

Working From Home – MacGyver Would Be Proud!

For some it has been almost a month working from home. Our homemade offices are kitchens, spare bedrooms, dining rooms, the basement, over the garage... you name it we have seen many iterations and creativity. I applaud your ingenuity.

THE PROBLEMS

As the time increases at home you may notice the newness has worn off. Those that took time to think about good ergonomics in their design are doing fine, and those that overlooked this are beginning to feel the consequences.

- Overstuffed chairs and recliners can be inviting, but as time marches on they become too soft and unsupportive. Oh, my aching back and sore shoulders!
- Those using tables and desks may have discovered they measure close to 29.5 inches high (it's sort of a standard). Most desk chair seat pans are around 18-19 inches high. When we sit and allow our upper arms to rest at our side and bend elbows to 90 degrees, you will find your fingers and hands are most likely below the desk height. If you put your keyboard, mouse or laptop on the desk you must adapt to the height difference. Somehow you need to raise the height of your hands.
- Unfortunately, we adapt to the work height instead of adjusting the desk height to us. Examples of this are:
 - ↳ Pushing the keyboard and mouse too far away on the desk. This causes you to reach to the input devices, correcting the elbow height but increasing the strain to the neck and shoulders.
 - ↳ Flipped down feet on the back of the keyboard, so it angles in the same direction as your forearms. Often forearms are weight bearing on the edge of the desk causing a contact stressor.
 - ↳ Raising the seat height by folding one leg up under the buttock and sitting on the ankle. This can be a numbing situation later in the workday.
 - ↳ Laptops on a lap, table, or desk which can cause forward bending heads to see the screen. For every 10 degrees of forward head tip, you add 10 more pounds of force to that 13 lb. noggin and increase the strain and tension to the muscles on the back side of the neck and upper back.
 - ↳ If you put the laptop on top of the table and use the integrated keyboard and mouse, arms and elbows will rest on the table. This will create achy necks and shoulders, and for some, fingers will go tingly.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MAKE YOUR HOME OFFICE BETTER?

Let's start with using your laptop as a home office and that's all you have.

- Time to get a separate keyboard and mouse wired or Bluetooth doesn't matter.
- Set the laptop up on a box or reams of paper so the top of the screen is even with your sitting or standing eye height. If you wear progressive lenses or multifocal glasses, it will have to be slightly lower.
- Plug in and use the separate mouse and keyboard as your input devices. They should be just under your hands when sitting upright, upper arms at your side, and elbows bent to 90 degrees.

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What can I do if the desk or table is too high?

- If your chair has height adjustment, raise it all the way up.
- If not height adjustable or all the way up, try a firm pillow on the seat for some height gain.
- If it has wheels like an office chair, typically they are 2 inches high. You can buy a new wheel kit online for \$35-50 and replace the 2-inch wheels with 4-inch wheels (Research extra-large wheel kit for office chair).
- If wheels and pillows don't give you enough height, consider a portable keyboard tray (Research portable keyboard tray). The front of the desk must have a decent overhang/lip for this to work. The portable keyboard tray simply clamps to the front of the desk lowering the keyboard to a more manageable height.

Paperwork flat on the desk and you're looking down (Ouch, my aching neck!)

- Grab a clip board or binder and place between the keyboard and screens. Angle the back so the documents tip towards your eyes. This will reduce your forward head bending.

Making lots of calls from home?

- Get a headset and set your hands free.

Sitting too long?

- Don't forget to take a frequent stretch break, no matter the workplace, the chair or the length of the workday everybody needs to get up and move frequently throughout the day.
- Get a drink of water, freshen your tea or coffee.
- Walk the dog, cat, or whatever animal you might have.
- Take 3 deep breaths. Deep breaths make everything better.
- Heed the reminders from MEMIC to do stretches at 10 am and 2 pm.
- Lumbar support – Roll up a towel to increase the lumbar support.
- If the seat pan is too long (the chair seat presses into the back of knees), try putting a pillow behind your back.
- Sit on a wobble cushion for a more "active" sitting posture.
- Footrest – Utilize a box or block of wood if your feet don't touch the ground.
- For the very tall, raise desk with furniture lifters like they use for dorm beds.

Lighting for lamps and windows

- Watch out for glare in your eyes from any source.
- Don't place your screen(s) in front of a window.
- Your screen should be 3 times brighter than the ambient light in the room.

Monitor Distance

- Place it where you can see it clearly sitting in good posture.
- 18-24 inches or arm's length is the guideline.