

Health and safety guidance for staff working from home during the Covid19 (Coronavirus) pandemic

Introduction

Normally staff only work from home infrequently or for individual days, however during the Covid19 'Coronavirus' pandemic, many staff will be working from home.

This is an unprecedented situation. It is not going to be possible for us to recreate the office environment in people's homes, but we will provide guidance and support to help people to work from home in a way that is as safe and healthy as possible. This temporary guidance is intended to support when working at home during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Please note: if you or a member of your team are experiencing discomfort or pain as a result of working from home, and you are unable to address this yourself by following this guidance, please discuss this with your manager in the first instance.

Working at home is not like being in the office

Lack of space, having young children at home, having to home school, being a carer for someone who depends on you, living on your own, sharing a living space with other people having health issues and having a disability are all things that can make it difficult to work at home.

To make it more difficult there aren't many of us who have the same chair, desk and IT equipment at home as we do at work.

All of these things can have an effect on health and safety: as well as being stressful, working from home with less than ideal workstation set up can injure your back and neck, strain your eyes and give you headaches and it can result in repetitive strain injuries to your hands, wrists and forearms.

There are, however, things you can do to help improve your home working environment, and we have put in place arrangements to support you.

Tips for working safely at home

You may find these two videos helpful to watch before reading the rest of this guidance:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vfd618cK5Uc>
- <https://youtu.be/Af7q5j14muc>

Creating a safe working space and setting it up well is really important to reduce the risk of injury. Generally, it is recommended that you take a short break every 20 minutes and get up and walk around or do some stretches to stop your muscles seizing up.

Desk or table

- Try to work on a desk or a table whenever possible. Dining tables, dressing tables and work benches may all be suitable if you don't have a office type desk.
- Clear or tidy your working area so you can set up your desktop PC or laptop and have space to work.
- If you can, try and position your desk or table somewhere relatively quiet so you can concentrate.
- You can even try standing rather than sitting – use a breakfast bar or you can even try using a stable ironing board to replicate a standing desk.

IT

- Position your IT equipment in front of you, not to the side or at an angle, as this reduces the risk of injuring your neck and back caused by twisting your head or body.
- Adjust your screen so that the top of the screen is at eye level and at an arm's distance from you. This will minimise strain on your eyes and neck. You can use books or boxes to raise the screen if needed.
- If you are working from a laptop you should make use of a separate keyboard and mouse. Use a laptop riser, a pile of books or a box to raise your laptop screen to eye level so you don't have to bend your head.
- If you find it difficult to type use voice activated software.
- If you are using a laptop and have a separate keyboard and mouse, make use of these

Chair

- Ideally, when sitting at your desk or table, your arms should be relaxed and to your side with your forearms parallel to the desk or table you are using. Adjust your chair to help you achieve this.
- Choose a chair that supports your lower back and allows you to sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor or on a footrest. You may want to use a cushion to raise the seat, or a rolled up towel to support your lower back.
- Make sure your feet are supported and keep your hips higher than your knees. You can use a box as a footrest to achieve this.
- Working on a sofa or armchair is not ideal although we are all guilty of it. Lower your risk of pain and injury by working here for no longer than 15 to 20 minutes and only do tasks that require minimal interaction with your laptop such as reading reports or browsing the internet.

Lighting and ventilation

- Try to use natural daylight as much as possible to light your work area as this can reduce strain on your eyes.
- If you find that there is a glare on the screen from windows or lights, you can try to reposition your screen or close your blinds.
- You can also use a desk lamp to improve task lighting.
- Open your windows to improve air circulation and ventilation, this will help you get some fresh air whilst working if you can't go outside.

Tips for managing time

- When working at home, sometimes we may feel that we have to work harder/longer hours to make up for not being in the office. This can increase our stress levels which also can cause increased tension in muscles resulting in pain. Plan your day if you can to clearly define your working hours and focus on maintaining this.
- Plan breaks and time away from your desk into your diary.
 - Aim for frequent and short breaks, such as taking a 2-3 minute micro break every 20 minutes and a 5 minute break every hour. You may want to set an alarm to prompt you to do this. You can use this time to stretch, walk or simply stand up if you have to continue working.
 - Make time for a dedicated lunch break away from your workspace.
- Organise your day so that you aren't constantly facing a screen, this will help you avoid eye strain.

Looking after yourself whilst working from home

It's important we look after ourselves under the current circumstances and that we remain focused and positive. Adopting a routine is important for your mental health and general wellbeing, especially when working at home where we might have more responsibilities making it harder to manage our time. Consider the following:

- You may find it helpful maintain your normal routine, such as waking up early, eating breakfast and getting dressed like you typically would when going into the office. This can help your brain get ready for the working day ahead of you.
- Try to implement a routine which helps you clearly define between when you are working, and when you are not. This can help you switch off and get out of "work mode".
- Check in regularly with your colleagues and consider virtual team coffee mornings, lunches or team challenges.
- Avoid awkward, static postures by regularly changing position and stretching. Move more often than your body asks you to, remember you are likely to be less active now than you are when at work.
- Exercise is very important so whilst keeping in mind your physical and health capabilities, do something to stay active. Make use of resources available online, they can inspire you to do quick home workouts/stretches/yoga.
- You can schedule calls on your mobile phone rather than emailing – by doing this you can walk and talk, helping you stay active and get your steps in.
- You may find that your eating habits have changed now that you are working at home. Try to eat healthy where possible and stay hydrated.
- Ensure you take regular breaks away from your workspace for a coffee/lunch break, this will help you switch off and also help increase activity levels.

Mental health and wellbeing

If you are feeling isolated or worried in these difficult circumstances, or if you are worried about someone else, you can contact the HR manager

Available assistance

If you have existing workplace adjustments or have had ergonomic equipment such as keyboards provided for you at work, or if you are newly diagnosed with a back, neck or repetitive strain injury please speak to your line manager.

We are updating our expenses policy so that essential office equipment like standard or ergonomic keyboards and mice, and office chairs can be purchased for working at home. You should speak to your line manager to discuss any requirements.

The reasonable adjustments policy has been updated for Coronavirus.