



Working from home

Tips for setting up your computer workstation & staying physically healthy when homeworking on a temporary basis

Brought to you by **Osteopaths For Industry** in association with our expert health and wellbeing partner, **Thrive4Life**



Amidst the Covid-19 outbreak the majority of office workers have been forced to work from home. Although some of us may be used to flexible working, for many this will be an entirely new experience and a significant change to our daily routine. This can feel like a shock to the system, both physically and psychologically, as we are forced to accept the sudden and significant changes to familiar daily habits, literally overnight.

Osteopaths For Industry want to help you keep safe, focused, motivated and productive over the coming weeks. We've teamed up with **Thrive 4 Life**, our parent specialist Health and Wellbeing company. With our combined panel of experts, we will be bringing you lots of great health and wellbeing top tips and advice to keep you in great shape over the weeks ahead.

If you've just started working from home you may understandably be wondering where to start, and how to make sure you're as productive, happy and healthy as possible. Many of us are now expecting to be working from home for a significant period. It's very important therefore that you ensure that your 'new' working environment and daily lifestyle help you work effectively, that you look after your mental & physical wellbeing and that you try and maintain a good work/life balance.

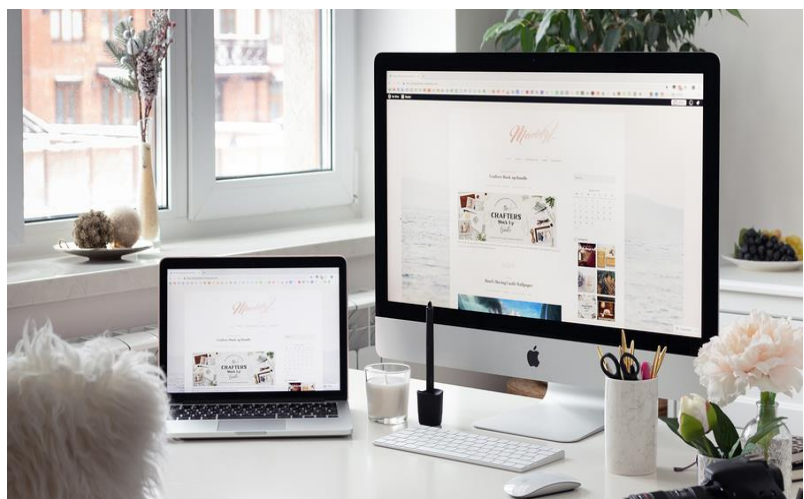
Workstation Health Safety: Preventing musculoskeletal and other health problems

To begin with, we have produced this short guide to help you set up your temporary home workspace. If you normally work at a desk in an office environment, you may have been made aware of the Display Screen Equipment (computer/screen/workplace) health and safety regulations, which provide helpful guidelines to those of us that work long hours in front of computer screens. It's been shown through research that working at poorly set up workstations can cause significant musculoskeletal problems including pain and disability. Creating a safe workspace is just as relevant at home as it is in the office. This short guide will give you some 'top tips' to help you create your own safe and comfortable working area at home.

1. Define your 'workspace'

Set up your 'home office' in a quiet area of the house, out of the way of distractions. This might be easier said than done for some of us with whole families at home! However, do make sure that the other people in your household are aware that you are working and respect that you should not be disturbed.

You might need to use extension leads to create your workspace. Make sure these leads don't become trip hazards.



Get dressed for work – don't just sit in front of your laptop in dressing gown and slippers. You need to get yourself into 'work mode'.

2. Set working hours – and stick to them!

It's all too easy to think you'll have an extra hour in bed and make up for it later in the day. But that's not always a productive approach. Wake up in good time, have breakfast and a drink, catch up on the news and get yourself ready for work.

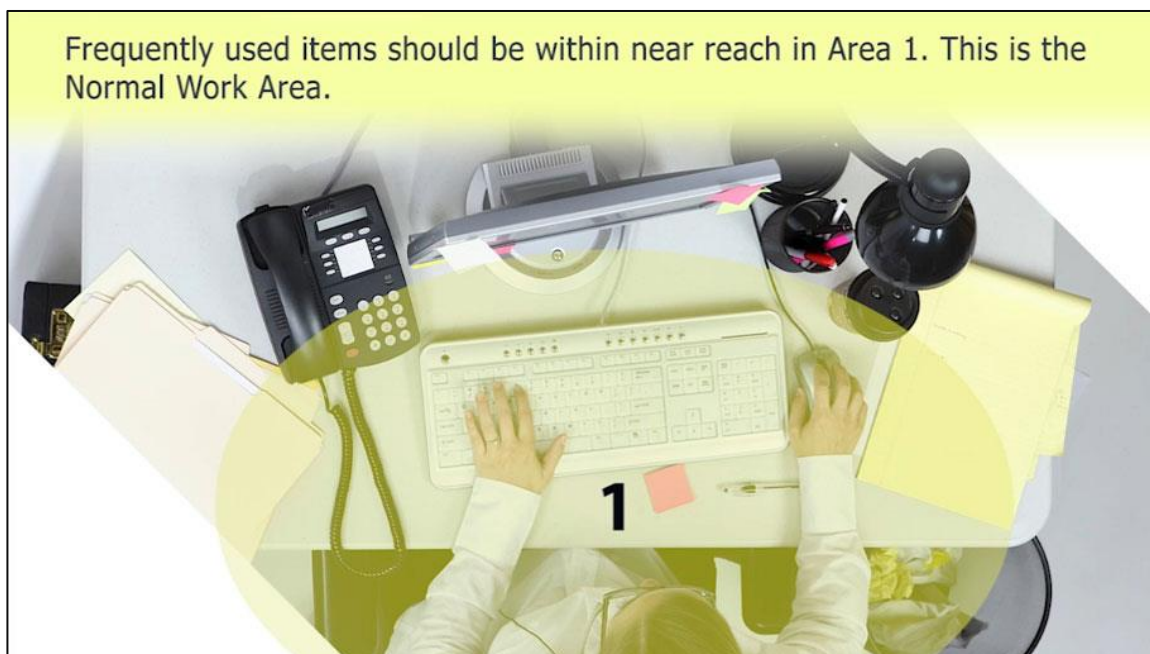
Make sure you get away from your desk and have a break at lunchtime. This will help improve concentration and reduce postural stress.

3. Your work 'desk'

If you are trying to work from the sofa or a coffee table (or from bed!) this is only going to increase the risk of musculoskeletal problems occurring.

Ideally, you'll be able to work from a desk or table that you can get your legs under - make sure there's clearance for your knees, thighs and feet. Try not to store unnecessary items under your work area.

The items on your desk can be arranged so that the most frequently used items, (i.e. pens, keyboard, mouse, phone, etc.) are within easy reach. Less frequently used items can be placed further away. The idea here is that you should not be regularly reaching for an item that you need to use.



4. Chair setup

Use a chair that provides adequate support for your back. Many people won't have the luxury of an adjustable (office type) chair, but if you do, then these are the key points to consider when setting up your chair:

- Push your hips back in the chair, whilst trying to maintain a three-finger gap between the edge of the chair and the back of your legs. This will allow good blood circulation to your lower legs.
- Adjust the seat height so your feet are flat on the floor and your knees equal to, or slightly lower than, your hips.
- Make sure your spine is adequately supported, especially the lower curve of the back. Use inflatable cushions or small pillows if necessary.
- Adjust the armrests (if fitted) so that your shoulders are relaxed when you have your arms resting on the rests. However, if the armrests prevent you from getting your chair close enough to your desk, then remove them (if possible).
- If you feel that you cannot achieve a comfortable position, while still being able to keep your feet flat on the floor, then a footrest may be required. This will allow you to raise your chair slightly but still allow your feet to rest comfortably.



Are you working from a laptop?

It's impossible to achieve a good ergonomic setup (i.e. the correct monitor height and distance, keyboard and mouse position) when using just a laptop computer.

It would be much better to connect an external monitor to the laptop and use that as the screen. Practically all laptops will have an HDMI port (or similar) to allow this.

You can also connect an external keyboard and mouse to your laptop (via USB or wireless). This setup (along with an external screen) would effectively eliminate your need to interact with the laptop itself, and would give you a system that can be greatly customised for far better ergonomics and comfort.

Note: If an external monitor is not available, but you do have an external keyboard and mouse, then you can compromise by placing your laptop on blocks and using the computer this way (as pictured below). This will allow you to achieve a good screen height, whilst also allowing flexible placement of your keyboard and mouse.



5. Screen setup

Place the monitor directly in front of you, about an arm's length away. The top of the screen should be at or slightly below eye level. The monitor should be directly behind your keyboard.

Try to limit or eliminate distracting reflections on your screen. It may help to place your monitor so that the brightest light source is to the side.



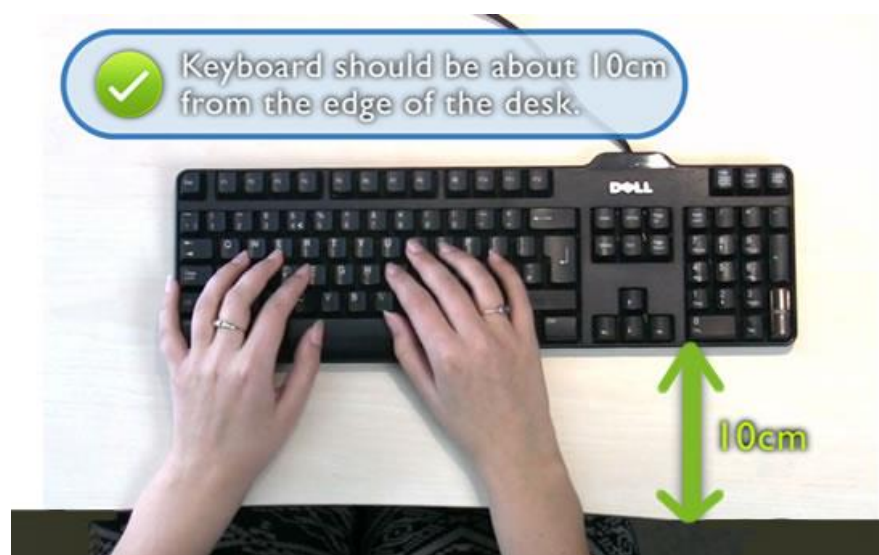
6. Keyboard and Mouse

Position the keyboard directly in front of your body. It's very important that you are not twisting to use the keyboard (or to see your screen!).

The keyboard should be approximately 10cm from the edge of your desk.

Place the mouse as close as possible to the keyboard. This should be within easy reach and on the same surface as your keyboard.

Make use of keyboard shortcuts to reduce extended mouse use.



7. Phone

If you frequently talk on the phone, then make sure it is placed within easy reach on your desk – you shouldn't be stretching or over-reaching to access your phone.

If you are a frequent phone user, or you talk and type at the same time, then place your phone on speaker or use a headset rather than cradling the phone between your head and neck. Trying to 'pinch' your phone between neck and shoulders is sure to give you sore neck and shoulders!



Tips to stay physically healthy when working at home

Be proactive about moving around enough during the day. Get up out of your chair regularly – perhaps practice some stretches or have a walk around.

For those that enjoy the team support and routine of the office-based environment working from home maybe a difficult transition. The key is to create your own ‘virtual’ support team by ensuring regular verbal and written connection with work colleagues. Communication is king in keeping morale up, so look for ways to re-create the team spirit across the board. Every team will be different in how they go about this, but it really is important.

Set up some key times when you can check-in with colleagues. Video conferencing, such as via Skype and Zoom, can facilitate remote working. It’s worth the effort - even just a one-to-one conversation, periodically link up by video rather than just picking up the phone. Regular connections with others in your team are important in helping you psychologically make this significant shift to home working.

It may be daunting right now, but in fact about 1.5 million people in the UK work from home on a regular basis. Ask your friends and colleagues how they are getting on and share tips and strategies amongst yourselves.

Coming soon!

Look out for the Thrive4Life ‘At Your Desk’ stretches that we will be sending you early next week!

What’s coming up from us over the next few weeks?

Over the coming weeks **Osteopaths For Industry and Thrive 4 Life, our health and wellbeing specialist partner**, will continue to bring you interesting, weekly bite sized ‘top tips’ and advice. Look out for an email from us once a week to help you look after yourself for the working week ahead and freely share this with family, friends and colleagues or anyone you feel might benefit.

Here’s an overview of what to expect from Monday 30th March:

- Top tips and advice for boosting your immune system
- Looking after your musculoskeletal wellbeing including home working health and safety advice
- Top tips for making homeworking work for you
- Achieving a good work-life balance whilst working from home
- Practical tips and advice to help cope with personal stress & anxiety in these unprecedented times
- Keeping physically fit whilst working from home through exercise and stretching
- How to get a good night’s sleep/ maximise your relaxation/ practice mindfulness to help you to de-stress and starter packs for meditation and breathing techniques
- Information on nutritional advice/supplements to help boost your immune system and stay healthy

We really do hope you have found this guide useful! We’d love to know what health and wellbeing topics you’d like to hear about. Email us at admin@ofi.co.uk

Remember – We can offer remote access one-to-one consultations for DSE Assessment and Workstation Setup. [Email us](#) for further information.