

Ergonomic tips for setting up a work station at home





Introduction

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, many of us are working from home. Working from home is comfortable in many ways, but comes with its own set of challenges. It can be frustrating to stay focused and be productive while you have distractions around like background noise, kids, and pets. And few people have dedicated home office spaces and furnishings.

We all recognize that back pain and other musculoskeletal disorders/MSIs are always a significant risk with computer work. Quite understandably, these are more prevalent without suitable ergonomic equipment – which most people do not have at home.

It can be tricky to keep a good work-life balance while working from home where the lines are blurred. You need to be disciplined and follow a regular schedule. There are simple things you can do:

- Move to the couch if you're reading a reference book or documents.
Taking a phone call? Why not walk while you talk?
- At home, it may be tempting to keep visiting the fridge for snacks.
Munching on healthy snacks like nuts, seeds and fruit and keeping your body healthy will help you stay focused during these unsettling times
- Developing healthy working habits, moving lots, drinking plenty of water, and adopting good posture, can make working at home comforting and productive

Don't worry; we are here to help! By following these few simple ergo tips, you can be more productive and avoid back pain and injury. Follow this guide to maintain a neutral, well supported posture throughout the day while changing positions and activities at a regular intervals.

Tip 1 Space

- Select a designated area/corner at home that is comfortable, with ample light
- Having a designated area of your own will help you to get in to work mode
- Set up your workstation on a hard and flat surface like a desk and table.
- Avoid working from a bed or couch

Tip 2 Equipment

- Use an external monitor if you have one. A TV with HDMI/VGA could be used as a monitor
- Use a laptop stand or raise the laptop with stack of books to elevate your screen to eye level
- You will need an external keyboard and mouse if you try this
- Elevate your chair or add a pillow on your seat if your shoulders are shrugging

Tip 3 Posture

- Improvise! Maintain a neutral well supported posture using household items like cushions to support your lumbar area if your chair can not support your back effectively
- Work surface should be at your belly button height
- Cardboard boxes can support your feet if your chair is raised to match work surface height
- Keep changing your posture. Most of MSIs happen due to static posture and repetition

Tip 4 Movement

- Variety is key; at least once every two hours, try working on a different surface in your home
- Use the 20-20-20 rule to give your eyes a break from the strain of looking at a monitor:
Every 20 minutes look 20 feet away for 20 seconds
- Use these micro breaks for simple stretching

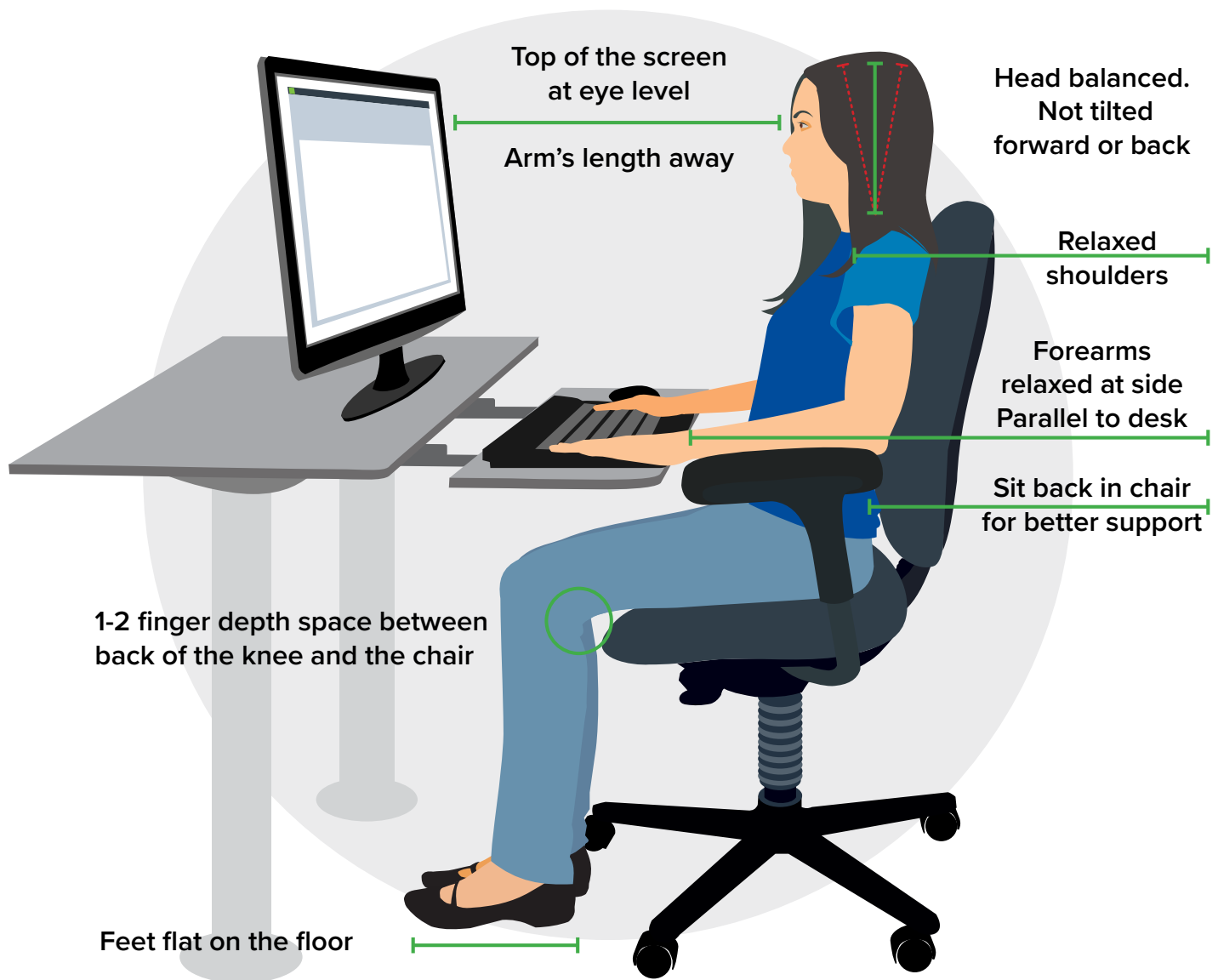
Tip 5 Routine

- Follow a regular routine, and continue activities you normally do in a work day
- Help family members understand that even though you're at home, you are still working
- Set out blocks of time of uninterrupted work, then take breaks with your loved-ones

Tip 6 Connection

- If you not used to working from home, the sudden isolation could be challenging
- Stay connected with colleagues using online chat or email whenever you can
- It's important to try to keep up socializing, even if it is virtual
- You don't always have to talk about work. Sometimes the best ideas come to us in informal, entirely unrelated chats

Setting up and using your home office work station



Take regular micro breaks to help relieve strain

Work 20 minutes • Break 20 seconds • Look 20 feet away

The infographic features a central circular timer with the number '20' in green digital font. The timer is surrounded by the text 'DO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING STRETCHES'. Ten circular icons, each containing a silhouette of a person performing a different stretch, are arranged around the timer. The stretches include: 1) Seated neck rotation (two people sitting in chairs, heads turning in opposite directions). 2) Standing shoulder rotation (two people standing, arms extended forward, shoulders rotating). 3) Seated leg extension (two people sitting in office chairs, one leg extended forward). 4) Seated torso twist (two people sitting in office chairs, twisting their torsos). 5) Standing arm raise (two people standing, arms raised overhead). 6) Standing backbend (one person standing, bending forward). 7) Seated neck extension (two people sitting in office chairs, heads tilting back). 8) Seated neck flexion (two people sitting in office chairs, heads tilting forward). 9) Seated shoulder stretch (two people sitting in office chairs, one arm extended across the chest). 10) Eye focus (a close-up of an eye with a dashed line indicating focus on a point 20 feet away).

DO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING STRETCHES

20

Look 20 feet away from your screen

1 Choose a designated space

It can be difficult at times to find a quiet place at home free from distraction, especially for those who do not regularly work from home. It is important that you select a designated area/ corner at home that is comfortable and has ample light to be productive. Set up your workstation on a hard, flat surface like a desk or table. Avoid working from bed or couch. Just having a designated area of your own will help you to get into work mode.

2 Work equipment

If you have an external monitor, use it. A TV with HDMI/VGA can be used as a monitor too. If working with a laptop, use a laptop stand, or raise the laptop with stack of books to elevate your screen to eye level. You will need an external keyboard and mouse if you try this. Elevate your chair or add a pillow on your seat if you find your shoulders are lifting up around your ears.

3 Strive for optimal posture

Don't worry if you do not have access to so-called ergonomic equipment - improvise!

The key is to maintain a neutral, well supported posture. To be able to achieve that, you can use a cushion or pillow to support your lumbar spine if your chair does not support your back effectively. Your work surface should be at belly-button height. Use boxes to support your feet if you have to raise your chair to match the height of your work surface. Above all, keep changing your posture. No position is best unless you change it regularly! Most MSIs happens due to static posture and repetition.

4 Move around and change

Variety is key. Change it up at least once every two hours, and try working on different surfaces around your home. Use the 20-20-20 rule to give your eyes a break from the strain of looking at a monitor: every 20 minutes look 20 feet away for 20 seconds. Studies shows that micro-breaks improve productivity. Use micro-breaks for simple stretching. (Make time separately for regular exercise; these micro-breaks simply help relieve strain on muscles from sitting too long in one position.)

5 Follow a routine and set boundaries

It is important to follow a regular routine and activities of a normal work day. Make sure family members with whom you share your home understand that just because you're at home, it doesn't mean you're necessarily available for impromptu chats or household chores.

6 Stay connected

If you are not used to working from home, the sudden isolation may be challenging. Stay connected with colleagues using a virtual platform whenever you can. It's important to try to continue socializing, even if it is virtual. You don't always have to talk about work. Sometimes the best ideas come to us in informal, entirely unrelated chats.

About us

The Manufacturing Safety Alliance of BC is the industry-led, nonprofit health and safety association that helps BC manufacturers and food processors build and certify safety programs that protect workers and cut costs.

The Alliance is also the WorkSafeBC Certifying Partner for the Occupational Safety Standard of Excellence (OSSE), the health and safety Certificate of Recognition for BC manufacturers.

The Alliance offers safety certification, OHS consulting and advisory services, and broad selection of classroom and online training. Our vision is to partner with BC's industry leaders to achieve cultural change that ensures safe workplaces for all employees.

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