

Working from Home – Tips and Tricks

Creating an Ergonomic Workspace

Seated Desk

If you have a desk and office chair at home, [this video](#) from an ergonomics expert will show you how to set up your desk.

Standing Desk

- There are many options for “sit/stand desk risers” online. There are many different brands available and they range in price.
- For a smaller budget, here are some do-it-yourself options for [converting any desk into a standing desk](#).
- There are also creative ways of making a standing desk using supplies you may already have at home, like books, upside-down laundry baskets, stools, packs of paper, boxes, countertops, piano, or a chest of drawers. The important thing is to make sure it is stable!

Below are a few examples of do-it-yourself standing desks.



A small side table on a desk, and a keyboard propped up on books. Image from [AE Wellness](#).



A chest of drawers is a little harder because your body is blocked by the drawers. But this may be a good option for a short-term change of position. Image from [Simple Home Simple Life](#).



The position of the hands in this example is not ideal, but it is another option. Image from [Mother Nature Network](#).

Managing Your Body and Mind

Postures and Positions

Having a variety of options is key. Everyone has slightly different needs. Make sure it fits for you!

- Keep your eyes at the level of the top of your screen in order to reduce neck bending.
- When your hands are on the keyboard, your wrist and fingers should be at or just below the level of your bent elbow.

When standing:

- Keep your back from overarching. Keep your tummy tucked in a little.
- It can help to put one foot up a few inches. For example, on a foot stool or a ream of paper.
- Vary the positions of your feet. Spend time with your feet hip width apart, then put one foot slightly ahead of the other, or one foot on a small footrest. Try putting both feet pointing forward and then shift them.

Managing Your Mind and the Work

Working from home requires more than just ergonomics. Occupational Therapists consider:

- the work (duties and hours),
- the worker (the mind and body and what the work means to the person),
- the workplace (who or what is in the environment).

Here are some common issues that might arise as you work from home.

1. “I can’t stay focused at home.”

Set up a schedule for your day that is similar to your regular work hours (e.g. 9:00-5:00). Block off periods of time for email, phone calls, meetings, and other tasks. Have clear boundaries between work and personal time.

Be mindful of the work you are doing. Multitasking can make you work less efficiently. Set aside small blocks of time to focus. It can be hard not to watch news, look at social media, or throw in a load of laundry while working from home. These can be tempting but also distracting.

2. “I can’t take a break. There’s too much to do.”

When big deadlines and crisis situations come up, like a pandemic, it can seem like tasks are endless. Taking small breaks can re-energize, get new ideas, and help you to carry on. Set a routine to your work that includes regular breaks. [There’s research behind this!](#)

3. “What if I forget what I was doing?”

There might be times when it is suggested you shouldn’t take a break, for example, when it might interrupt the flow of your work. However, if you have any type of chronic pain, taking a break can prevent a set-back later in physical discomfort. Before taking your break, leave yourself a sticky note with a reminder about where you left off.

4. “What is the best thing to do on a break?”

Anything that makes good use of your mind and body! Take a few minutes to stretch or do mini exercises (see some examples below). Take a breathing break. Send or receive encouraging messages. Throw in a load of laundry (on a break this is ok). Use a timer to keep the break structured.

5. “I can’t get started.”

Some of us have trouble settling in to work at home. Set a timer for 5 minutes (or 10 minutes) and see how much you can get done in that time.

6. “How do I relax.”

Try these quick [mini-meditations](#) from Psychology Today to calm your mind and body.

7. “How great not to have to get dressed.”

It’s worth getting dressed for work even when working from home. Getting dressed every morning will help to get your mind into work mode. Comfortable clothes are okay, but try not to stay in your pyjamas.

Great Exercises for Office Work

Before you begin: If you can't make the whole movement illustrated below, make sure you modify! Do a smaller version of that movement, or don't do as many repetitions.

Computer & Desk Stretches

Approximately 4 Minutes

Sitting at a computer for long periods often causes neck and shoulder stiffness and occasionally lower back pain. Do these stretches every hour or so throughout the day, or whenever you feel stiff. Photocopy this and keep it in a drawer. Also, be sure to get up and walk around the office whenever you think of it. You'll feel better!



10-20 seconds
2 times



10-15 seconds



8-10 seconds
each side



15-20 seconds



3-5 seconds
3 times



10-12 seconds
each arm



10 seconds



10 seconds



8-10 seconds
each side



8-10 seconds
each side



10-15 seconds
2 times



Shake out hands
8-10 seconds

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If you have any questions:

Call your Occupational Therapy team:

- Martha Bauer OT Reg (Ont) – McMaster Family Practice (905) 525-9140 ext 28932
- Colleen O'Neill, OT Reg (Ont) – Stonechurch Family Health Centre (905) 575-1300 ext 310