



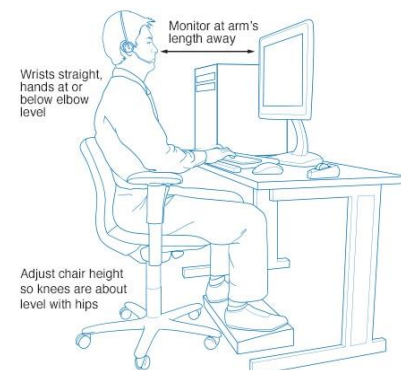
Ergonomic Tips to Reduce Musculoskeletal Strain When Working from Home

Work-related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WMSDs) are injuries or disorders attributed to the work environment which typically includes sitting for long periods of time or working in an unnatural posture. This is where the practice of Ergonomics comes into place. Ergonomics is the practice of identifying and controlling workplace risks, most often relating to musculoskeletal injuries. This could include muscle strain, repetitive movement injuries, and postural injuries. The goal of ergonomics in the workplace is to put measures into place that will maintain your spine's natural posture and a relaxed neck and shoulders. For best practice, keep your spine and legs seated at a 90-degree angle, elbows close to the body at a 90-degree angle as well maintaining feet flat on the floor.

Working at home can contribute to musculoskeletal distress and aggravate aches and pains as we may not be working in a standard office setting. For some people, working from home means working on the couch, bed, dinner table or even kitchen countertop. If you are worried about your workspace at home, here are some helpful tips to reduce the risk of musculoskeletal strain.

Workspaces that are seated:

- Place your feet flat on the floor or on a footrest to ensure that your feet can be flat. If you do not have a footrest, use 1-2 stacked books. It is useful to also wear supportive shoes even if you are sitting at home.
- Make sure the length of your thighs are supported on your chair.
- Your lower back needs to be supported to maintain natural posture. Consider placing a pillow at the small of your back to reinforce the natural curve of your back. You can also use a rolled-up towel and secure it to your chair using a scarf or long piece of fabric.
- Hips should be level. Sitting for a long time could become uncomfortable if hips are not level, so consider adding an additional cushion to your chair or folder towel or blanket if needed.
- Keep relaxed shoulders and arms, but avoid leaning forward or hunching your shoulders into an unnatural posture.
- Keep your elbows close to the body to avoid straining your neck and shoulders.
- Make sure your keyboard and mouse (if using either) are at a natural position. This means your elbows can be bent at a 90-degree angle and still reach your keyboard without strain. This helps maintain your natural posture and reduces strain on your shoulders and neck.



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- Raise your computer so that your eyes are level with the top of the screen. Looking down at your computer screen and keyboard can cause strain in your neck and shoulders. You can do this by placing your screen or computer on a few stacked books or even a box.
- Keep your head straight and not bent forward straining to be close enough to your computer screen. Screen should be about an arm's length away.
- When using a mouse, avoid repetitive movements only at the wrist to avoid strain. Instead, lift your arm with your hand to move the mouse.
- Stand up or move around when you start to feel restless or notice pain in your hips.

Standing workstations:

If you want to create a standing workstation, it's really not that difficult! Standing will give you a break from sitting, increases the blood flow in your lower limbs and will help maintain your natural posture. You can achieve a standing workstation by simply stacking books, using a box or a lap tray to raise your computer to a comfortable position at eye level. Here are some additional tips to avoid musculoskeletal injuries while using an improvised standing workstation.

- Wear shoes with good foot support, such as trainers and avoid heeled shoes.
- Make sure your knees are slightly bent. Avoid locking your knees while standing.
- Shift your weight by moving side to side and change leg position often.
- You can put one foot on a stack of books or a box to slightly bend one leg at a time if this is comfortable.
- Keep your elbows close to the body to avoid straining your neck and shoulders.
- Place your keyboard and mouse at elbow level to maintain a 90-degree angle.
- When using a mouse, avoid repetitive movements only at the wrist to avoid strain. Instead, lift your arm with your hand to move the mouse.
- Raise your computer so that your eyes are level with the top of the screen. You can achieve this by stacking your computer with books or a sturdy box.
- Keep your head straight and not bent forward straining to be close enough to your computer screen. Screen should be about an arm's length away.
- Sit down when you start to feel fatigued
- Avoid leaning over or onto your standing desk as this will put your spine into an unnatural position and can cause pain.

Regardless of which position you are working in, it is important to take frequent breaks to walk around, stretch and look away from your screens to avoid digital eye strain. If you have any questions about how to optimize your home work space with simple do-it yourself (DIY) solutions, contact IRC's [Staff Health Advisor](#).

Additional Resources:

- <https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ergonomics/ergoprimer/pdfs/Computer-Workstation-Checklist.pdf>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/office-ergonomics/art-20046169>