

COVID-19: Ergonomic Tips and Best Practices for Working from Home

As we work remotely to reduce the transmission of COVID-19, many of us will be using laptops or tablets to perform our tasks. For those of us that don't have a desk and an adjustable chair, that means working on a couch, bed or kitchen table. While working on our couch and bed may sound comfortable, working in awkward postures for extended periods of time can increase the risk of ergonomic-related injuries, such as tendonitis, rotator cuff, and carpal tunnel syndrome.

To minimize computer-related injuries while working from home, the following guidelines review how to set up your workstation and tips to help avoid musculoskeletal related disorders.

Chair

1. Use a chair that properly supports you.
2. Sit with your thighs parallel to the floor. If the table or desk you are using is too high and you do not have an adjustable chair, use a pillow to lift your body up to avoid shrugging your shoulders.
3. Use a footrest (or an equivalent sturdy object) to prevent your feet from dangling.
4. Make sure that your lumbar (lower back) is well supported. If necessary, use a pillow to minimize stress on the back if sitting on a hard surface such as a dining room chair.

Desk

1. If you do not have a desk, use a surface that emulates a desk (such as a table).
2. Make sure there is ample legroom. Surfaces that have items stored underneath (such as cabinets or drawers) take up leg space and can lead to awkward posture, such as leaning forward or extending your arms to use your input devices.

Monitors, Laptops and Tablets

1. Place the computer monitor about an arm's length away from you and set up the monitor so that the top line of the screen is at or below your eye level.
2. If using a tablet or laptop, use a sturdy object to raise the top of the screen to eye level. If possible, get a tablet/laptop stand from an online retailer to adjust the height of your equipment. There are various stands on the market. Examples include Goldtouch Go and the Simple Houseware Mesh Ventilated Adjustable Laptop Stand.*

*The NYC Health Department does not endorse any product referenced in this document.

Keyboard and Mouse

1. Laptops and tablets should be fitted with an external keyboard and mouse to prevent hand extension/reaching and contact stress.
2. Move your keyboard/mouse so that you can reach them with your elbows resting at your sides and your wrists in neutral posture position.

Telephones and Mobile Phones

1. Avoid cradling your phone between your shoulder and head, especially with prolonged phone use.
2. Use a loose, comfortable grip, while keeping wrists neutral. Alternate hands when holding phone for prolonged periods. (Gripping of mobile devices and twisting or bending of the wrists can cause strain on the fingers and wrists.)
3. Use a hands-free headset or use the speaker function on your phone to reduce undue strain from poor posture.

Environment

1. Work in an environment where you are not easily distracted.
2. Make sure there is enough light at your workstation for the task you are doing.
 - a. If you are working on a paper document, use an adjustable task light.
 - b. Position the task light below eye level to prevent dry eyes, eye strain or headache.
 - c. Position the task light opposite your writing hand so as not to cast shadow on the document.
 - d. Limit overhead light to reduce glare.

Other

1. Take two or three 30-to-60-second microbreaks each hour to allow your body to recover from periods of repetitive stress.
2. Vary your work posture by standing, moving to make or receive calls.
3. Arrange electrical cords carefully so that they are not a tripping hazard. Ensure that cords are plugged into a safe outlet that is not overloaded.
4. Make sure your home has clear and unobstructed hallways, walkways, stairs and exits.
5. Follow the 20-20-20 rule for your eyes. This means that for every 20 minutes you spend staring at a screen, you should look away at an object that is 20 feet away for a minimum of 20 seconds.

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.