



MEMO

Home Ergonomics

April 7, 2020

In an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19, the number of employees temporarily working from home has increased. This shift in environment can present problems regarding proper workstation set-up. The following suggestions will allow employees to implement proper ergonomic set-up and to continue to work productively while at home.

Use these recommendations to set up your home workspace:

- Define your workspace. Find a space or room in your home where there are limited distractions and, if possible, it is separate from other living areas and away from the television.
- Select a chair that will provide an appropriate amount of support throughout the day. If you're stuck with a hard kitchen chair, try sitting on a pillow or cushion for comfort and place a rolled-up towel behind your lower back for lumbar support.
- Be sure your thighs are parallel with the ground while seated; this may require a footstool so your legs aren't hanging. A yoga block or some large books could be used if a footstool is not available.
- Maintain a neutral wrist posture by choosing a work surface that is not too tall or too short. Ideally, you want to keep your wrists straight while typing and using your mouse. Avoid resting your wrists on the edge of the surface, as this can create discomfort in the forearms and hands. If necessary, use a rolled-up dish towel or other soft material along the front edge of the keyboard to reduce the pressure. If your chair has arms, place your keyboard and mouse at the edge of the work surface so you can rest your forearms on the chair arms.
- If you're using a laptop rather than a desktop computer, maintain a neutral neck posture by tilting the monitor upward. This provides a better angle to view the screen and reduces neck flexion.
- Using a standard keyboard and mouse can help reduce the negative postures associated with long-term laptop use. Simply plug the tools into your laptop and raise the laptop such that the screen is in line with your line of sight. You might need a box or books to do so.
- Don't feel restricted to a single working position. The beauty of working from home is that you can move around to many different working areas, such as sitting on a recliner with a tray, or standing at your countertop. Frequently changing positions throughout the day is a great way to relax tense muscles, keep your blood flowing and give your body a break. Try taking frequent breaks from your workstation every 20-30 minutes. Try taking phone calls while standing, get a cup of water, etc.
- Don't forget to stretch. For ideas, refer to <https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/ergonomics/office/stretching.html>.
- If you require a piece of equipment to do your job safely, please have a conversation with your supervisor.

- Review the following resources for more information:
 - <https://hr.mcmaster.ca/resources/covid19/faqs/#Work>
 - https://www.wsps.ca/WSPS/media/Site/Resources/Downloads/quick_steps_for_setting_up_your_temporary_laptop_workstation.pdf
 - [Home Workstation: Self-Assessment Safety Checklist](#)

Please keep in mind that during these extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic and the temporary work from home arrangements – it may not be practical to action everything in the checklist. If you have questions or concerns, contact Faculty of Health Sciences Safety Office at fhss@mcmaster.ca.