



How to set up a home office

Remote technologies and flexible working arrangements mean that more employees are working from home offices. But while the flexibility for employees is seen as a perk, as an employer, it's your responsibility to make sure that home offices meet ergonomic safety standards.

Here's our top tips on how you can set up a safe and productive home office.

QUICK CHECKLIST

- Decent chair
- Good lighting
- Sufficient desktop space
- Control unwanted noise
- Sensible storage
- Correct laptop use
- Comfortable heating/cooling
- Regular breaks
- Access to information
- Access to people

WELLNESS TIPS

- It's important to maintain a routine. Wake up at the same time each morning.
- Dedicate a space at home specifically for work. Create separation between where you work and where you relax.
- Think of innovative ways to interact with your team.
- Stick to a time to 'clock-off'. This will help you keep you focussed during the day.

For more free handy tips and guides, visit:

ergonomics.com.au

1 Get a decent chair

The best sort are the standard clerical-type office chairs – not the large, high-backed reclining types which some people think (mistakenly) are guaranteed to be comfortable.

A good chair for working in, needs the following features:

- Adjustable in height;
- A separately adjustable backrest you can bring forwards into the small of the back, as well as (preferably) altering vertically to suit your trunk length;
- A seat short enough to allow you to get full back support without the front edge of the seat pushing into the back of your legs;
- A five-star base (for stability);
- A curved, "waterfall" front;
- Well padded – you shouldn't be able to feel the seat base under the padding when you're slumped heavily in the chair.

2 Learn how to adjust your chair

Here are a few things that you can do to adjust your chair to suit you.

- Alter its height until your shoulders are relaxed, not slumped, in the working position; adjust the backrest into the small of your back;
- The seat pan should be flat or sloping slightly downwards. This reduces pressure under your thighs and encourages an 'open hip angle' (hips slightly above knees);
- Use a footrest if there is still any pressure under your thighs. Alternatively, lower your desk (if you can) as well as your chair;
- Learn the elements of correct posture, and practice it!

3 Provide good, even lighting

Your whole working surface should be evenly illuminated, without shadows near your hand. Concealed fluorescent lighting is good (tubes are cool, light well dispersed, long life); consider an extra desk lamp as well, but ensure that the light source itself is covered, and is kept out of your field of view.

Use curtains to control screen reflections or bright sunlight, and don't sit facing a screen with bright daylight (like a window) beyond and behind the screen. Don't put up with a dark or shiny desktop: they should be a light to medium color, matt finish.

4 Give yourself plenty of desktop space

WHY not put your screen or laptop on a mobile, articulated holder? You can adjust it to suit (a good distance: about an arm's length away, with the top of the screen level with your forehead), then use the handy space under it to move your keyboard out of the way. 700 mm is a good desk height, but lower for lots of shorter people.

Many desks are still far too high. Put the things you use a lot within a comfortable arm's reach (eg phone, notepad, reference files).

A desk should be 900 mm deep (front to back) for comfortable screen viewing, and your desk should not be thick (30 mm maximum).

5 Control unwanted noise

There's nothing like barking dogs or noisy playtime sounds to send you to the brink. Your working environment should have a minimal number of these distracting and disruptive sounds.

6 Arrange your storage sensibly

Shop carefully for cupboards and storage facilities suited to what you need. Think of your back, and the frequency with which you'll need to be getting things in or out of whatever you buy. Put the most used things closest to you, and consider mobile drawer units which can be moved around according to your best seated position. Computer "towers" on wheels are good, too, but not for long periods (unless they're highly adjustable – keyboard height, screen height, etc) – perhaps a standing desk might be more suitable for you.

7 Laptop use

Laptops are wonderfully convenient devices when on the go – but are not designed to be used on their own for prolonged periods. Ideally, use a separate keyboard, mouse and screen with your laptop, and set each of these in comfortable positions. However, if you must use your laptop as your screen, lift it up so that the top edge of the open screen is just below your eye height.

Minimise laptop keyboard and mouse use – there is a dictation function in Microsoft Word.

8 Provide heating and cooling

Climate control in your working environment should make you comfortable, but not sleepy. Hot weather can often be met with a simple pedestal fan and light clothing. Watch tangi-fans for heating the legs under the desks: they'll put you to sleep, and they can be a fire and safety hazard. Try wearing warmer clothes.

9 Take regular breaks

Muscles need movement – from the tiny muscles which manage your eyes to the big ones which support your back. Get up and get things. Try working standing up sometimes. Get some fresh air. And keep yourself fit – daily exercise (even just a brisk walk) will repay you many times in the extra hours of productive work you'll be able to do as a result.

10 Get access to information and people you need

You may need to access your workplace server, to receive files (perhaps large ones), send reports or data to others, and participate in meetings remotely. To get access you may need to have VPN (Virtual Private Network) software installed on your computer, with access rights granted at the other end. Next, explore Dropbox, iCloud, or any of the services that simplify sharing, file mobility, and making large files easy to transfer. Most email services have a 10 MB limit on email attachments.

For meetings, there is plenty of software enabling virtual conferencing (with video) – eg Microsoft Teams. Ask your employer for help.

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