

Working from home

OHS information for employers and workers

This bulletin gives examples of occupational health and safety best practices for employers and workers who are working from home. If your workplace allows telecommuting or work-from-home options, these best practices can help maintain worker health and safety.

KEY INFORMATION

- **Employers should:**
 - Develop a work-from-home policy.
 - Establish a contact schedule and have their workers' contact information, including emergency contact information.
- **Workers should:**
 - Take steps to maintain their mental health.
 - Design their home office or workstation in ways that mitigate the risk of developing or aggravating musculoskeletal injuries.

Work-from-home policy

Employers should develop a work-from-home policy that includes:

- Communication between employer and worker.
- Availability of tools and technology to enable staff to work remotely.
- Protocols to protect workers' health and safety.
- Contact with customers, if applicable (for instance, practices that limit direct contact to biological hazards such as respiratory viruses).

Contacts

Employers should establish a contact schedule and have a worker's contact information, including the exact address they will be working at and an alternate phone number. As well, workers should provide an emergency contact.

Workers should have their employer's contact information and know how and when to reach out to their supervisor or management. This is especially important in circumstances where the worker might typically seek out an in-person conversation.

If an employer has workers who work alone, read [Working alone](#) for more information.

Mental health

Working from home can be a big change under any circumstances. Use strategies such as these to help maintain well-being and balance:

- **Keep a schedule.** It's easy to overwork when working from home. Set break times, regular working hours, and beginning- and end-of-workday routines.
- **Set up a dedicated work space and ground rules.** A home office is ideal, but if a separate room isn't available, create a work area and make sure family or roommates know you're working when you're in that area.
 - Consider using tools such as closed doors, a white noise machine or app, or a "Do not disturb" sign to reduce distractions and reinforce your work space and requirements.
- **Stay connected.** We're social beings, and workplaces are an important part of both our personal health and community.
 - Employers should continue to hold meetings (for instance, by teleconference or video conference) and set deadlines that support focus and structure.
 - Workers can actively maintain their office culture through direct messaging, quick phone calls, or virtual coffee breaks together.
 - If needed, everyone should know how to access employer or community supports, such as an employee and family assistance program or the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#).
- **Maintain your professional identity.** Dress and groom for your workday, keep colleagues informed of project progress proactively, and promptly return emails, calls, and voice mails.
- **Use your scheduled break times to support your health and well-being.** Step out to your balcony or yard, eat a healthy snack or lunch from your kitchen, or check in with your family or roommates.

Ergonomics

A poorly designed home office or workstation can increase the risk of developing or aggravating musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs). Some common hazards that can lead to MSIs such as muscle strain, pain, and numbness include:

- **Awkward posture.** A poor computer or workstation setup can cause awkward posture. The design of laptops makes it impossible to position both the screen and keyboard at

the correct height, which can lead to poor posture in the neck, shoulders, and wrists.

- **Contact stress.** Contact stress is when a hard surface (such as the edge of a desk or the edge of a laptop) places external pressure on the soft tissues of the body. Poor workstation setup and the use of a laptop can increase contact stress on the wrists and forearms.
- **Repetition.** Typing and using a mouse require repetitive actions in the arms, hands, and fingers. If a body part is in an awkward posture and you are performing a repetitive activity, the risk for developing a musculoskeletal injury increases.
- **Static posture.** When working from home, people sometimes stay at their computer for longer periods of time and don't take regular movement breaks. Lack of movement can increase the risk of developing a musculoskeletal injury.
 - As well as your scheduled breaks, get up and move around periodically. If you need to, set a timer to remind yourself to take quick, active breaks that let you reposition your body and refocus mentally. Frequent very short breaks throughout the day are important for both physical and mental health.

For more information, visit [Ergonomics in the workplace: Identifying and controlling MSI hazards](#).

Tips for setting up your home office

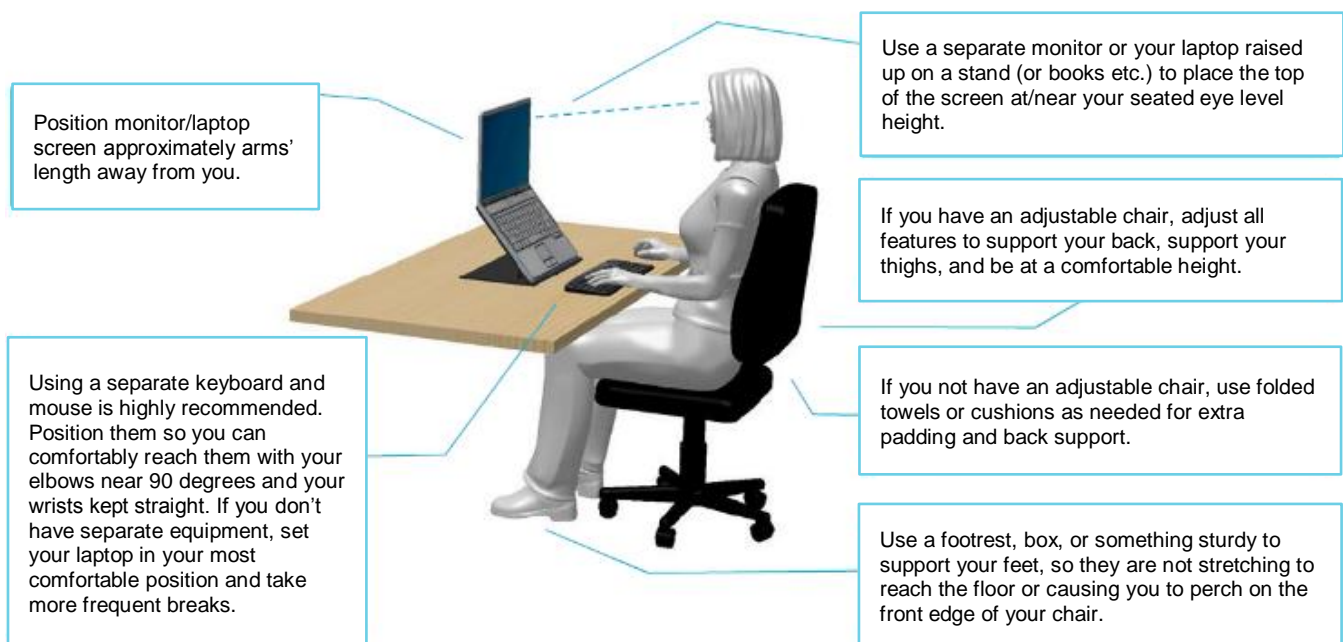
Figure 1 below gives some guidelines you can follow to set up your workstation. Here are some additional tips to consider when setting up your home office:

- Have adequate work surface space. A desk with a height-adjustable chair is best, but you can also manage at a kitchen table or a similar space.
- Avoid working from couches or other soft surfaces that don't have a stable work surface or support for your back.
- When possible, position your computer so windows are beside you, not in front of you or behind you. Use options such as blinds or curtains to control glare and reduce the risk of eye strain.
- Make sure to follow good housekeeping practices (ensure surfaces are clean and clutter-free, electrical cords are in good condition and properly positioned, heavy or sharp items are safely stored) to reduce the risk of common household and office injuries and illnesses.

More tips for setting up your work area are available at myhealth.alberta.ca/Health/pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=abp8920&lang=en-ca.

Figure 1: Setting up your workstation

Image source: EWI Works



Contact us

OHS Contact Centre

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Edmonton and surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hard of hearing (TTY)

- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

Notify OHS of health and safety concerns

alberta.ca/file-complaint-online.aspx

Call the OHS Contact Centre if you have concerns that involve immediate danger to a person on a work site.

Report a workplace incident to OHS

alberta.ca/ohs-complaints-incidents.aspx

Website

alberta.ca/ohs

Get copies of the OHS Act, Regulation and Code

Alberta King's Printer

alberta.ca/alberta-kings-printer.asp

OHS

alberta.ca/ohs-act-regulation-code.aspx

For more information

Ergonomics in the workplace: Identifying and controlling MSI hazards (ERG045)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/erg045

Ergonomics: Setting up your work area web page

myhealth.alberta.ca/Health/pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=abp8920&lang=en-ca

Office health and safety CCOHS fact sheet

ccohs.ca/oshanswers/occup_workplace/office_general.html

Proper height of work surfaces (ERG016)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/erg016

Sitting and preventing back pain (ERG014)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/erg014

Telework / remote work / working from home CCOHS fact sheet

ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/telework.html

Working alone (WA002)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/wa002

© 2022 Government of Alberta

This material is for information only. The information provided in this material is solely for the user's information and convenience and, while thought to be accurate and functional, it is provided without warranty of any kind. Neither the Crown, nor its agents, employees, or contractors will be liable to you for any damages, direct or indirect, arising out of your use of the information contained in this material. If in doubt with respect to any information contained within this material, or for confirmation of legal requirements, please refer to the current edition of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, Regulation, and Code, or other applicable legislation. Further, if there is any inconsistency or conflict between any of the information contained in this material and the applicable legislative requirement, the legislative requirement shall prevail. This material is current to December 2022. The law is constantly changing with new legislation, amendments to existing legislation, and decisions from the courts. It is important that you keep yourself informed of the current law. This material, including copyright and marks under the *Trademarks Act* (Canada), is owned by the Government of Alberta and protected by law. This publication is issued under the Open Government Licence – Alberta. For details on the terms of this licence and commercial or non-commercial use of any materials in this publication, visit open.alberta.ca/licence. Note that the terms of this licence do not apply to any licensed third-party materials that may be included in this publication.

Working from home

©2022 Government of Alberta | Published December 2022 | GS017

Classification: Public

