Office Ergonomics: Working from Home

✓ Use an area of your home that allows productive work

Consider your comfort and the work you regularly complete when choosing a location. The work surface should be close to your elbow height with elbows bent 90-degrees. This allows typing, mousing, and writing with less contact stress on the edge of the work surface. A large wide workspace allows placement of all necessary equipment and documents, which improves productivity.

✓ The Chair

Sit in a chair that is comfortable and adjustable. For short stints, a dining room chair will provide comfort, but the lack of padding and lumbar support can lead to discomfort over time.

✓ Put a pillow on your seat

Placing a thin pillow underneath your seat can go a long way to making an ordinary chair a lot more comfortable. If you don’t have a pillow, you could also fold up a fluffy towel for the same effect. Draping a soft towel over the back of your chair is also a small thing that can make your chair feel plush.

✓ Add a rolled towel for lumbar support

If you struggle with lower back pain, lumbar support pillows that rest on the back of your pelvis have shown to increase comfort while seated. You do not need to buy a fancy pillow to accomplish this effect, try rolling a towel and placing it between your chair and lower back.

✓ Elevate your laptop

Laptops are never going to be ergonomically efficient because the monitor is either going to be too low or the keyboard is going to be too high.

Ideally, the top of your monitor should be just below eye level, so you do not have to strain your neck to read. If you are working on a reading-intensive task, prop your laptop up on objects (stack of books or shoeboxes) so it is at eye-level. If feasible, add an external keyboard and mouse, so you can put the laptop at comfortable monitor height, or an external monitor, so you can put the laptop at a comfortable height for typing. Typing should always be at a level that allows your arms to bend at 90-degree angles.

✓ Take breaks

It is crucial that you vary your posture throughout the day, because sitting in the same position or chair all day can lead to back, neck and shoulder pain. For example, you might start your day at your kitchen table, then transition to a standing position or sit on your soft couch. It is best to alternate every hour.

Set a timer to go off every hour to take a break for three to five minutes. Get up and walk around, or do some quick stretches at your desk. Adding regular exercise, even if it is low-level activity, is very important to keep your body healthy and avoid back pain. If using a non-office-style chair or a laptop without external input devices, take breaks more frequently.
COMPUTER DESK STRETCHES (Approximately four minutes)

Sitting at a computer for long periods often causes neck and shoulder stiffness and, occasionally, lower back pain. Do these stretches every hour or so throughout the day, or whenever you feel stiff. Photocopy this and keep it in a drawer. Also, be sure to get up and walk around the office whenever you think of it. You'll feel better!

1. 10-20 seconds, two times
2. 8-10 seconds, each side
3. 15-20 seconds
4. 3-5 seconds, three times
5. 10-12 seconds, each arm
6. 10 seconds
7. 10 seconds
8. 8-10 seconds, each side
9. 8-10 seconds, each side
10. 10-15 seconds, two times
11. Shake out hands, 8-10 seconds