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Health and Safety Guidance on Working from Home

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Comments or queries relating to the contents of this document should be referred to:

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Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic more of us will be working at home. This document provides some practical advice to enable you to achieve the best possible workstation set-up and look after your musculoskeletal health. Additionally this guidance is also intended to enable those who are working from home for short periods of time or for extended periods of time, assess any relevant hazards at home and put in place sensible management controls. There are also some helpful links to information on working at home and tips on maintaining a healthy work/life balance together with tips on how to manage staying indoors and help with wellbeing.

While the University has a duty to take reasonable care of staff's health and safety, staff are expected to take primary responsibility for ensuring safe working conditions in their home.



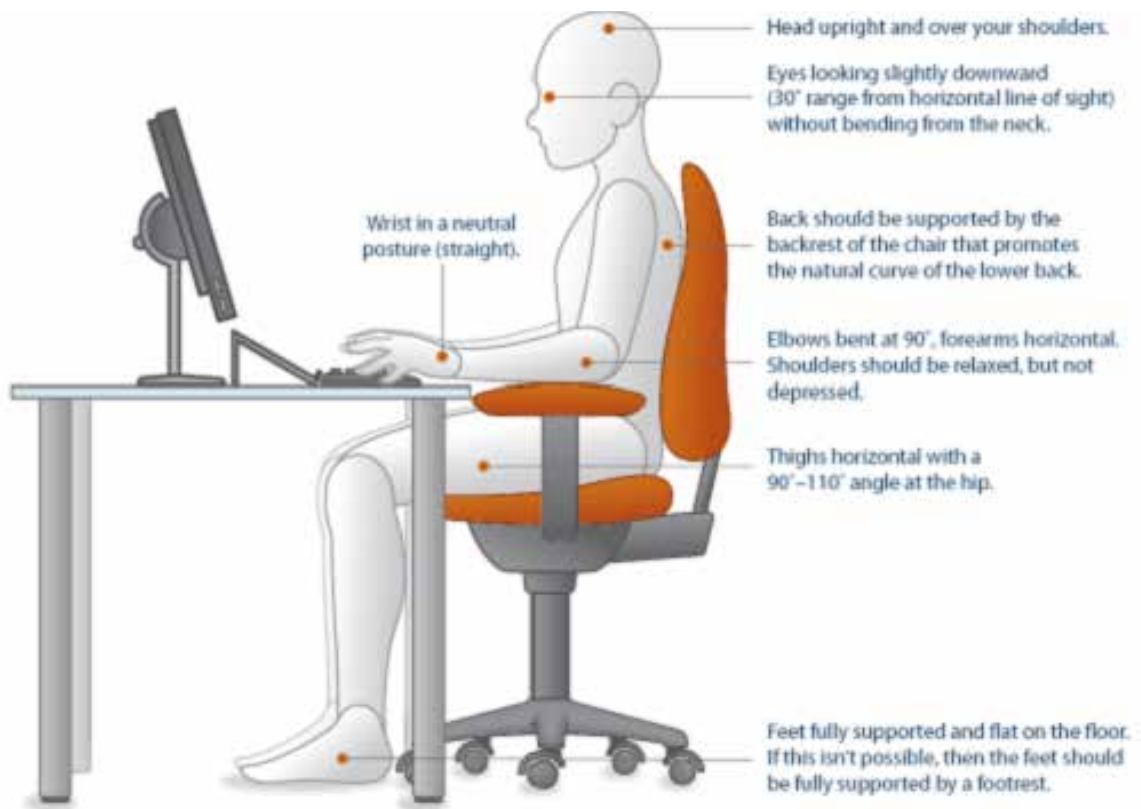
I will be working from a home office

Setting up your workstation correctly at home is equally as important as when you are in the office, and the same principles apply. If you have a home office with a desk, chair and personal computer please try and follow the DSE checklist as far as you possibly can and try and achieve the ideal sitting position (see image below). If you can't achieve this you could try implementing some of the measures suggested in the rest of this document, where relevant.

I will be working from a kitchen/ dining table with a laptop/tablet

Location

Use a table and chair rather than your sofa or bed. Check your electrical equipment is still safe to use. Do not overload sockets or daisy chain extension leads. Take care to avoid cables running across the floor which may present a trip hazard to you or other family members. Use adhesive tape to temporarily fasten the cables to the floor if this cannot be avoided. Try to maintain the area as you would at work and designate this as your home office area.



Sitting position

Have a look at the ideal sitting position image above. Try and mimic this as far as you can.

Chair

Try and keep your knees below your hips and an open 100 degree hip angle (see image above). As it is unlikely that you will have an adjustable chair you can try to get into an ideal sitting position using a cushion or pillow (folded in half) to sit on and a rolled up towel against your lower back for lumbar support. These measures will help to take the strain and load off your spine but only use them if they feel comfortable. If you are unsure, contact a Safety Officer (see 'Additional Help and Support' below). Make sure that your feet are planted on the floor. If you can't do this use a biscuit tin, Tupperware container or similar as a footrest. If you have a footrest at work and can take it home please do so.

Screen Glare

If you can, try not to put your laptop/tablet directly underneath a bright artificial light. Try and use natural light as much as possible. Where possible, position yourself sideways to a window rather than having the window directly in front or behind you.

Screen height

If you have a laptop or tablet stand, use this to raise your screen. If you do not have one of these, raise your laptop/tablet up using books, biscuit tins etc. as best you can. You may not achieve the ideal position but aim to raise your laptop/tablet by a minimum of 15 cm. Your eyes should be level with the top third of your screen when you are looking straight ahead. Even a small height adjustment should help. The goal is to avoid dropping your head as much as possible to try and avoid neck and shoulder strain.

Mouse and Keyboard

If you are raising your laptop/tablet use an external keyboard and mouse so that you are not working with your arms too high. See if you can take your keyboard and mouse home with you, particularly if you already have ergonomic ones. Make sure that you have enough USB ports to connect these. Your elbows should be at a 90 degree angle, tucked closely to your body, and your wrists should be in a neutral position. This posture helps keep you from rounding your shoulders and pulling your neck muscles.

If you can't attach an external mouse and keyboard, leave your laptop in place on the table rather than raising it up but you must take more breaks. Try and move every 15 minutes (more on taking breaks and exercises below).

Wellbeing – Taking Breaks and Exercise

It is important to take regular breaks and maintain positive wellbeing when working. Regardless of your set-up, the best way to look after your musculoskeletal health is to take regular breaks and to move around as much as possible. The more ‘makeshift’ your set-up, the more important it is for you to move regularly. If you have a good home office set-up, take a break for 5-10 minutes every hour. For other set-ups take a break every 15-20 minutes.

Here are some tips to help you to move more:

- Stand up every time you use the phone
- Try and do more work activities away from the screen e.g. reading paperwork
- Set up a reminder e.g. a timer on your phone. You can also install apps such as Break Reminder (find it on Microsoft Store) on your computer that allow you to set reminders.
- Take your breaks/drinks and refreshments away from the home office workspace to help with your work/life balance.

Here are some workstation exercises you can do in your micro-breaks.

posturite.co.uk/help-advice/useful-resources/learning-guides/workstation-exercises.

It is important to stay connected when home working. Keep in contact with your team leader and colleagues. All team leaders should maintain contact with their teams. Using Microsoft Teams is an ideal way of doing this and will let you share conversations with all team members or individually.

Webinar

We recommend that you watch this Posturite Webinar (YouTube), which discusses issues around working from home with computers and will help you to put this guidance into practice.

youtube.com/watch?v=tBFf1NZkJKE

Additional Help and Support

You can find more advice and guidance on the Posturite website.

posturite.co.uk/help-advice/useful-resources/advice-sheets

If you have any questions contact safety@qub.ac.uk and one of the Health and Safety Officers will be able to offer support.

MIND the mental health charity, have released a ‘plan for staying indoors/avoiding social contact’ which is full of information and ideas to help with taking care of your mental health and wellbeing.

mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing

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Keep elbows
at 90°



Adjust screen
height



Support the
lower back



Remember to
take breaks