University of the Fraser Valley — RISK & SAFETY

Remote Workstation Setup

As many faculty and staff members have the flexibility to work remotely, it is important to have a proper workstation set up to avoid awkward posture(s) which can increase the risk of a ergonomic injury. A proper workstation set up can also decrease fatigue and increase productivity. Many of the staff may be using a laptop as a main computer. Laptops are lightweight, compact, portable and allow you to work from anywhere. Laptops pose a low risk when used for shorter periods of time but when used for a longer period, it can result in poor neck/head posture and poor hand/wrist posture.

Whether you are working with a laptop or on a personal computer (PC), optimize your workstation to promote an ergonomic posture.
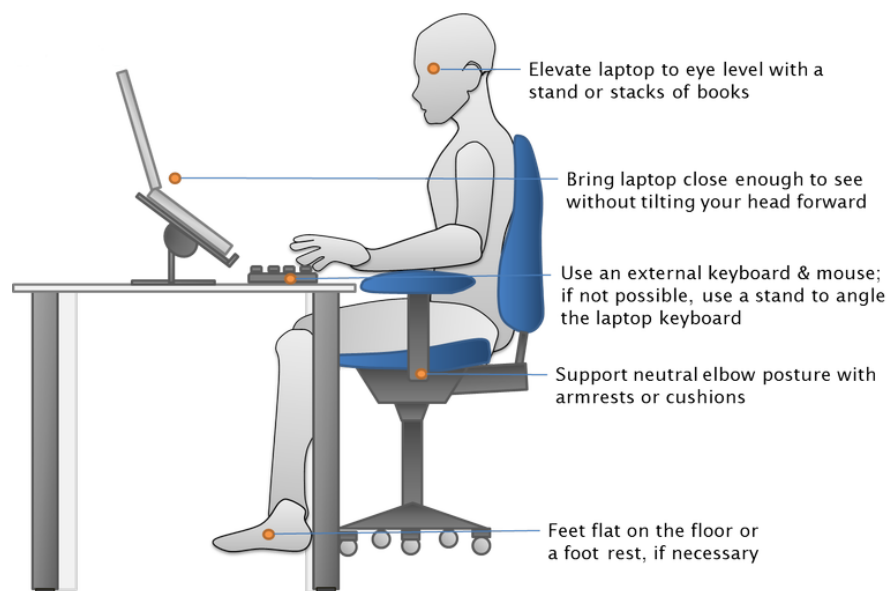
A comfortable workstation setup promotes the following:

- Neutral postures with the neck aligned with the spine (neutral, not bent or thrust forward)
- Back relaxed but supported
- Shoulders relaxed (not hunched or rounded)
- Elbows close to the body and bent at a angle between 90 to 120 degrees, and
- Wrist and hands straight (not bent or turned)

After Hours Computer Usage

While most employees are usually focused on the computer workstation at work, considerations also need to be taken for our computer workstation after hours. When the workday is done, many people are at home and use the computer for up to an additional 4 hours in the evening. Your body does not know the difference between computer work at home or at work; all it knows is that it is being stressed.

Follow the basic ergonomic tips, principles and guidelines for workstation design to ensure a proper ergonomic set-up at home to help reduce injuries.

Elevate laptop to eye level with a stand or stacks of books

Bring laptop close enough to see without tilting your head forward

Use an external keyboard & mouse; if not possible, use a stand to angle the laptop keyboard

Support neutral elbow posture with armrests or cushions

Feet flat on the floor or a foot rest, if necessary

Laptop Set up - Picture from UC Davis Occ. Health Services

Six Essential Ergonomics Tips for Remote Work

1. Keep Moving

Even with the perfect office set up, you shouldn't sit in a chair all day. Instead, take a break! Change your position, stretch, and adjust your chair when needed (refer to page 4 for stretches). Try making a change every 25-30 minutes.

2. Chin up

Your head and neck posture are important as well. Keeping your chin tucked toward your chest can lead to neck, shoulder, and back pain. Instead, you want to keep your body relaxed.

There are a few updates you can make to your ergonomic home office for your neck, including:

- Adjusting to the position of your monitor
- Keep the center of the screen at eye level
- Using a headset

To keep your monitor at eye level, place your monitor on a surface to raise it to a better location.

3. Rest your Eyes

Take a break and look away from your screen every 20 seconds. Make sure your ergonomic office is lit well and without glare from your monitor screen.

4. Perfect your posture

Without realizing it, you might start leaning toward your screen. To avoid back problems, you need to improve your posture.

Remember to sit all the way back in your chair. The ideal angle from your leg to back is 90-100 degrees.
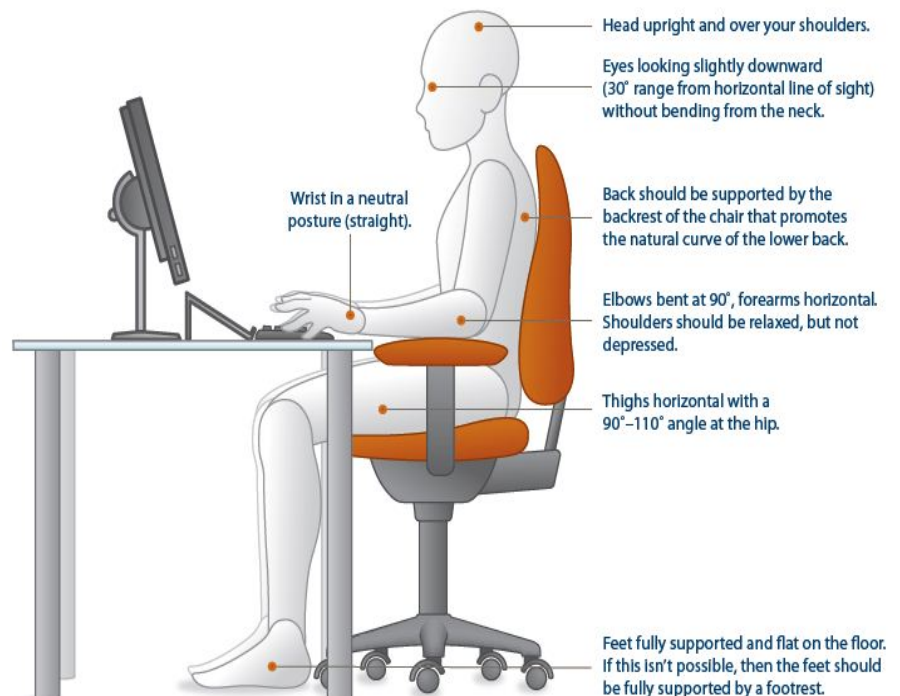
5. Keep your Arms Close

Avoid sitting too far from your keyboard and mouse. Stretching too far to type can hurt muscles throughout your body.

Keep your elbows comfortably close to your body core.

6. Reposition Your Chair

Finally, consider a comfortable chair that will keep you from leaning and straining.

Head upright and over your shoulders.

Eyes looking slightly downward (30° range from horizontal line of sight) without bending from the neck.

Wrist in a neutral posture (straight).

Back should be supported by the backrest of the chair that promotes the natural curve of the lower back.

Elbows bent at 90°, forearms horizontal. Shoulders should be relaxed, but not depressed.

Thighs horizontal with a 90°–110° angle at the hip.

Feet fully supported and flat on the floor. If this isn't possible, then the feet should be fully supported by a footrest.

Setting up your laptop for frequent use

Here the user is using the laptop monitor. The monitor has been raised using reams of paper. An external keyboard and mouse have been attached and are at a height that allows the user to type with the shoulders, relaxed, elbows at sides and forearms parallel to the floor. Eyes should be viewing the monitor at approximately 15-30° from horizontal line of sight.

Here the user is using a laptop stand. The laptop is connected to a larger monitor, external keyboard and mouse to resemble a standard desktop workstation. The keyboard and mouse are at a height that allows the user to type with the shoulders relaxed, elbows at the sides and forearms parallel to the floor. Eyes should be viewing the monitor at approximately 15-30° from horizontal line of sight.

Setting up your laptop for frequent use:

- Maintain a neutral neck posture by placing the top of the screen at about eye level or slightly lower if using bifocal glasses.
- Use a laptop stand or place your laptop on a stable support surface, such as monitor risers, reams of paper, or phone books so that the screen height can be adjusted.
- Connect the laptop to a monitor (if available) for a larger display.
- Attach a regular size external keyboard and pointing device to the laptop and place them on an adjustable keyboard tray or on the desk. The keyboard and mouse should be positioned at or slightly below elbow height.
- Take frequent stretch breaks every 40-50 minutes.

Setting up your laptop for occasional use

If you usually use a desktop computer, but occasionally use a laptop, here are some quick fixes for short-term laptop use.

- Use a chair that supports a comfortable upright or slightly reclined posture.

- Position your laptop in your lap for the most neutral wrist posture that you can achieve. An empty 2-3 inch binder with the wider edge toward your knees will create an angle that will help keep your wrists straight and maximize the height of the screen.

- In a reclined position, prop your feet up to maintain a neutral trunk/thigh angle.

- Be sure to maintain a neutral neck posture.

- Do not place your laptop on top of a pillow or other soft material. The lack of circulation could shut down the fan, which can overheat the computer.

- Stand up and stretch frequently.

Special thanks to Indiana University, Yale University and UC Berkley's Ergonomics@work for being a source of information and the use of their images.