

Desk work from home

In these unprecedented times we are finding ourselves working differently, many from home and possibly on temporary desks.

My aim is to offer some advice and help you prevent or reduce symptoms you may suffer from working at a desk, and especially if in a less than ideal position.



Why bother? A good seated position has many benefits:

1. Prevention of symptoms in your muscles and joints which occur in poor postures.
2. Improves concentration, circulation and breathing. When we slouch our ribs compress our abdominal organs, and switches off our abdominals.
3. Improves functional movement & performance as posture is the foundation of all movement. You can not sit like a sack of potatoes and expect to run like a leopard !!
4. Relieve stress: tension in the upper traps causes a release of stress hormones. Especially at this time stress levels are high, it's important to relax your shoulders and improve your head position.

Advice on posture

Good posture relies on deep postural muscles. It also requires muscles to work in balance, from back to front and side to side. Poor muscle activity or imbalances results in joint and ligament strain and muscles either over working or switching off.

Optimum posture is efficient and will transfer into more efficient movement.

Posture is not a fixed constant, but a relaxed dynamic control of your body parts. Improving your awareness of your posture and tuning into sensations you feel when you change positions feeds into your muscle tone therefore helping you to maintain a better position ie variety is also important.

Poor spinal posture: Too little tone and gravity squashes the spine, causing over load and strain on the spine. Too much tone stiffens and extends the spine. Extension at the top of the neck can cause headaches, extension in the low back will cause aching and bracing between the shoulder blades can result in upper back and arm symptoms.

There are also shoulder, arm and leg positions to consider.

What is an optimal position?

1. Sitting tall, with a sense of height as if a balloon attached to the crown of your head takes its weight and your spine lengthens. At the same time feeling your weight on your sitting bones & relaxed shoulders
2. Your feet are firmly on the floor or support (box file in my case as I have very short legs!), the weight in the middle of your feet.

3. Your hips and knees at 90 degrees. If the seat is too high pressure on the back of your thighs can compress blood vessels and nerves. Use a foot rest.
4. Your elbows flexed to 90 degrees, you may need a cushion on your chair if the table is too high, but then you may also need a support under your feet.
5. Your screen should be at a height so the top of the screen is level with your eyes. I have used my French verb book under the back of my laptop to raise mine !
6. The keyboard should be in front of you, forearms resting on the table without needing to reach forward. **NB** if mainly using the keyboard to type text you will be in a better position if you slide your laptop slightly to the right as if you are not using the number block to the right you will find you are typing to the left all the time. ie the bit of the keyboard you are using needs to be central in front of you & NOT the laptop.
7. Care if you wear glasses, varifocals are not usually suitable for screen use. Mid distance or reading glasses are better. This is because the reading part of the lens is often too low resulting in over extending the neck to focus.
8. BREAKS: you should break every 40 mins, for your body, your eyes and internal organs. Regular 5 – 15 min breaks away from your screen, even if this is standing to take a call. Going for a walk, doing a few exercises.
9. Also working from a standing position is an option. The same set up advice applies. You can experiment with standing with your feet parallel or one foot in front of the other and feel where it is easier to maintain a good tall, though relaxed standing posture.

To access the exercises I have suggested for desk workers highlight the link below, then press control (ctrl) and click mouse or pad to access the link. **Please**, if unaccustomed to these types of exercises, start very gently, they should not be painful.

https://ptuk001a.physiotoolsonline.com/PhysioTools/TON_PrintReviewPage.aspx?GR=1&PrintDataId=593096ed0fe742e_CFF39093&PtVer=201901