

Working from home - am I being ergonomic?

Ergonomics is the science of fitting a workplace to a user's needs. The aim is ensure that you are comfortable, productive and efficient. It is not just about your chair and your desk but the entire environment around you. This short article considers the needs for each individual in their own environment which in this case is the home.

What is my environment and what should I do?

We need to consider all factors that impact your comfort, efficiency and productivity. There are some key factors to consider:

- **Space:** Do you have a dedicated space for your home office that allows you to set it up and leave it? It is strongly preferable to not have to pack away your office at the end of the day – so try not to use the kitchen table.
- **Sound:** Lots of noise can impact your productivity and can be very distracting when on phone calls or video meetings. Try to set yourself up where you can control the noise. Where possible it is good to be in a room or space that you can have to yourself when needed. With the kids likely to be at home some of the time, set some rules on when they can be with you and when they can't.
- **Temperature:** We all suffer if it is too cold or too hot. Ensure that the temperature is comfortable.
- **Light:** Ambient light is important so avoid direct sunlight in your eyes and conversely don't work in the dark as this can contribute to eye strain.
- **Adaptability:** Try to have an office space that gives you the ability to change positions. If you have a desk that is a good start, but it is also good to have an area that you can stand at as well. If you have a laptop you can put it on top of a filing cabinet or high bench with some books under it. When it comes to working at home, it is critical to vary your position often and avoid prolonged sitting in the same position. Ideally break it up at least every 30 minutes.
- **Privacy:** While we all trust our families it is important to remember that we can deal with sensitive information that should not be available to see by others and equally, sensitive conversations should also take place without others listening in.
- **Posture:** Posture is important but again it is more important that you change your posture regularly, avoid slouching for long periods or reaching with your arms for long periods. Remember that moving often is critical and that the only dangerous posture is the one you are adopting right now – move!
- **Breaks:** Working at home can create an environment where people have less structured breaks. Also, start and finish times are often blurred. Treat your home office as just that. Enter at a standard time in the morning. Take breaks and have your lunch in the kitchen or outside, not at your desk. And at the end of the day, try to walk even if it is just to the front gate or corridor to break the end of the work day from your next activity.
- **Exercise:** It is important to remember that by not commuting to work you are losing valuable steps in your day. It is important to get some exercise, 75-150 minutes a week so that your body does not lose condition and you maintain your health.
- **Diet:** Working from home can create a diet that is varied and sometimes worse with more snacks and higher calorie intake with less activity. Try to eat regularly and during your breaks. Critically, you need to remain hydrated – so have a drink bottle or jug at your desk and drink, often.

We know it can't be perfect, but if you can follow most of these simple steps you will be more ergonomic and less at risk of developing other illnesses or injuries while working from home.

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