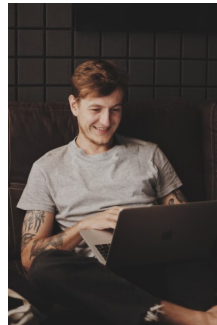


Musculoskeletal Health whilst Working from Home

During this period of social distancing, more and more people are currently working from home via their laptops — with a less than ideal workstation set up!



The problem is that we weren't really designed to sit in one position for hours on end, let alone sitting with poor posture. This can place additional strain on certain muscle groups and can lead to issues such as back, neck or wrist pain.

Tips when working from home with a laptop

1. If possible, place your laptop on a desk or a table. This should have sufficient room underneath for your feet and knees so that you can sit close to your laptop. Despite its name, the **worst** place to rest your laptop for prolonged periods of working is on your lap. Posturally, using your laptop on your lap is all wrong.
2. Use a chair that has a good lumbar support for your spine. The lower part of your spine (the lumbar spine) is designed to naturally curve inwards so if you don't have a good lumbar support on your chair, you can use a small rolled up towel between the small of your back and the back rest just to support this area. Don't overdo it and create a huge roll. All you are looking to do is to create a support that follows the natural curvature of the spine and this should be comfortable in use.
3. Your knees should be slightly lower than your hips. Use a footrest if you need to, otherwise place your feet flat on the floor.
4. Use a separate keyboard and mouse with your laptop if you can, or alternatively use a separate monitor. This is because with laptops, when the keyboard is in the ideal position, the screen position will generally be too low...and when the screen is at the ideal position, then the keyboard will be too high.
5. The top of the screen should ideally be level with your eyes. This avoids you having to look down onto the screen which would involve you bending your neck and placing strain through your cervical spine and neck muscles. Laptop stands can be helpful for this purpose, but if you don't have one then you can use books under your laptop or a separate monitor to raise the screen to the correct position.
6. The keyboard and mouse should be placed directly in front of you within easy reach so that you have a comfortable working position. A gap of about 4 to 6 inches (10-15 cm) between the front of your desk and the keyboard is usually about right and allows you space to rest your wrists when you take a break from typing. Your forearms and wrists should be straight. Your elbows should be down at your sides and bent at about a 90 degree angle (so that your arm forms an L-shape at the elbow joint)
7. If your chair is too low such that you are struggling to achieve the position in Tip 6 and if instead you find you are having to reach up to the keyboard, then adjust your chair (if it is an adjustable office type) or alternatively use a cushion to raise your seating position to the correct height.

Further information (including a diagram of an ergonomic working position) can be found at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm> but finally, remember to take regular breaks from your work. The HSE recommends a 5 minute break every hour. Get up, stretch and move around!

Produced by The Wharfedale Clinic, Guiseley. Images taken from www.unsplash.com (Credits: NESAs by Makers, Oleg Ivanov, Andrew Peel)