

# WORKING FROM HOME

Due to coronavirus, a lot of us are now working from home. Unfortunately, kitchen tables and home office desks tend not to be as well designed as the furniture at the office. People are managing as best they can, often whilst looking after children too. How can you make working from home as healthy as possible?

## VARIATION!!

If you want to avoid health problems caused by long-term computer use, variation is key: make sure you regularly switch position. You may need to get creative, as your home office probably isn't as well equipped as your workplace at the office.

Here are a few suggestions:

- **vary the kind of work** tasks you do: switch between typing and reading;
- **try working in different postures:** sitting behind a home office desk or the kitchen table, sitting on a stool with no back, sitting on the sofa with your laptop actually on your lap, or standing up or walking around while you're on the phone;
- take regular short breaks away from your workspace; get something to drink, spend a minute or two in the garden or **take the dog for a walk**;
- **give your eyes a rest** by regularly looking away from the computer screen.

When you work intensively with a screen, it is essential to take frequent **short breaks** – even just for 20 seconds.



Take breaks for coffee and lunch, and make sure you step away from your workspace during breaks. This variety is even more important if you work behind a screen for more than **six hours a day**.



## A PROPER WORKSPACE, EVERYWHERE

Try to create the best possible workspace in every place where you work for more than two hours. If you use a laptop, you'll need an extra keyboard, a mouse and potentially an extra screen so you can set up the keyboard and screen separately. If you don't have these things at home, ask your employer if you can borrow them from the office. Home workspaces (**for more than two hours a day**) are subject to the same obligations as a screen-based workspace in the office; for more information, visit <https://www.arboportaal.nl/onderwerpen/fit-en-vitaal-thuiswerken/wat-staat-er-in-de-wet-over-thuiswerken> (in Dutch).

## SET UP YOUR WORKSPACE PROPERLY

You can't work in your adjustable workspace at the office right now, and your kitchen table or home office desk may be harder to adjust to your needs. **Here are some tips for how to set up your computer screen, desk, mouse and chair so you stay as healthy as possible while you're working from home.** When it comes to your posture, use this rule of thumb: don't stay in the same position for more than an hour. Vary your posture as much as possible, for example by spending a little while (**not too long in one go**) in a comfy chair with your laptop on your lap.



### COMPUTER SCREEN

Set up the computer screen so it's right in front of you. People often have their screens too high. A slight downwards gaze reduces the danger of developing poor neck posture, and it's also less tiring for your eyes. Adjust the top of the screen so that it's just below eye level, and tilt the screen so you can look directly at it.

### DESK

Try to adjust the height of your chair and table so that your arms and shoulders are relaxed. This works best when the elbows are at or just above table height. If that's not possible at home, then give your arms as much support as possible and make sure you change position frequently.

### MOUSE

Keep your elbows close to your body when using the mouse. If your elbow is out in front of your body, the mouse is too far away. You can make space to bring the mouse closer to you by using a narrower keyboard. Optical mice are less effective on smooth, varnished surfaces, so it's worth introducing a pattern to your work surface to get the most out of your mouse.

### CHAIR

Try to set up your chair so that your feet are supported, whether by the floor, a footrest or even a pack of printer paper. Your knees should be almost at the same height as your hips, and your thighs should be comfortably supported by the chair. Make sure your lower back is supported by the curve of the backrest – use a cushion if you need to.

### SWITCH BETWEEN SITTING AND STANDING

One way to vary your posture is to work standing up from time to time, rather than spending a long time sitting down. You could create a standing workspace by setting up a temporary desk at elbow height, for instance by standing a sturdy cardboard box, a coffee table or a pile of printer paper on your desk. You shouldn't work standing up for more than an hour at a time, or for more than four hours in total. You can of course also vary your posture by standing or walking around when you're on a call.

## EARLY WARNING SIGNS

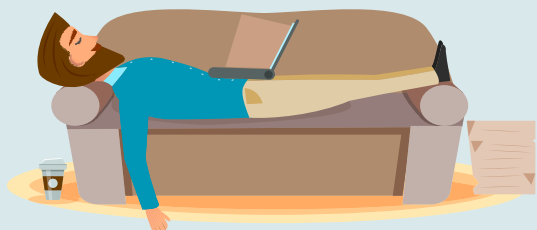
You're more likely to experience symptoms that warn of potential health problems when you work for a long time in a temporary workspace, such as at the kitchen table or in the bedroom, than when you work at the office. Those symptoms could include pain in your muscles or joints, especially in your arms, neck and shoulders, but you may also get **headaches, eye trouble** and **issues related to your workload**. If you think these symptoms are due to your work, don't hesitate to report the situation to the prevention officer, your supervisor or the occupational health physician.



## GET UP AND DO SOME EXERCISES

Exercises can help you avoid pain and physical discomfort. Some exercises are aimed at achieving relaxation over the course of the day, while others get you moving in a different way. They can help you **change the static strain on your muscles** while you're working with the screen. Exercises that stretch your muscles and tendons can relieve tension, and of course you can always climb the stairs, get up to fetch a drink or take a short walk. There are a lot of apps on the market that offer exercises, some of them developed by gyms and sports clubs.

## WORKLOAD



Make sure you know what your tasks are, and what is **expected of you**.

**Organise your work** so as to introduce the right amount of variation between harder and easier tasks. Because you don't have to concentrate as hard on easier tasks, it's less important if you get distracted when the children are running around.

When you work from home, it is essential that all your **devices work properly**. If you feel that you can't take full advantage of the possibilities your devices offer, you should discuss the situation with your supervisor, your colleagues or the IT service. A bit of extra instruction might help.

Update your calendar with the times when you will read your e-mails or answer your phone, and make sure your colleagues **know how to reach you**. After all, you can't just pop in for a chat at the moment.

If you're not happy with something, or if you're struggling with problems you can't resolve on your own, don't keep it to yourself.

**Discuss any scheduling bottlenecks** with your supervisor and your team, for instance if your childcare obligations get in the way of finishing your work. Talk to your supervisor, and work together to find solutions.

## SCREENS AND PROLONGED SITTING IN YOUR FREE TIME

These days, we also spend a lot of our free time sitting and using screens. If your workspace is not conducive to varying your posture, try to build in more variation outside working hours. **Set up a good place to sit**, and watch out for early warning symptoms of potential health problems. Of course, it's even better if you can stay as far away as possible from the computer screen after work and get plenty of exercise.



If you'd like to assess the risks and areas for improvement in your own situation, fill in the 'Better behind your screens' (BAS) tool at <https://www.fysiekebelasting.tno.nl/en/instrumenten/bas-better-behind-your-screens/> or try the 'Werkplekchecker' (in Dutch).