WORKING WELL FROM HOME
Planning safe and healthy work when working from your home

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

An Australian Bureau of Statistics report states 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 employees 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.

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 comfort, productivity, health and satisfaction while working from home.

**Common problems experienced by people who are working from home**

You are not alone if you experience any of these problems 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 your 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 your 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 comfort, productivity, safety and satisfaction

If you experience difficulties with your work from home arrangement, a starting point may be to discuss this with your manager; they may have successfully helped others with similar problems.

Some people use a checklist to help set up their workstation, but it can be difficult to evaluate your own work environment and posture. You can reduce your risk of discomfort by seeking support when setting up your home workstation.

How can a Human Factors and Ergonomics professional help you?

An assessment by a Human Factors and Ergonomics professional can help you achieve a working arrangement where you can perform your 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 you. Advice would be tailored to meet your budget constraints and any potential working space available within your home.

Human Factors and Ergonomics professionals can use a variety of tools to assess and design a functional work environment that works for you. For example, a Human Factors and Ergonomics professional can:

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

The assessment can be via video-conference, email, or face-to-face in your 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