

Home Office Ergonomic Tips

**Provided by Julie Dorsey, OTD, OTR/L, FAOTA, CEAS
Associate Professor, Occupational Therapy, Ithaca College**

Use these general tips as a starting point, and get creative to adjust your workstation to your own comfort. Ergonomics is about fitting the workstation to the person and each individual is very different. There are lots of household objects that can be used in makeshift workstations. Some are suggested here, but there are many others. Perhaps most importantly, listen to your body! If you have discomfort, do not just push through to complete the task—take a break and try to identify the source of the discomfort.

Chair

- The chair is the foundation of the workstation and should be chosen and adjusted first. Everything else is then built around this foundation.
- Use a comfortable chair with back support; add pillows if needed for extra support, especially if the chair isn't cushioned.
- If there are armrests, they should allow your arms to rest naturally at your sides and with your elbows touching them lightly to avoid contact stress. Add padding (washcloths, etc.) if needed to achieve this.
- Towel rolls work well for lumbar support (hand towels, dish towels).
- Your feet should rest comfortably on the floor when sitting back in the chair; use a footrest if needed (cardboard boxes, binders, textbooks work well).
- The seat depth should support your thighs, and the edge should be about 3" to 4" from the back of your knee.

Lighting and Vision

- Set up your monitor 90° from a window, if possible. Don't face the window, and don't have it at your back, to cut down on glare. If you're unable to position the monitor at 90° from a window, use shades, curtains, or other methods to filter the light.
- Lower the ambient (overhead) light and use task lighting over documents (e.g., a gooseneck lamp).
- Observe the 20-20-20 rule: For every 20 minutes of computer or other visually intense work, look 20 feet away for 20 seconds.
 - Pick something to stare at across the room. This changes your focusing distance and gives your eyes a chance to rest. Be sure to fully blink frequently to lubricate your eyes.

Monitor

- When looking straight ahead, your eyes should be level with the top of the monitor (tip: this will also help with your Zoom/webcam angles!).
 - Positioning the monitor in this way allows you to keep your eyes in a neutral position and prevents eye fatigue. When you look up, your eyes are exposed to more air; by not needing to look toward the top of the monitor, your eyelids can protect your eyes and prevent them from becoming dry and irritated.
 - If you are using a laptop, get an external keyboard and mouse and put the laptop on a platform to achieve the appropriate monitor height (can use boxes, books).
- Monitor(s) should be about arm's length away (measured when sitting back comfortably in your chair). If you are using multiple screens or a very large screen, they should be a few inches further back. If you're using a small

laptop monitor (set up as described above with external keyboard and mouse), it might need to be closer for ease of viewing.

- You can zoom in on text (enlarge) to compensate for desired focusing distance. However, this can get tricky with progressive lenses, so find what works best for you.
- Try tilting the bottom of the monitor closer to you as a way to adjust focusing distance—this can be especially useful with progressive lenses.

Desk/Work Surface

- The desk height for typing/keyboarding should be lower than you would think. You want your elbows at greater than 90° for blood flow and to keep your wrists in a more neutral position. Avoid wrist extension (wrists bent up) as this increases pressure on the carpal tunnel.
 - If all your work surfaces are high (>30" for those around 5' 6" to 5' 8"), try sitting in a higher chair (or add pillows to your chair) and use a footrest if needed.
 - *Most home work surfaces are too high in relation to home chairs, so pay careful attention to this!*
- In general, look out for contact stress—this is when your elbows, wrists, or forearms are resting on a hard surface and/or sharp edge for long periods of time (e.g., edge of desk, edge of keyboard). This compresses soft tissues and restricts blood flow. Add padding or wrap edges of the desk to soften the surfaces where possible (you can make wrist rests from washcloths).
- Keep the mouse as close to the keyboard as possible to avoid awkward shoulder movements. Keep the most frequently used items in midline for neutral positioning. The "H" in the keyboard should be aligned with the middle of your body.

Alternate work station setups

- Varying your posture throughout the workday is really important. Perhaps some of your work tasks (e.g., those that don't require a computer) can be done in different locations of your home.
- Consider ways to work while standing. For example, if you are reading, talking on the phone, or handwriting something, try to do so while standing at the kitchen counter or a high dresser to vary your working posture for periods of time over the day.
- If you want to work while sitting or lying on a bed or couch, try to apply as many of the above principles as possible. Use pillows to support your back and to place under your knees.

Additional Tips

- Get up and move! Take breaks every 30 to 60 minutes. Both active breaks (getting up and moving) and passive breaks (seated stretch, breathing exercises) are essential!
- Stay well hydrated.
- Maintain a comfortable room temperature; use clothing layers if needed.
- Check out this [comprehensive website](#) for visuals, self-assessments, and other tools.