

Frequent stretch breaks are just as important at home as in the office. Try the 20-20-20 rule. Take a 20-second stretch break every 20 minutes, and look 20 feet away.

A happier home office

By Marnie Douglas

You can make working from home work for you with a few simple tips to reduce musculoskeletal injury (MSI).

Working from home. Telecommuting. Working remotely. It's what many companies are asking of their employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. So how can you make working from home work for you? Working from home can be safe, positive, and productive with a well-planned workspace.

"Many people started working from home very quickly and may not have had the opportunity to set up a proper ergonomic workstation," explains WorkSafeBC ergonomist Emma Christensen. "It's easy to sit at the dining room table but there can be physical discomfort if the workspace isn't set up properly."

Some relatively simple modifications can be made if you don't have the same adjustable equipment at home as in your workplace.

Set it up correctly, stay organized, stay comfortable

Here are some tips to help you achieve correct posture and reduce the risk of injury while working from home.

1 Setting up

It's important to use equipment in a way that helps you work in a healthy and safe manner. Key is having the right chair height, as you will reduce the risk of injury if you maintain your body in a neutral position while sitting at a work surface.

The chair needs to be high enough so you are able to type and move with your wrists straight, shoulders relaxed. It should be stable with back support. Sit with your buttocks all the way back against the backrest, and your back should be nearly upright.

Back or lumbar support is also important. A rolled-up towel or a small cushion behind your lower back will help prevent slouching.

Sit with your knees and hips at the same height to avoid pressure on the back of your thighs. Consider using a raised footrest — a stool or box or even books will do — to support your feet. Make sure your footrest does not raise your knees higher than your hips.

Use an external keyboard and mouse and place them at the same height. Your elbows should be at the same height as the keyboard, with your elbows comfortably

at your side and not reaching forward. There should be no pressure from the edge of the desk.

Ideally, the monitor should be an arm's length away with the top line of text at eye level. Looking down or bending your neck for a short time is okay but remember to take regular stretch breaks. Looking slightly downward helps with eye strain.

② Staying organized

Having an organized work space is important. Excess clutter can be distracting and take away from productive work time. Make sure your work area is also free from tripping hazards such as electrical cords, loose carpeting, and other objects.

High-use items such as your keyboard and mouse should be reachable with your elbows at your side and not reaching forward. Items used less frequently (phone, pens) should be reachable with your arm extended while keeping your back on the backrest.

Use a phone headset or speaker phone for long or frequent telephone use. Avoid holding the phone with your shoulder as this can result in neck strain.

③ Working comfortably

Take note of your work habits and routines to make sure you are avoiding awkward postures and staying in one place for too long. Alternate tasks to change posture and use different muscle groups. Maintaining

a neutral position means you should be relaxed with your joints aligned (i.e., no twisting or awkward angles) to minimize stress on the body.

Remember to take regular breaks. If you have fewer interruptions at home, you may find yourself taking fewer breaks but it's important to find ways to break work into chunks.

So breaks are easier to remember, follow the 20-20-20 guideline — take a 20-second stretch break every 20 minutes, and look 20 feet away. This helps to lubricate your eyes and stretch your eye muscles.

Have a morning routine before settling at your desk (shower, get dressed, and eat breakfast) to help psychologically trigger your brain for work mode.

Just as important is having an end-of-day routine (change your clothes, take a walk, exercise) as this helps keep work and home life separated.

If you experience discomfort when working from home or need some extra help setting up your workspace, talk to your manager.

To find out more

For more information on home offices, see [Working from home: A guide to keeping your workers healthy and safe](#) and [Setting up, organizing, and working comfortably in your home workspace](#) at worksafebc.com/ergonomics 🍷



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