

How to Use This Fact Sheet

Telecommuting can be difficult. The Telecommute Tips series of fact sheets provides in-depth suggestions on how to improve a variety of computer setups. Start by making one or two changes that best suits your home work area. You do not have to make sweeping changes all at once. Incremental change allows you to “test out” those changes and decide if more are necessary. Resolving discomfort associated with computer work can be tricky but by reviewing these fact sheets, and making a few changes over time, you will have an optimized computer workstation that reduces strain on the body and improves comfort.

Step 1: Identify a Work Area

A dedicated work area is vital to successful telecommuting. An ideal work area will have minimal distractions and sufficient space for your computer, paperwork, and other tools. You may need to, or want to setup in a variety of locations to accommodate others in the home, or for a change in scenery. The following are a list of potential spaces:

- **Home office with computer desk** – Ideal space to telecommute. A dedicated work area intended for this purpose with minimal distractions.
- **Computer desk** – Consider moving the desk to a private area. If that is not possible, set boundaries with the other occupants in the home. For example, having quiet hours during work/class times and keeping noise/calls isolated to another room.
- **Dining room table** – This is another option in a shared area of your home. Like above, communicate with those that you live with to create a space that will allow you to stay productive while working.
- **Kitchen counter** – This can be a great option for setting up a standing workstation. Keep in mind kitchens are one of the busiest rooms in the home. Controlling distractions can be difficult when considering others. Static standing for prolonged periods is tough on the body, but the kitchen can be a good alternative location for part of the day.
- **Floor** – Floors can be uncomfortable and not recommended, however if other places are too distracting or space is limited then ensure that you have sufficient back support. Changing positions is very important when working on the floor.

ERGO CHECKLIST

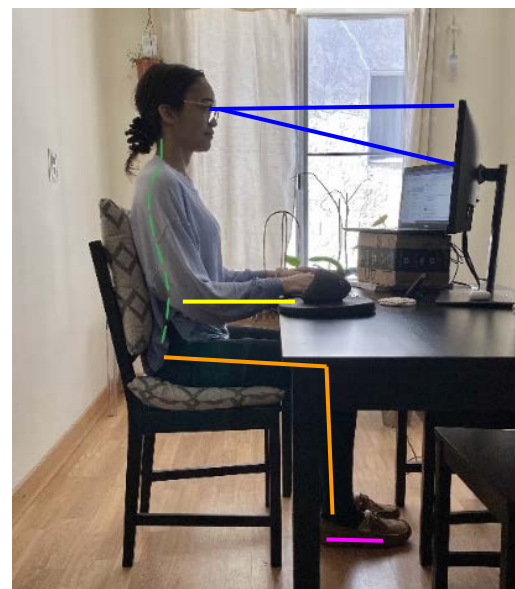
OPTIMAL STATIONS HAVE A:

- ✓ DEDICATED WORK AREA
- ✓ COMFORTABLE CHAIR
- ✓ KEYBOARD & MOUSE
- ✓ SUPPORTED POSTURE
- ✓ BREAK REMINDER

Step 2: Adjust Your Chair

Properly adjusting your chair improves comfort. Many common seat options found in the home are fixed height and do not adjust in the same way as your office chair. However, dining chairs and sofas can be adapted with a few simple changes to fit. Please refer to the colored reference lines in the photo as you go through each step.

- Support feet firmly on the floor. When your feet dangle unsupported you will shift the load of your upper body and arms onto your hips, core, and lower back.
 - Use books, boxes or a foot rest if needed. (Pink line)
- Adjust the seat height so your thighs are parallel to the floor and knees level with or slightly below hips, 90°-100°. (Orange line)
 - Use a cushion. Seat cushions can raise your seat height and reduce contact stress on the hips. If a seat cushion is not available, consider using a firm pillow or large folded towel.
- Fully engage the backrest. If you are slouching to touch the backrest the you will need build up your backrest. You want maintain the S-curve of your spine (Green line).
 - Place pillows between you and the backrest. Start from the hips and continue up so the mid and lower back are well supported. An easy way to build hip support is use a rolled-up bath towel.
- If the chair has armrests, adjust the height to just below the bottom of your elbows. If your armrests are in the way or cannot be adjusted, remove them, or select a chair without armrests.



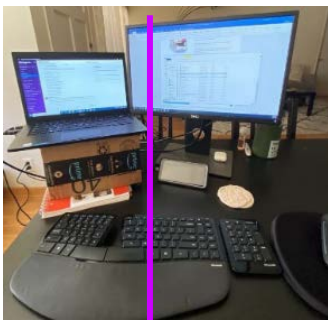
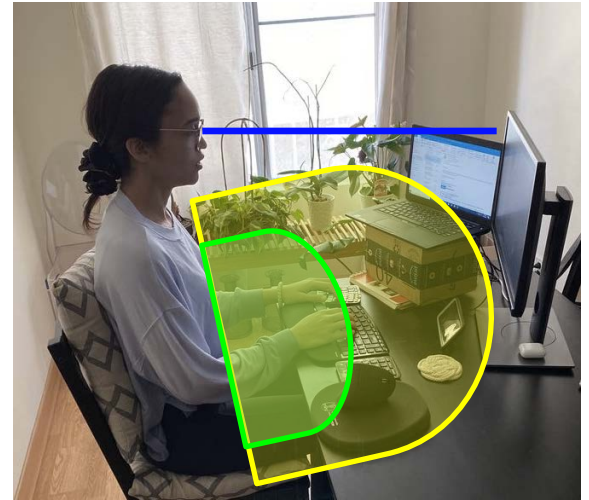
Step 3: Reach and Visual Targets

Properly positioned reach and visual targets reduces strain on the joints and muscles, improving comfort and efficiency. Be aware of your primary and secondary reach zones. The primary reach or “easy reach” zone is the area directly in front of you where the forearm can easily sweep over with a bent elbow (Green arc). Laptop users are strongly encouraged to obtain an external keyboard and mouse. Place these items in the primary reach zone along with other frequently used tools such as pen and paper. The secondary reach zone is the area you can reach with your arm extended out in front of you. Less frequently used items such as books, phones, or reference material can also go here (Yellow arc).

External Keyboard and Mouse Placement

Using these devices will allow you to reposition your keyboard and mouse closer to you, improving posture and limits reaching. Mice work best on a table, counter, or any hard surface (TV tray, lap desk.)

- Keyboard & mouse height – Place your keyboard and mouse in-line with your elbow (pg. 1 Yellow line).
- Keyboard & mouse distance – Place your keyboard and mouse close enough so you can comfortably reach the device. Your upper arms should be relaxed and down the sides, elbows bent 90° - 100°, and forearms/wrists are straight and level.
- If you do not have an external keyboard and mouse, consider using an external monitor as your screen to adjust to your eye height and use laptop as keyboard. This will reduce strain on the neck and back.



Monitor/Laptop Placement

- Monitor height – Position the top of the monitor at seated eye level (Blue line). Use a box to elevate the laptop or use an external monitor. This reduces fatigue associated with looking down at the laptop screen. If you wear progressive lenses, lower the monitor to avoid raising your chin when reading the screen.
- Monitor distance – Place your monitor at an arm’s length away. Start just beyond your secondary reach zone and adjust as needed so reading is clear and sharp.
- Monitor alignment – Align the monitor(s) relative to your seated position. When properly placed, the monitor and keyboard will be in-line with your navel (purple line).

Step 5: Pauses and Breaks

Movement is important to relax muscles and increase blood flow to reduce fatigue and stress. It is important that you take breaks and move about throughout the day. Disengaging from work for 5-10 minutes every hour also improves focus and increases productivity. Some additional break ideas:

- Give your eyes rest with micro breaks. Every 20 minutes, look 20 feet away, for 20 seconds.
- Set a timer to remind you to stop and eat a meal or snacks if you tend to forget.
- Get up and wash your hands.
- Practice 6 feet of social distancing and go for a walk!

Related Fact Sheets on the Working Remotely Page:

- Dining Table & Couch
- Standing Stations
- Working in Bed