

SAFETY MEMO

January 16th, 2023 – Ergonomics and Teleworking



Did you know?

A version of this memo was previously published in April 2020. Please check the website for the original memo.

Introduction

With the recent increase in employees working from home multiple times per week, here are some suggestions to improve ergonomics and time management.

Setting up your Home Office¹

Choose an adequately lit part of your home. It could be a bedroom or dedicated office in your home, but it could also be the kitchen table. Ensure visual and audio privacy are provided if you deal with sensitive documents and personnel issues.

Choose a chair that supports your spinal curves; adjust the height of the chair so your feet rest flat on the floor or use a footrest; adjust arm rests, if any, to rest your arms gently on the supports with your shoulders relaxed. If you need additional lumbar support, place a rolled-up towel between your lower back and the chair.

Use a desk or table surface that provides clearance for knees, thighs, and feet. Place your laptop in the middle of the surface, away from the edge, to ensure forearm support.

Setup your laptop on a riser, a docking station, or on top of books so that the top of the screen is at or slightly below eye level. If you are using monitors, ensure all monitors are setup at about an arm's length away, with the top of the monitor at or slightly below eye level.

Use these tips for best eye comfort:

- Follow the **20-20-20** rule to reduce eye fatigue:
 - After **20 minutes** of work
 - Look at an object from about **20 feet** (6 m) away
 - For **20 seconds**

Keep frequently used items like phone, pens and pencils, paper, and other stationery items close at hand. Stand up to reach anything that cannot be comfortably reached from a seated position.

Use a headset or speaker phone when making phone calls. This will help you avoid bending your neck when trying to speak and write at the same time.



Figure 1: Ergonomically unsafe usage of a cellphone. Courtesy of iStock

Prolonged Remote Work from Home

Regardless of if you are working from home or working in the office, take frequent breaks. Set a timer for 30min intervals and take a quick stand and stretch break. It is important to keep in mind that after a prolonged period of immobility, any movements of greater intensity must be done gradually. Listen to your body and don't force yourself into a position. These exercises must remain painless.

Some great exercises you can do at your desk include:

- Stand and bend from side to side to stretch the muscles
- Torso twists to loosen up the spine
- Shoulder rolls
- Extend your arms forwards and round your upper back
- Bend at the waist and try to touch your toes
- Tilt your head to bring your ear to your shoulder, repeat other side
- While seated on the floor with your legs crossed, keep a straight back, and push down lightly on both knees with your hands.

Change your positions frequently to ensure your muscles get variety, and if possible, rotate your regular tasks to avoid repetitive strain injuries.

Consider going for a walk at lunch time and on your coffee breaks. You can walk around your house, your yard, or your neighborhood. The fresh air and exercise will clear your mind, give you inspiration when stuck on a difficult task, and give your body a break from being in a seated position for extended periods of time.

¹ Canada. Home office ergonomics: your prolonged remote work from home guide. Retrieved from https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/eccc/documents/pdf/corporate-info/covid-19/2020-04-08_Ergo_TeleworkTips_E.pdf

