Working from Home Guidance, Common Problems and Discomfort

This document has been created to support employees who are working from home and start to experience discomfort.

It is really important that health and wellbeing is give consideration into the way in which an employee intends to carry out the work whilst at home. With appropriate consideration and adjustments to improve comfort, it is hoped that employees will be less likely to experience discomfort and fatigue.

We recognise whilst in our normal place of works that we if use our equipment wrongly that we will experience pain and discomfort in the back, neck, arms, wrists and legs. Inside the office we are able to adjust our work stations to improve comfort.

Whilst working from home we are encouraging employees to achieve a good posture from what you have available around the home. This document will show some adaptions that can be made to home furniture and other solutions, which could be implemented to improve comfort.

Set Up – Chair

Whether it be an operators chair or dining room chair, the chair needs to be set up to ensure that you have a good level of postural support for the task that you are carrying out.

To support a suitable position from the chair you are trying to keep your forearms level with the desk and are in a neutral position. If we don't then we are going to compromise our upper limb comfort. If you are having to make use of a chair that doesn't adjust in height you may need to use cushions to pad out the base and back.

We also need to make sure that our back is protected and ideally our hips to be slightly above our knees to help our lumbar curve. To achieve this posture you may need to use a foot rest.

The chair is going to be the most important feature of your workstation and guidance suggests that we need to make sure that whether it be an operators chair or dining room chair, the chair is giving the right postural support for specific tasks.

Common Problem – no adjustable chair
Use from around your home cushions and other items to provide padding like rolled up towels. The padding should be supporting you into the correct height for using the equipment and closing any gaps between your back and the back of the chair you are using. Try to keep your spine in contact with support at all times whilst working.

When you have no adjustable chair you really do need to get up and move often. Stand up and stretch frequently.

Common Problem – no foot rest

If you don't have a foot rest you can make use of an item from around your home such as a box, ream of paper, large book or biscuit tin.

Set Up – Display Screen

We need to be able to read what is displayed on the screen and if we can't read it comfortably then we are going to adopt a poor posture, which could result in eye strain and musculoskeletal discomfort.

If the screen is positioned centrally to us then we are less likely to bend or twist to read the screen.

If the screen is at arm's length away with the top section in line with your eyes then that is generally a good reading distance, which also reduced neck and back strain when typing and reading the screen.

Common Problems – screen is low level as it is a laptop or I have no screen riser.

You can raise the laptop or screen with an item from around the home such as a plastic box, biscuit tin or books. Just be cautious that if raising a laptop then this may generate heat and it would be a good idea to place onto an item between the laptop and raised surface such as a place mat or tray.

When adopting this adjustment in height, you will only achieve good posture when you are using a separate keyboard and mouse.

Set Up – Input Devices – Keyboard / Mouse / Number Key Pad etc.

Input devices should be in a suitable position near your body when they are in use. The position should not allow you to over stretch and the wrist and hand should be in a neutral relaxed position.

As a guide, these items should be – when in use – 10-15cm away from the body. This will prevent over stretching and twisting of upper limbs to use the equipment which could result in musculoskeletal discomfort in the shoulders, neck, wrist and hands.

Common Problems – no mouse or keyboard

If you are unable to find the above in your home, is it possible to borrow these items from the workplace, family member or friend. Having these items installed will make a difference to the overall set up of the workstation.

If you can't get these devices immediately, ensure that you take regular comfort breaks or rotate your tasks. Stretch, change positions and stand up frequently.

Set Up – Task Breaks

Whether you have the perfect setup, or you are fixing up a workstation with what you have, your working day must include frequent breaks or changes in activity.

Employees are expected to incorporate breaks which allows for

- Movement to avoid fatigue and discomfort from the static posture
- Rest the eyes – look into the distance and allow your eyes to return to their natural state of vision. Blinking will also help to refocus your field of vision.
- Incorporate micro breaks throughout the day – shake your hands, stand and stretch and look into the distance

These breaks all help to reduce fatigue, discomfort and help to remain productive whilst working from home during this time. Employees are expected to and are responsible for ensuring that task breaks are adequate for their working hours and set up.

As a guide for task breaks:

Desk Set Up	Break Recommendation
Good DSE Set Up	Movement and eye breaks every 20 minutes Standing and stretching every hour or more often if you start to feel uncomfortable.
Compromised Laptop/Tablet Set UP	When reading, use a stand or tilt the tablet to reduce the need for you to bend your head forward to read. Whenever possible try to place the tablet on a surface rather than holding it. If you are using the on-screen keyboard for extended periods consider using an external keyboard. Use a light touch when using the screen it will be more efficient as well as preventing problems. When typing or touching the screen regularly have the tablet flat or only slightly angled to ensure your wrists are not in awkward positions. If you find you are leaning forwards to view the tablet, enlarge the image or text. Keep your screen clean for good visibility and hygiene reasons. Remember movement is really important, if you find yourself using a tablet intensively for more than 10-20 mins take a short break, stretch your hands, shoulders and neck and look into the distance to relax your eyes.

Mobile Device (low input) – Phone	*Whilst on Telephone Calls:* Swap and move the device between hands, shoulders and neck Make use of a headset/ear phones. *Checking e-mails and responding:* Short duration only. To reduce typing consider phoning instead. Hold device up higher to reduce bending of neck to read text Look away from the screen frequently to relax the eyes Increase font size When large amounts of typing is requested, can you use a laptop/computer instead? See useful resources for tips on how to reduce *tech neck*

There are a number of activity sheets within the useful resources section which will provide guidance on desk based exercises. These activity sheets have been developed to help reduce the risk of discomfort in the back, neck, shoulders, fingers, wrists and forearms.

Common Problems – lack of movement

It is the responsibility of the employee to ensure that frequent breaks and stretches are taken and carried out away from the work equipment.

This is particularly important when there is a poor basic set up which may well be the case during this time.

The worse posture you can have is a static posture for a long period of time without breaks and stretches. You should try your best to incorporate breaks and stretches so that you can be comfortable and pain free for the short time that you are working from home.

If you are unable to do so, you should discuss this with your manager.

Scan the below for some guidance on exercises

https://www.posturite.co.uk/media/pdf-downloads/Workstation-Exercises.pdf

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Set Up – The Working Environment

Whilst working from home you will have a number of different areas of the home where you can incorporate some active working. For example, do you always need to sit in front of your device?

Why not move away from the dining room table and chair and take the phone call whilst sat on your sofa or in your comfortable chair? You could also sit somewhere else in the home to read through paperwork or review a few simple documents on a tablet – returning to your laptop to interact with the document you are reviewing.

Back Discomfort

If you find that you are experiencing back discomfort it may be due to your set up. Therefore, active working and frequent breaks are really important. Check the following:

- Check your seat height. Are you elbows about keyboard height with your forearms level with the desk?
- Check that your feet are supported – do you need to create a foot rest
- Is your back supported by the back of the chair? If not, use a rolled up towel for the lumbar/cushion to close the space between the chair and the back.
- Are you leaning forward to use the equipment? If so, can you bring the equipment closer to the body?
- Are you taking sufficient breaks? If you do not move you are going to experience discomfort.

Neck Discomfort

If you find that you are experiencing neck discomfort it could be due to awkward twisting and neck movements you are making to use your equipment. Therefore, active working and frequent breaks are really important. Check the following:

Scan the below for some guidance on reducing neck and shoulder discomfort.
https://www.posturite.co.uk/media/pdf-downloads/Neck-Shoulder-Pain-Infographic_A4.pdf

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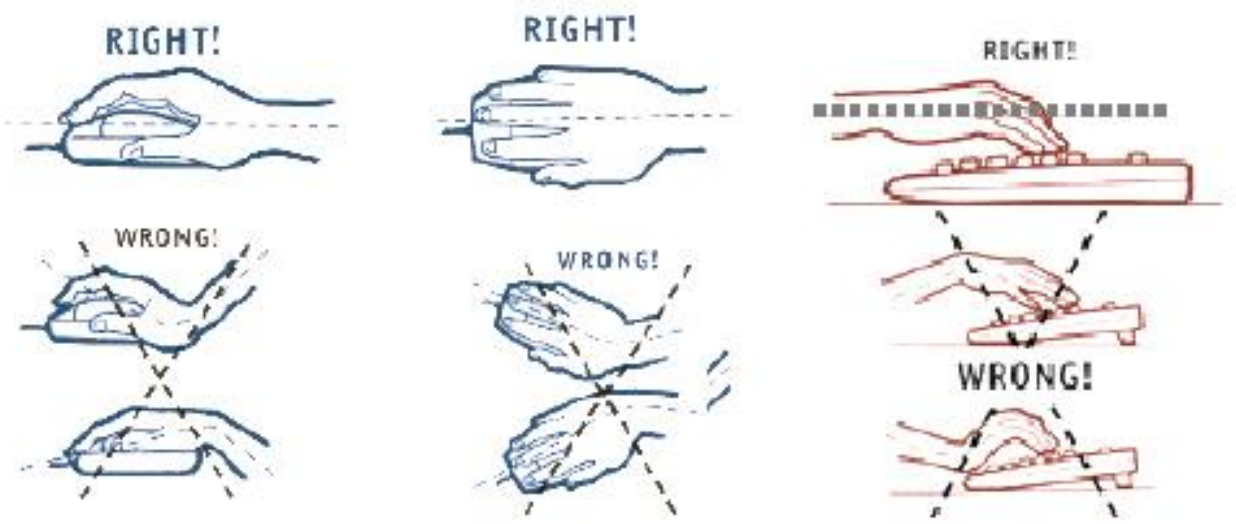
- Screen position – is it too far away? It should be fingertips away to prevent you leaning to read the screen
- Screen position – is it to one side? Centralise the screen to avoid awkward neck twists to read the screen

- Is glare or reflection causing poor posture? Can you reduce glare by screen tilt/use window curtains? Can you change blind slats so that the sun is not directly onto the computer screen?
- Are you taking sufficient breaks? Could you incorporate some neck stretches into your daily routine?

Upper Limb Discomfort – arms and wrists

If you find that you are experiencing arm and wrist discomfort it could be due to the postural set up and input devices. Therefore, active working and frequent breaks are really important. Check the following:



- Are your forearms and wrists level and neutral? Is it possible to adjust the height of the chair/working desk? If not, frequent breaks with stretches
- Are you using a separate standard size keyboard which is separate to your laptop? If not, consider finding one to use
- Is your separate keyboard, when keying, positioned with the letter "H" in line with the centre of your body?
- Are your hands relaxed when using the input devices?
- Are your shoulders and upper arms relaxed and by your side? Not overstretching or hunched.
- Are you carrying out any repetitive or awkward movements? Can you include any task rotation?

Eye Discomfort

If you find that you are experiencing eye discomfort it could be due to the setup of your screens or infrequent eye breaks. Therefore, active working and frequent breaks are really important. Check the following:

- Check that the screens are a suitable height and distance – top section in line with your eyes with the screen at arm's length away. Too close or too far will result in eye strain.
- Is the screen angled with no reflections?
- Is the lighting suitable? Too dark or too bright can cause eye discomfort. For more light, try a lamp to assist with additional artificial lighting
- Rest your eyes during breaks – look into the distance and let your eyes relax to their natural state of vision
- Make sure your screen is regularly cleaned.

Scan the below for 10 hacks for fighting digital eye strain:
https://www.posturite.co.uk/media/pdf-downloads/Eye-Strain-Infographics-A4.pdf

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Useful resources

ErgoMind AniMath 4.0, 3 Ratin Free	Scan the below and download an app to prompt breaks and stretches. Useful prompts will be displayed – for example: • Stretch your arms forward and rotate wrists – hold it for 5 seconds • Tilt your head forward and relax back of your neck for 10 seconds – repeat 3 times • Sit on the edge of your chair. Raise your right leg and hold for 10 seconds – repeat 2 times. Switch legs. SCAN ME
Laptop Ergonomics – Basic Tips – Adult or Child Laptop Use	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLwIP8cBaWA SCAN ME
Helpful hints for working from home short term	https://www.posturite.co.uk/media/pdf-downloads/Homeworking-Solutions_Infographic.pdf

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Guidance to reduce tech neck:	https://www.posturite.co.uk/media/pdf-downloads/Avoiding-Tech-Neck_2019.pdf?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=0219&utm_content=tech-neck SCAN ME