

COVID-19 and Working from Home



DSE – Display Screen Equipment, including desktop PCs, laptops, tablets and smartphones used for work

introduction

Millions of people suddenly find themselves working from home – possibly for the first time. This short note is designed to provide some basic information about the physical aspects of using mobile DSE – and in particular laptops or tablets – for prolonged periods. If you are lucky to have a home office (with task chair, desk, separate screen etc) you can apply general principles about chair and workstation set-up to replicate how things are set up in the office.

While great for short bursts of work, portable DSE such as laptops, tablets and smartphones is generally unsuitable for prolonged use. One reason for this is the lack of any separation between keyboard and screen, which encourages users to bend forward and tilt their head and neck as they constantly look down at a screen.

general principles

- **sit less, move more**

Wherever you choose to work at home, try to avoid static postures (staying in the same position for too long), even if you think your posture is “good”. Regular movement and postural changes are important not only to avoid or manage aches and pains, but also to protect general health. Working from home can often involve compromises compared to the office (e.g. using a dining room chair instead of an office chair), so breaking up long periods of DSE use and sitting becomes even more important. You might also be less likely to be interrupted if working from home, and so liable to sit for longer. As a rough guide, try to aim for at least a minute of standing or movement after thirty minutes of sitting. You might even try some [stretching exercises](#) while sitting and working.

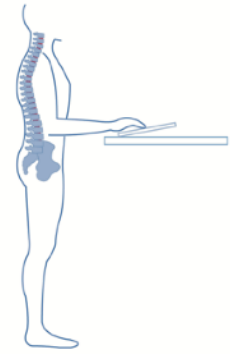
- **neutral, supported postures**

We’re built to move – not sit or stand for long periods – but try to avoid movements (and postures) which are awkward or repetitive. This means sitting at a good height relative to your work surface, bringing commonly used items (like a keyboard) close to you (so you’re not stretching or twisting to use them), and trying to position your screen at a good height.

(1) work surface

Try to use a stable work surface at a good height (such as a dining room table) in preference to lower surfaces like coffee tables. Avoid working in bed, or from soft seating like sofas.

If you like to stand periodically to work, you might be able to use household furniture (such as a chest of drawers) provided this is sufficiently deep and at a good height (approximately elbow height). A low block or other item to place a foot on and allow you to change posture can make standing for longer periods easier.



(2) chair

In the absence of an office chair, a dining room chair is often a suitable seat for most people to use. With your keyboard around 10cm from the edge of the table, ideally you would sit at a height so that, when typing with shoulders relaxed, there would be an approximate right angle at your elbow with your forearms parallel with (and just brushing off) the desk surface. To achieve this height, you might need to use a cushion or similar to 'bump you up' in height. Similarly, if you feel you need some extra back support for your lower back, a cushion (or rolled-up towel) can help with this.

After adjusting your height relative to your work surface, if you can't comfortably place both feet flat on the ground you can use books, boxes, files etc as a makeshift footrest.

(3) screens, keyboards and mice



laptop stand

Over time, constantly looking down at screens can cause various issues. Raising the height of the screen – **if you are able to do this** – is a key recommendation. This help to keep your chin up and your posture 'open', and avoid prolonged forward bending. You could plug into a separate screen if you have one, raise your laptop or tablet on books, files etc, or even use a laptop or tablet stand.



tablet stand

However, raising the height of the screen means you will also need to use a **separate** keyboard and mouse to help maintain a neutral working position. If you don't already have these at home (and you aren't able to use your work equipment), purchasing your own separate keyboard and mouse is definitely worth considering for the weeks or months ahead. Amazon have a wide range of affordable items – other retailers are available!

- **‘zoning out’**

If you are sharing a room in the house with others who might distract you (partners also working, children etc) then being able to focus can be difficult. Using headphones to listen to music or white noise (we recommend the free www.mynoise.net, also available on streaming services) can mask background noise and help you concentrate.

other physical hazards

Beyond DSE use, in the circumstances it's worth considering a few other issues. For one thing, the emergency services are highly likely to be under extreme pressure during the pandemic crisis.

- **slips, trips and falls**

Slips, trips and falls account for more major injuries in the workplace than anything else, while falls are the most common type of accident at home. Make sure cables and laptop bags are not trailing or likely to be tripped over.

- **electrical safety**

As it tends to be frequently used, moved and/or wound up, charging cables for portable DSE can become damaged more quickly than for other hardware. A quick visual check now and again can guard against the risk of shock or fire.

- **fire safety**

Make sure that you have a smoke alarm on every floor, and that they are regularly tested.

- **first aid**

If you already have a first aid kit at home, check that it contains at least the basic items you might need.

Paracetamol has been recommended as the drug of choice if you acquire coronavirus and are self-isolating, whereas ibuprofen should be avoided.

DSE Scotland



Desk Assessments & DSE Assessor Training



www.dsescotland.com

(0131) 335 3689