

10 TIPS

for Making Sure You Stay Comfortable and Sane in your Temporary Home Workspace



Working from home sounds simple (not to mention convenient) but you're probably realising by now, how easy it is to get distracted or how quickly you have developed back or neck pain from your makeshift 'home office'.

Kitchen tables and bedrooms have temporarily become home offices, meaning you may be working in less-than-ideal ergonomic conditions, for example a chair that's too low or a table that's too high. Poor ergonomics can make or break this experience and when those ergonomics are poor, it adds further stress to your day when pain develops.

In addition, when your home suddenly becomes your workplace, it can be hard to concentrate on tasks or to figure out when to stop being available, which also makes it tough to 'call it day', as you would when you physically leave your office.

With many professionals carrying out remote working for the unpredictable and foreseeable future, we've put together some advice to help you boost your productivity and stay comfortable in this new working environment.

1. THE ERGONOMICS

I. Temporary Footrest

The positioning of your feet, legs and hips is extremely important when it comes to creating an ergonomic workstation setup. It's recommended that your knees bend at a 90° angle to relieve pressure on your legs and promote healthy circulation, as well as relieve strain on your lower back. If

getting into this position means your feet aren't flat on the floor or worse still, are left to dangle, you need to act.

A footrest can help to restore good positioning. Books can be stacked to create a makeshift footrest and help to make your workstation more ergonomic. A box (not too soft and/or flimsy), crate, or even a hard-shell suitcase (which you won't be needing that for a while!) would also work as a footrest.

II. Laptop Screen Positioning

If you're working remotely, you're most likely to be using a laptop. It's easy to work on your laptop for a few hours at the weekend, but doing it for 40+ hours a week can lead to back, shoulder, and neck strain. Whatever you do, don't hunch over your laptop.

Unsurprisingly, it's best to have your screen directly in front of you so that you don't have to tilt your head to view it, but again this can be difficult with laptops, which often sit below eye level.

If you have a portable keyboard and mouse, consider stacking some books or props below your laptop as a makeshift laptop stand. Try to raise the screen to eye level, while using a separate keyboard and mouse.

At the very least, tilt the screen to reduce the strain on your neck and eyes. Avoid having your laptop open at 90° and instead tilt the screen back further to more like 110° to improve its position in your field of vision.

III. DIY Back Support

One of the most important features of an ergonomic desk chair is the support

it provides your back. Without this support, stiffness and pain may develop, which will not only affect your posture and movement but also add to your worries.

The solution thankfully is a simple one. Get a cushion and place it between your back and your chair. This can offer support to your lower back and you'll probably find it easier to sit comfortably for longer. Try multiple chairs if you have them, until you get the best fit.

IV. Table Height

Wherever possible, work at an appropriate height, where your elbows naturally fall flush with your table/desk height. Ideally your elbows should be bent to 90°, and your arms should be relaxed so your shoulders don't shrug upwards. This will promote better wrist alignment rather than impingement or carpal tunnel stress. Resting your arms on the table without shrugging your shoulders will also relieve tension in your neck and shoulders and reduce the development of tension and headaches. Setting a table that's too low up on books or some bricks, may be an option.

If you are used to a wrist support try finding some hard foam or chop up a swimming noodle or aid that can be shaped to make an alternative (if your child is likely to have a meltdown, blame it on a bored dog!).

Putting a firm cushion or tightly folded towel under your buttocks may help lift you on your chair so that the table becomes the correct height to rest your arms.



2. A DESIGNATED WORKSPACE

If possible can you create your own work space in a designated area? Ideally, your work and private life are clearly separated when you work from home – spatially too. Having a closed door really helps to block out unwanted noise from other people in the household. If you are living in a studio flat or have a smaller home, having an area designated as your office space can also help make it easier to switch into, and out of, work mode.

3. TAKE REGULAR BREAKS

Ergonomic practices are there to support and look after your body, but it's important that you listen to how your body is feeling. If your back is becoming uncomfortable or your neck is starting to hurt, take a break, stretch or do some exercises.

It's far more productive to take frequent breaks, approximately every 30 minutes, and release the pressure to your body than it is to endure it and become distracted and disgruntled by annoying aches and pains. Working from home can be lonely without interruptions from colleagues, or the requirement to walk to the coffee shop or copy room, which makes it even more important to take short regular breaks and move around.

4. FOLLOW THE 20/20/20 RULE

For every 20 minutes spent looking at a computer screen, it is recommended you should spend 20 seconds looking at something else 20 feet away. This gives your eye muscles a break and helps reduce eye strain.

5. THE DREADED COUCH AND BED

As tempting as it is, the couch or your bed is not an optimal place



to work at your computer for the entire day. Although it may seem comfortable to start with, having your legs or full body in a horizontal position can lead to muscle numbness and discomfort and slouching over a screen, without any back or arm support, will definitely lead to pain.

6. EAT PROPERLY

It's 9am and you have already visited the fridge 5 times! It's easy to snack throughout the day instead of eating like you do in the office. Making a meal, and taking a proper lunch break gives you the opportunity to stand up, walk around, and let your eyes, mind and body have a rest from the computer screen. Remember to stay hydrated and drink plenty of fluids.



7. TIMEFRAMES AND WORK BOUNDARIES

Having fixed timeframes in which you have to be available, makes it easier for you to shut down the computer at the end of the day. If there are no regulations, people tend to overwork themselves at home. And if the limits between work and free time aren't clearly demarcated, you can quickly become demotivated, or the time spent working may add to family pressure and stress.

Set up a schedule that fits in with you, your partner and the family if applicable. You may have to tag team your partner in babysitting versus work duties. Having a daily routine will help reduce the stress in the home.

At the end of the day, work is work, whether you do it in an office or within your own four walls. It means two things:

- 1) if you're working from home you're expected to deliver the same availability and performance as you would in the office, and 2) you also

have the same rights such as rest breaks and start and finish times, for example.

8. STAY IN CONTACT

Out of sight, out of mind? To keep this from happening, homeworkers should regularly contact their colleagues via chat, email, phone or voicemail. It's generally better to overcommunicate than to under-communicate – don't be afraid to be specific or overexplain yourself because a lot of feelings and emphasis is lost through non-verbal, or in-text communication.

Video conferencing will also help you to feel close to your colleagues again, and don't hesitate to take a few minutes to natter about personal matters.



9. MAINTAIN ORDER

A cluttered space is a cluttered mind. Your efficiency and productivity are directly associated with the tidiness of your working space. Try to be as organized as you are at the office. If small trinkets, plants and pictures distract you, get them out of sight but if you want your desk to be personal and motivate you, do exactly that.

10. PUT YOUR FACE ON

Don't get caught with an unexpected video conference call in your PJs with 5 day old hair! If you usually spend time putting together a 'look' for work, try to keep up this routine. The same goes for getting dressed. Some people could be accustomed to working the way they rolled out of bed, but many experts advise against this.



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