WORKING WELL FROM HOME
Planning safe and healthy work for your workers

This guide has been prepared by the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society of Australia (HFESA) to help you and your workers be comfortable, productive and safe while working from home. Human Factors and Ergonomics professionals can assist employers confirm that home-based equipment and furniture are suitable for workers and how they work from home.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics report that 1 in 3 employed people regularly worked from home in 2015\(^1\). The recent COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing measures mean that many more of us now work from home. For example, 88% of organisations encouraged or required workers to work from home as part of these measures\(^2\). Working from home may become the new norm.

However, physical discomfort, pain, fatigue and anxiety that can occur when working from home does not have to be the new norm.

Employers have an obligation under Work Health Safety legislation in their state to provide a workplace that is safe and healthy. Working from home is considered a workplace when work is directed to be undertaken by an employer.

This guide presents a brief overview of some of the common problems experienced by people working from home. It also provides links to help you apply knowledge from the science of human factors and ergonomics to improve your workers’ comfort, productivity, health and satisfaction while working from home.

Common problems experienced by people who are working from home

These are some of these problems people experience when working from home:

- **Discomfort, pain or injury.** This can arise from:
  - Poor working postures, e.g. using the wrong type of chair, working at a surface too high, sitting hunched or twisted while working on a laptop computer.
  - Not having regular movement breaks and sitting for long periods (what is the longest videoconference or webinar you have sat through?)
  - Longer work hours at home that increases sedentary time (e.g. reduced movement around the home).
- **Visual fatigue and visual discomfort.**
- **Mental fatigue.**
- **Anxiety** e.g. from adjusting to a new routine when working from home, learning to use new technology, balancing work and family demands.
- **Feeling isolated or disconnected from your team /colleagues, or communication shortcomings with colleagues and supervisors.**
Improve your workers’ comfort, productivity and satisfaction

It is a good idea to have a conversation with your worker about their experiences working from home. You may find that many workers have similar problems that aren’t so difficult to solve.

Checklists are available to help your worker make sure that everything is set up correctly. But sometimes it can be difficult for someone to evaluate their own work arrangement, posture and other stressors. Therefore, you may need to give your workers further support when setting up their home workstation.

How can a Human Factors and Ergonomics professional help you?

An assessment by a Human Factors and Ergonomics professional can help your worker achieve a working arrangement where they can perform a range of normal work duties in a safe and effective way, and with a reduced risk of injury. The aim is to adapt the work to suit the worker. Advice would be tailored to meet your budget constraints as well as the needs of the worker’s situation.

Human Factors and Ergonomics professionals can use a variety of tools to assess and design a functional work arrangement. For example, a Human Factors and Ergonomics professional can:

- Help your worker adapt their current furniture to create the best home office to suit them.
- Help you and your worker review their workload, work expectations, and their interactions with other workers and with people in their home.

The assessment can be via video-conference, email, or face-to-face in your worker’s home. You will need to agree to an assessment method and any costs associated with it.

How do I get in contact with a Human Factors and Ergonomics professional?

The Human Factors & Ergonomics Society of Australia has more than 500 members Australia-wide. Some of our members have attained professional certification (Certified Professional Ergonomist), which means that they have demonstrated education and experience across a range of human factors and ergonomics topics (they don’t only give advice about setting up your desk and chair!).

To find a Certified Professional Ergonomist (CPE) in your local area go to:
https://www.ergonomics.org.au/find-a-cpe

References


Additional resources and links

© 2020 HFESA
Working Well from Home: Planning safe and healthy work for your workers, 11th May 2020