyboard and mouse and place them at the same height.

- Your elbows should be at the same height as the keyboard surface with your elbows at your side and not reaching forward.

- To keep your upper extremities neutral, position the keyboard and mouse just above your thighs so you can keep your shoulders relaxed and wrists straight.
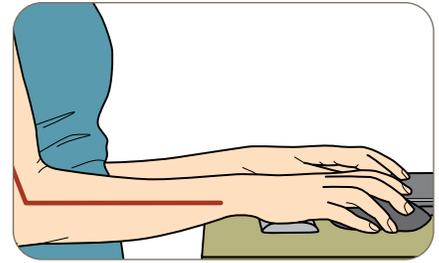
On your lap:

- If you are using the keyboard on your laptop, it should be placed on your lap. This means you will have to flex your neck, but your upper extremities will be neutral.

- If you use your laptop while sitting on a couch or a chair, put it on top of a pillow or lap tray. This will help keep your elbows at 90 degrees and reduce the amount of neck flexion when you look at the screen.

## Adjusting your monitor and reducing glare

- Ideally, the monitor should be an arm's length away and the top line of text at eye level. This requires creativity with a laptop. Neck flexion for short periods of time is okay for most people, but make sure you take regular stretch breaks. Looking slightly downward helps with eye strain.

- If you wear bifocals or progressives, your screen may need to be lowered so that you don't tip your head back.

- Possible sources of glare include windows, overhead lights, or any shiny surfaces.

- Try switching off room lights and using task lights. Adjust blinds and curtains.

- Windows should be at your side and not in front of or behind your monitors.

- Adjust brightness and contrast on the monitor so that it is similar to your surroundings.

- Clean your screen and eyeglasses.

- Use the zoom feature to adjust font sizes to help reduce eye strain.

For more information, please see the *How to Make Your Computer Workstation Fit You* publication and other information at **worksafebc.com/ ergonomics**

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Organizing your work area

- Reduce the risk of injuries by identifying the tasks you work on and analyzing them to find out the safest way to do them.

- High-use items (e.g., keyboard and mouse) should be reachable with your elbows at your side and not reaching forward.

- Occasionally used items (e.g., phone, pens) should be reachable with your arm extended while keeping your back on the backrest.

- Reference material and other documents should be in line with the monitor to avoid excess neck rotation and placed on a slanted surface, if possible, to reduce neck movement.

- Use a phone headset or speaker phone for long or frequent phone use. Avoid holding the phone with your shoulder.

- Make sure your work area is free from tripping hazards, including electrical cords, loose carpeting, and other objects.
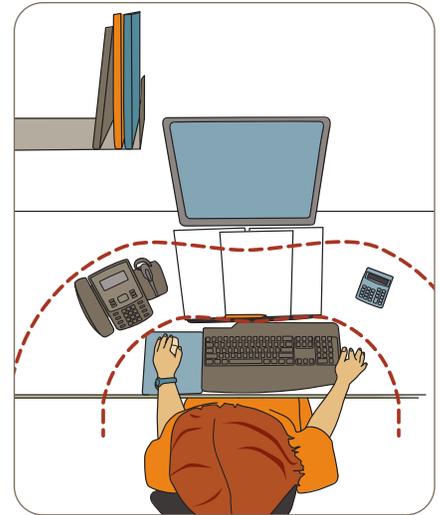
Working comfortably

- Examine your work habits and activities to ensure you are avoiding awkward postures and staying in one place for too long.

- Alternate tasks to change posture and use different muscle groups.

- Avoid working for too long on a task. Try to insert shorter tasks in the middle of longer ones.

- You may have less interruption at home, which can lead to fewer breaks from work. It's important to find ways to break work into smaller chunks.

- Follow the 20/20/20 guideline: Take a 20-second stretch break every 20 minutes, and look about 20 feet away.

- Leave the radio or TV on in the background if you miss the noise or energy of the office environment.

- Use a morning start-up routine (e.g., shower, get dressed, and eat breakfast) to help psychologically trigger your mind into work mode.

- Having an "end of the workday" routine (e.g., change your clothes, go for a walk, do some exercise) is also helpful to keep work and home life separated.
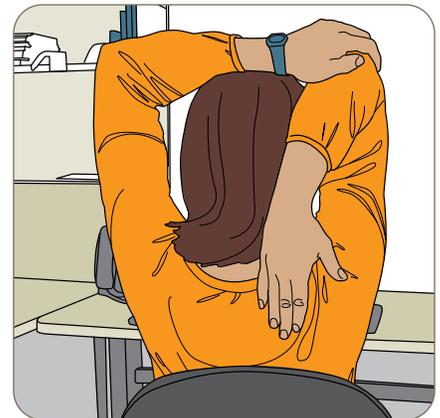
If you experience any discomfort when working at home, discuss this with your manager immediately.

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