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Let's Connect!

Want to win a \$50 Amazon gift card?

And, more importantly, want to share your thoughts with OSHA at the national level? I will randomly draw the name of one NAWIC member who identifies a potential health and safety issue and shares at least one idea for addressing this issue by February 28. The purpose of this "contest" is to identify issues that may not yet be on the radar of OSHA and to share ideas for issues that are currently being researched. You may have an idea for a "better way" of bringing safety to the office and jobsite. I want to hear your voices. You can email your entry to me at [CO-kem513@outlook.com](mailto:CO-kem513@outlook.com).

# OSHA-NAWIC Alliance

## February 2021

### Working from Home: How to Optimize Your Work Environment and Stay Healthy

*Condensed from the November 20, 2020 NIOSH Science Blog by Brian D. Lowe, PhD, CPE; Jeannie A.S. Nigam, MS; Claire Caruso, PhD, RN, FAAN; Imelda Wong, PhD; and Julie Tisdale-Pardi, MA*

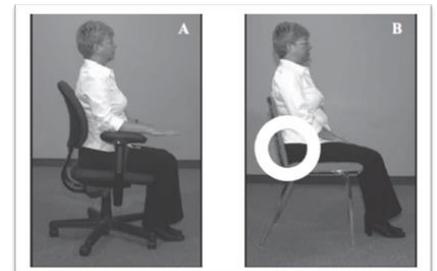
Many workers continue to telework during the pandemic. While some may be fortunate to have a designated home office, others are competing for workspace with family members. These new work arrangements combined with the additional stressors of working at home may be taking a toll on our health. Here are some tips to optimize your telework environment and help manage stress during these challenging times.

Start with creating a work-ready environment. Find space in your home where noise, lighting and temperature can be well-controlled. Even if you are home alone, a dedicated workspace will help keep you focused.

#### Seating

An intelligently designed workspace can help prevent workplace musculoskeletal disorders. Below are ideas for a healthful seating design.

- An office chair with armrests is ideal for seating, allowing your feet to rest flat on the floor with the hips and knees at, or slightly greater than, a 90° angle. If your feet are not flat on the floor, use a box or book as a footrest.
- In general, avoid working on a couch or soft chairs. If you have no other option, use pillows to provide some back support and work in an upright position.
- Varying your posture regularly is beneficial. If possible, periodically work standing up as a break to prolonged sitting.
- Working for prolonged periods of time at a kitchen table or while on the sofa can be uncomfortable for many. Ideally, a primary seated posture should support the low back in a position of lordosis – the natural inward curvature of the lumbar spine above the pelvis. This is shown in photo A. Photo B shows an ordinary flat back chair which does not support the inward curvature of the low back.

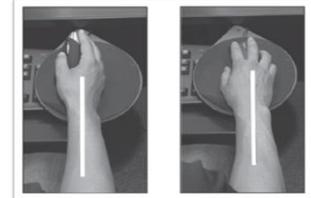


## Monitor/Display

- An external monitor is more ideal for display, generally placed about an arm's length away with the top of the monitor at or below eye level. Use a book or box to elevate the monitor, if needed.
- Position your display perpendicular to any windows or adjust your blinds to help reduce screen glare.
- If you are using your laptop's display, take more frequent breaks from screen use. Increasing font size may decrease eyestrain.

## Keyboard/Mouse

- If you cannot use a separate monitor, you may be able to use a keyboard and/or mouse that is separate from your laptop. External (USB or wireless) keyboards and pointing devices can be positioned independently of one another and independently from the screen/display.
- If using an external mouse, maintain a neutral (straight) wrist posture as shown here.
- When using a keyboard, the wrists should be as close to neutral (straight) as possible. Elbows should be at a 90° – 120° angle.
- To the extent possible, avoid resting the forearms and wrists on unpadded cornered edges of the work surface. (As in the left panel shown.) Rounded edges (right panel) are preferable to reduce localized contact pressure.



## Eye Strain

Working from home could increase the hours of screen time. Eye strain can be caused from prolonged screen use, from excessively bright light in the telework setting, font size and other factors.

- Take regular breaks from screen use, including tablets and cell phones.
- Work in areas with less glare from outside light. Close drapes, blinds, or shades.
- Understand how to adjust your display brightness and contrast to reduce eye strain.
- Consider enlarging the font to avoid squinting, leaning forward, or placing the laptop closer.
- Try the 20/20/20 rule to help combat eye fatigue. Focus your gaze on an object 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes.

## Take a Break

- Periodic rest breaks and changes in posture are beneficial.
- NIOSH research has found that overall levels of musculoskeletal discomfort and eyestrain are significantly reduced when twice-daily conventional rest breaks were supplemented with hourly 5-minute breaks.
- Take at least one prolonged break (such as at lunchtime).
- Set a timer for your other 5-minute break from screens and from sitting. Stretch, walk the dog or yourself, climb a set of stairs, get the mail, or rehydrate.

Paying attention to your home office setup can help prevent physical discomfort and musculoskeletal disorders. The good news is that raising awareness of these principles will also help improve your “regular” work environment when we one day return.