## INTRODUCTION

The University is committed to the health and safety of all its workers, students and visitors. During the COVID19 pandemic, it may be necessary for you to work from home in order to ensure your own health and safety and/or to help support the health and wellbeing of our community, and particularly its most vulnerable members, by minimising the spread of the disease.

If you already have a dedicated home office or desk space with an adjustable chair, a desk, monitor, mouse and keyboard, then just take a few moments to check that it is adjusted correctly for you, in line with this graphic, and remember to continue to take regular posture breaks and move around frequently during the day.

If you have the means and space to do so, this might be a good time to consider setting up a more permanent long term home work space which would include purchasing an office chair and desk and ensuring appropriate desktop equipment. Talk to your supervisor about borrowing your office mouse, keyboard and document holder during your time at home.

Workstation ergonomics: ideal set-up
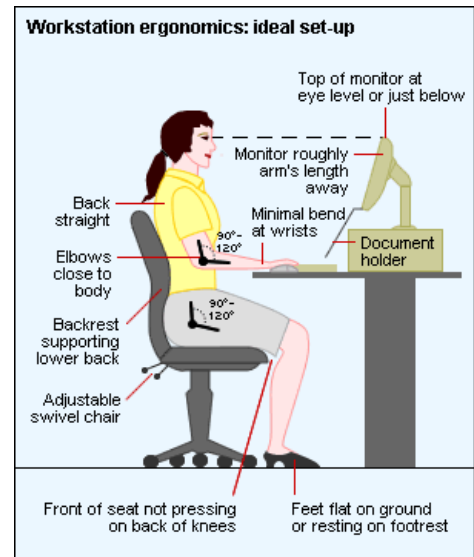
ADAPTING YOUR HOME ENVIRONMENT

In the interim, for many people, you will simply be adapting what you already have. This will usually mean using the dining table or kitchen bench. Here are some tips to ensure a safe and comfortable work set-up for your time at home for either the short or the longer term.

☐ If the chair is too low/work surface too high use a cushion or a folded towel to add some height. This also adds some softness if your chair is too firm.

☐ If the chair is too deep (long) or is not shaped in a way that supports your back, use a small cushion or a loosely rolled up towel to ensure that you have good contact with the support for your lower back.

☐ Where using a laptop as a full time home workstation, always use an external mouse and keyboard and elevate your monitor screen so that your eyes are level with the top of the screen. You can use a laptop riser as pictured here, or simply use household items such as books or a small box to support your laptop.

☐ If the chair is too high and puts pressure on your thighs, use a small box or a rolled up towel to raise and support your feet.

If standing: the principles are the same – elevate the screen to be level with your eyes, use an external mouse and keyboard if you're using a laptop. Consider using a traytable, or sturdy box on top of the bench or table to elevate your worksurface to provide an appropriate standing height (shoulders relaxed and elbows at roughly or slightly greater than 90 degrees when typing; eyes in line with the top of the screen) In standing, as always, ensure good supportive footwear and take regular posture breaks.

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OTHER HOME BASED SET-UPS

While we strongly recommend setting up a seated and/or standing workstation using a chair and a firm, stable work surface, we acknowledge that for some people this may not be at all possible, for others, the need to have a number of different postures/work areas is more appropriate than having just one, and for still others, the temptation to lounge on the couch with the laptop for a bit is sometimes just too great! Without condoning or condemning any of these choices, here are some tips for staying well, using a non-standard set-up:

The first and most important advice for all of these is - don't stay in these positions for long. You might "get away with" a poor posture for a short period of time, but when we are looking at fulltime hours, for an extended period of time, the risk of discomfort, pain and injury from maintaining such postures increases significantly. Use these alternative set-ups sparingly and as a means of breaking up your day by using different postures rather than staying in one all day, every day.

1. **On the couch with the laptop.**
   Risks: The main risks here are the lack of back support resulting in a rounded posture through the spine and hunched and forward postures of the neck and shoulders. This places strain on the lower back as well as on the neck and shoulders.
   Minimising the risks: Consider using a tray table to elevate your screen and equipment and use good cushions behind your back, and, if lying down, behind your head and neck. If you are rotating positions, then the couch will be less risky for activities that don't require heavy mousing or keying such as watching a webinar, online meetings, or reading a long document that doesn't require corrections/input.

2. **Floor sitting.**
   Risks: particularly if you are not accustomed to it, sitting on the floor places greater strain (through increased stretch) on the long muscles at the back of your legs and into your glutes and lower back. It also does not offer good support to your back. Lower back and hip strain and discomfort is common.

   Minimising the risks: sit on a cushion and sit up against something (a wall or furniture) using another cushion to give your back some support. This will take some of the pressure off the hip flexors and gluteal muscle groups while providing support and thereby less strain to the lower back. Use a tray table, low coffee table or similar to elevate your screen and equipment so that you are not hunching or slouching, placing strain on the neck and shoulders to reach the keyboard and view the screen.

3. **Working while lying down**
   Risks: In a lying position if you are using the keyboard there is a significant risk of neck strain through having your neck forward to view the screen in addition to having to hold your arms up to use the keyboard.
   Minimising the risks: If you are lying down while watching a webinar or other such online learning where you are NOT required to type or mouse or take notes, ensure that the screen is supported in a position that allows you to have your neck in a straight and relaxed position – consider side lying – and utilise an appropriate holder (such as a book or tablet holder) that gives you hands free positioning of the screen to minimise strain to the neck. This is a very difficult posture to make safe for work tasks.

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WORK ROUTINE

- Regardless of your set up, it is important to continue to take regular posture breaks – a bit of movement at least every 30 minutes, and ensure regular breaks of 5 – 10 minutes every 2 hours.
- Taking a lunch break of a minimum 30 minutes and using that time to get some exercise is also very important while working from home. As we are not getting the activity and physical movement of our commute, and not walking between classes or meetings, it is vital that we take that reduced movement into account and structure it into our home based work plans.
- It is also strongly recommended to maintain your usual daily routine as much as possible. Get up, shower and dress at your usual time, start and finish work activity at your usual times and stick to your usual sleeping habits. This will assist you not only during your time working from home, but will make it easier to transition back into the workplace when the time comes.

EYE HEALTH

During this time of working from home we are all taking advantage of technology that allows us to connect including Zoom, Teams, emails and other screen based work platforms. This means that our eyes are working very hard and spending more time than usual looking at screens without the breaks that they would get from either face to face interactions, walking between classes/meetings or commuting to and from work.

While computer based work doesn't damage the eye as such, it does place strain on the muscles of the eye to maintain the close distance viewing required for computer work. Taking regular breaks is important for our mind and body, but also for the eyes. Take regular time – every 30 minutes – to look away from your screen – ideally into the longer distance, out the window to the sky or the horizon or, if that's not possible, close your eyes for a few minutes to give them a short rest.

Take a few moments to adjust the screen resolution, colour and brightness of your home computer to minimise eye strain. If you are susceptible to headaches, often setting the screen to "warm" tones will help, but everyone is different so it is important to try a few options to see what is most comfortable for your eyes.

RESOURCES

Working from home information sheet -

http://imagedepot.anu.edu.au/whs/Information%20Sheet/Working%20from%20Home%20Information%20Sheet.pdf

Workstation Self-assessment checklist -

http://imagedepot.anu.edu.au/whs/3.11%20Manual%20Handling%20and%20Ergonomics%20Safety%20Management/Workstation%20Self%20Assessment%20Checklist.docx

Any questions or concerns please email your friendly WHS team at whs@anu.edu.au – we're here to help!

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