Guidance for Staff Working at Home during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic guidance has necessitated that the majority of staff across the country have had to make the switch to home-working. This allows the significant reduction of risk with regard to the spread of the virus and compliance with government instruction, however it is important to still be mindful of the risk of injury arising out of poor workstation setup and to work as safely as we can in unprecedented circumstances.

Whilst in the office, the workstation and Display Screen Equipment (DSE) provided to you has a standard level of adjustability that you are unlikely to have at home; however there are some general guidelines to follow, in order to keep you physically healthy whilst using Display Screen Equipment (DSE) at home for your work during this difficult period.

Consider your working position

Try to position yourself to work in an area that minimises the chances of becoming too distracted, i.e. in another room to others in the household and away from areas where light may cause glare off of nearby surfaces. If possible use a kitchen or dining table as your base.

Try to avoid 'soft seating'

It may not always be possible, but you should avoid sitting on furniture which does not provide good support for your body, such as sofas and beds. If you do have to work on a sofa then you should use a small pillow to support your lower back in order to maintain the natural curve of your spine.

Avoid using your laptop on your lap

In extremely rare circumstances, laptops have been known to cause burns on the legs without an object being placed between (such as tray or magazine) in order to prevent direct contact and allow the internal fan to cool the item down.

Using them in this position also necessitates holding your head down for long periods. This increases strain on the neck and can lead to discomfort and posture issues.

You should always use your laptop on a flat surface with the screen as close to eye-level as possible and connect to a separate monitor or screen and keyboard where you can. If you must work with it on your lap, do so only for short periods and use an object, such as a tray, to raise it more towards eye-level.

Elevate the laptop screen with a stand; book or a box when using a separate keyboard.

Be mindful of your posture

Office chairs adjust and allow you to position your thighs horizontally and your feet flat. It is unlikely that your home furniture provides the same support, which means your pelvis may tilt while you work and place your body under increased strain. Always make sure you stand up regularly and move your body to offset this.

If your table is too high sit on a cushion to raise your seated position. This will help you relax your shoulders and straighten your wrists.

Consider using a cushion or rolled-up towel to support your lower back.

Move around and stretch regularly

As mentioned above, getting up and moving around regularly is invaluable in decreasing the strain caused by a lack of ideal workstation setup. Some good tips for getting yourself habituated to movement are to place a drink nearby but just out of reach so you have to move to get it, or standing up and moving about each time you take a call. Aim to move around for at least 10 minutes every hour to reduce static working.

In general if you become stiff or uncomfortable, get up and move around to alleviate the strain, roll your shoulders, and shake your arms and hands to keep your circulation going.

Ten Tips to follow

(1) Relax your shoulders
(2) Support your lower back
(3) Support your feet
(4) Keep your head level
(5) Keep your wrists straight
(6) Maintain equal pressure when sitting
(7) Maintain arms and legs at an angle between 90°-110°
(8) Position the screen about an arm's length way
(9) Walk away regularly form your screen (minimum of 10mins in every hour)
(10) Stretch regularly