

# Three Ergonomics Tip to Improve Your Home Office

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Before the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated [8 million Americans](#) worked from home. With millions more now operating remotely, it's important to recognize how your at-home work environment can affect your health.

Poor ergonomics can cause musculoskeletal disorders such as carpal tunnel syndrome and tendinitis. You can take several steps to create a more ergonomically sound workspace that will help reduce the pains and strains that can come throughout the workday.

When you find yourself working from home, keep these three tips in mind.

## Watch Your Posture

Working in a traditional office environment offers workers equipment such as desks, supportive chairs and keyboards to help them maintain a position that will improve their posture. In the home working environment, however, many of those tools may not be available or readily accessible. It's important to find ways to use what is available in your home environment to make yourself more comfortable.

"If possible, you should have a supportive surface for your laptop or computer, your feet resting on the floor and a chair for back support" says Rachel Michael, director of consulting services at Exponent EHF and administrator for ASSP's [Ergonomics Practice Specialty](#).

Michael acknowledges that using a laptop presents its own ergonomic challenges, but says there are ways to improve your posture while working on a laptop.

"Using a laptop is one of the hardest things," she says. "They're not designed for us to be able to have our eyes and our head and our neck up where we have a neutral posture and can still see the screen and use our hands typing on the keyboard."

She encourages the use of a pillow or lap desk to raise laptops higher to help alleviate the strain on your head, neck and back. This will relieve the constant pressure on your back muscles caused by holding your head up when looking down.

"When you're using just a laptop, your head is leaning down and you're starting to bend at the waist," she says. "After a prolonged duration, that can result in discomfort of the head, neck, back and possibly arms and eyes as well."

She also says that while our bodies are resilient and can manage through repetition of awkward postures, it's important to not make those awkward postures a habit or a more permanent part of your daily work.

## **Take Breaks**

Although our bodies are resilient in managing through repetitive postures, it is best to take time throughout the day to break out of those postures. One of the most common causes of musculoskeletal disorders is repetitive motion, so taking steps to reduce that repetition is a proactive measure.

“The more you're outside of a traditional sitting posture, the more you're going to want to take breaks,” Michael says. “Get up, move, stretch and particularly get your head and shoulders back in more of an upright position.”

In situations where working doesn't require you to be seated, Michael encourages you to stand for 15- to 30-minute periods throughout the day. For instance, if you have a virtual meeting that doesn't require you to sit, consider switching that call to your phone and standing at a countertop or walking around during that meeting.

It's also important to monitor the amount of time you spend looking at a screen and take regular breaks and look away from your screen to reduce the strain on your eyes.

## **Have the Right Tools**

Although you may not be able to bring your office equipment home, you can bring some of those elements into your home to create a more comfortable working environment.

For example, if all you have is a laptop, considering using a laptop riser or sleeve to elevate the laptop screen. If your company doesn't provide such equipment and you're not to purchase it on your own, Michael suggests using books or binders to elevate your laptop screen into a more comfortable position.

Michael stresses that, if you are working from a laptop and experiencing back pain, you'll need to look at solutions beyond your work chair.

“That pulled forward posture is going to be present regardless of what chair you have if you don't address the height of the laptop screen or add peripheral tools such as an external keyboard, external mouse or external monitor,” she says.

Michael also encourages at-home workers to talk with their organizations about any corporate purchasing discounts that may be available through office equipment suppliers.

Listen to our podcast with Ergonomics Practice Specialty Administrator Rachel Michael for more tips on how to create an ergonomically sound home workspace.