Janaury/February 2021

Remote Work Newsletter

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Remote Workstation Ergonomics

The COVID-19 pandemic abruptly forced many people to work at a location other than their normal workplace. If you are working from home for the first time, getting the correct home workstation setup can be challenging.

Your workstation might be a home office, a kitchen table or wherever you can find the necessary space. Unfortunately, it's easy to overlook ergonomics in the home environment. However, by understanding basic home ergonomics and taking small steps, you can positively impact your health and well-being.

The Impact of Ergonomics

Ergonomics is the science of fitting a workspace to an individual's needs, and aims to increase efficiency while reducing discomfort and the likelihood of injury.

When working at a desk or workstation, poor ergonomics can not only lead to reduced productivity—but can also lead to a number of health issues that may have long-lasting effects, including head or neck strain, damage to muscles, nerves, blood vessels, ligaments and tendons. If you're sitting at your workstation for eight hours a day, it's important for these hours to be as healthy as possible. While completing a motion that's not ergonomic may feel safe or even natural for the short term, prolonged use of an unhealthy body movement can lead to long-term injuries and strains, leading to why it's vital to prioritize home workstation ergonomics.

Remote Workstation Tips

There are some general ergonomics best practices. Consider these tips for components of your remote workstation setup:

- **Chair**—Using a sturdy chair that supports the curvature of the spine is ideal for working. Chairs should also allow for adjustments so that your feet can rest flat on the floor and your thighs are parallel to it. While typing, your arms should be parallel to the floor as well.
- **Desk**—Find a work surface, such as a desk or table that has space underneath for your legs and feet without your knees banging on the bottom. If a work surface is too low, adjust the chair or work surface accordingly. Cushion your wrists from the surface edge with padding or a wrist rest.

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- **Footrest**—Your feet should be flat on the floor. If your chair is too high for you to rest your feet flat on the floor, consider using a footrest. If not available, you can use a household object.
- **Monitor**—Arrange your laptop or monitor directly in front of you and approximately an arm's length away. The top of the screen should be at or slightly below eye level. Try to set up the monitor to avoid glare, as it can strain your eyes. If you wear bifocals, you can lower the monitor an additional 1-2 inches for more comfortable viewing. If necessary, tilting your screen can also help.
- **File storage**—Organize files and materials so that you don't have to frequently bend and strain to reach them.
- **Keyboard and mouse**—When using a keyboard and mouse, keep them on the same surface. Ideally, a flat keyboard is better than one tilted up. Position your arms so that your wrists can be straight, with your arms at elbow level. If using a laptop, the same principles apply.
- **Phone**—If you use your phone often, consider using a headset or a speakerphone to reduce the need to frequently hold up the phone or press it up against your neck.
- **Cords**—Be aware of other risk factors that may be present, such as overloading electrical outlets or creating tripping hazards with power strips or extension cords running across the floor.

Working from home comes with its own set of challenges. As you find yourself working from home for a prolonged time, taking small steps can go a long way toward working more productively, preventing ergonomic injuries and improving your physical well-being. Keep ergonomics in mind and make your workstation work for you.

Preventing Cyberattacks

While remote work is exciting in many ways, this environment also comes with unique challenges—including additional cybersecurity risks. However, you can help prevent hackers from compromising your personal or work data by understanding common cyberthreats.

Many attempts are typically brushed aside by IT and firewalls. However, as an employee working from home, those protections aren't guaranteed and can often be worked around by hackers.

Threats to Monitor

One of the best ways to prepare for cyberthreats is to understand what types of activity are unusual and how to look out for them. The following are some of the most common cyberthreats to be aware of:

- **Vishing**—Vishing, or voice phishing, is when a scammer spoofs a legitimate phone number and poses as an IT help desk, using that alias to solicit personal information. These calls may even be routed your cellphone, making it harder for IT or security systems to catch. Vishing attempts are a recent trend and are increasingly prevalent.
- **Phishing**—Phishing is an attempt to gain personal information, such as computer passwords, Social Security numbers or other data. Hackers and scammers will impersonate a legitimate company and send fake emails to solicit this information, typically with a phony threat.
- **Malware**—Malware is a type of computer virus typically disguised as an innocuous program,

email attachment or link. These viruses infect computers and can do any number of tasks, typically hidden from the user. For instance, they might store password data, track website activity or download personal files.

- **Brute force attacks**—Brute force attacks are when hackers try logging into someone's account many, many times. These attempts work most often when individuals reuse usernames and passwords across different accounts. A hacker may expose the information to one account, then use those credentials everywhere else they can think of, eventually gaining access.

Should you encounter a cyberthreat, be sure to report it to IT to ensure the safety of your data and to help prevent it from threatening you or your peers in the future. While cyberattacks are inevitable, you can help protect your work and personal data by staying aware of current threats and knowing how to respond.

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