



CREATE A PRODUCTIVE HOME OFFICE

Teleworkers need to have work areas at home that will enable them to be productive. Workstations should be safe and comfortable. Key elements of an ergonomically correct workstation (at home or in an office) include:

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 has the following features:

- adjustable in height;
- a separately adjustable backrest that can be positioned into the small of the back, and altered vertically to suit 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.

Lots of chairs are labeled ergonomic, but they're not! Bargain chairs may break down after a year or two - so budget accordingly. Keep in mind that some of the best chairs around are reasonably priced and there are some pretty ordinary high-priced ones also. A good chair is absolutely worth the money! Armrests are usually unnecessary, and can get in the way or push your shoulders up, so consider a chair without them. Kneeling-type chairs are good for exceptional tasks or certain types of back problems... but they can create problems, like lots of pressure on the knees.

2. Know how to adjust your chair

- Alter its height until your shoulders are relaxed, not slumped, in the working position;
- Adjust the backrest into the small of your back;
- Ensure the seat is flat or sloping upward (NEVER down) at the front;
- Use a footrest if there is 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 them!

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; it should be a light to medium color, matte finish.

4. Give yourself plenty of desktop space

Why not put your monitor on a mobile, articulated stand? 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. Just over two feet (27 inches) is a good desk height, but lower for shorter people. Many desks are still far too high. Put the stuff you use a lot within a comfortable arm's reach (e.g. phone, notepad, reference files). A desk should be about three feet deep (front to back) for comfortable screen viewing.

5. Control unwanted noise

Nothing like barking dogs or noisy playtime sounds to send you to the brink.

6. Arrange your storage intelligently

Shop carefully for 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. Mobile drawer units and file carts are very handy. Computer towers on wheels are good, too, but not for long periods (unless they're highly adjustable – keyboard height, screen height, etc).

7. Get a decent computer

A huge hard disk, quality keyboard and screen, lots of RAM, fast processor. And back it up every day. If you don't know how, find someone who can show you.

8. Appropriate heating and cooling

It's meant to make you comfortable, not sleepy. Hot weather can often be abated by a simple pedestal fan and light clothing. Watch fans for heating the legs under the desks: they'll put you to sleep. 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.

**Guidelines adapted from the Web site of Mark Dohrmann and Partners Pty Ltd, Ergonomists, Melbourne, Australia*

Links that provide more detailed information and ways to assess the adequacy of a home office or workstation's ergonomics include:

1. **The Ergonomics Division of the University of California at Los Angeles Office of Environment, Health and Safety (EHS).** The UCLA Ergonomics Program provides employees with ergo-friendly solutions to a variety of work-related problems. Our goal is to fit work to workers to make jobs safer, more comfortable and more efficient.

<http://www.ergonomics.ucla.edu>

2. **3M Corporation's Office Ergonomics Self Help Web site.** The discussion of ergonomics is provides suggestions for improving personal comfort and productivity. Individuals must determine how best to apply the suggestions to their work environments

<http://www.3m.com/cws/selfhelp/>