

TECH STRESS

WORK-FROM-HOME WELLNESS: ASSESS YOUR SETUP

Consider where you're working, how you're sitting, and if you're remembering to take breaks to rest your eyes and reset your mind.

To optimize your desk, place the keyboard on the desk surface; then pull up your chair and adjust the chair height so that you can rest your forearms on the desktop, while placing your fingers on the keyboard, so your arms form the letter "L". This enables you to take the weight off your arms and shoulders while you're using your hands. Then you're no longer fighting gravity while you're typing.

What's working well here:

- Knees are at a right angle, like the letter T.
- Good back support allows for a straight and upright position.

Your desk:

At home, the key is to remember that most furniture can be changed. Desks can be raised by using blocks or purchasing risers from the hardware store. If the desk is too high, give yourself permission to just neatly trim the legs. Another option is to purchase an inexpensive replacement desk on Craigslist or from other secondhand sources that you can alter to suit your needs without guilt.



Workarounds for a sit-stand desk at home: If you would like to create a sit-stand workstyle, you may already have a credenza or dresser that is the perfect height for standing work. For someone of medium height, credenzas make marvelous, roomy standing desks. If you are tall, a dresser might be the ideal height for a standing desk. Here, too, you want the surface to be at about elbow height.

Your monitor:

You can sync your laptop, tablet, and even your phone with an external monitor, sync your laptop with two monitors, or use your laptop or tablet with an inexpensive laptop stand. YouTube has instructions on the kind of cable you'd need and how to sync your monitor and devices.

Your chair: When the table is too high, raising your seat will make you more comfortable. If you're using a dining room or kitchen chair, often it makes a noticeable difference to simply use a pillow. Even better, use a small, firm pillow that is cut in a slight wedge shape so your knees are about an inch lower than your hip joint. If you are planning to purchase a chair, remember to try it first, whether it's new or secondhand.

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WORK-FROM-HOME WELLNESS: MOVE MORE

We're living an evolutionary mis-match: our societies, tech, and lifestyles evolved much faster than our genes could keep up with, so our bodies are still more suited to hunting and gathering than sitting at a desk for eight hours. Chronic sitting is the opposite of the evolutionary pattern of our ancestors, who alternated periods of rest with frequent movement. Maintaining static posture at a desk for hours on end without getting up and moving around can result in fatigue, muscle tension, back strain, and poor circulation, putting us at risk of injury. Here are some strategies for dynamic work-from-home living:

Alternate periods of activity and rest

Performing alternative tasks or different types of activities and movement is one way to interrupt the couch potato syndrome. The Tech Stress authors' research has confirmed what others have observed: that it's important to be physically active, at least periodically, throughout the day. Alternating activity and rest recreates the pattern of our ancestors' daily lives. When we alternate sedentary tasks with physical activity and follow work with relaxation, we function much more efficiently. In short, move your body more.

Vary how you do your usual tasks

Alternating time at the computer with opportunities to move or be active is central to your ability to pace yourself. When you change to a different type of task or movement, you use a different set of muscles, which interrupts muscle fiber contractions and allows them to rest. Try interrupting your typing by getting up and filling the paper in the printer, or make a telephone call while standing. Periodically allow your shoulders, arms, wrists, and hands to relax.

Take time every day to regenerate

When performing mechanical tasks, muscle fiber units within the larger muscles tighten in a cascading sequence. The first units within the muscle to contract are typically the last to relax. When we don't relax all of the muscles fully, the part of the muscle that was first contracted may remain contracted. The key is to relax all the muscle fibers. Two strategies for achieving this include (1) alternating tasks when we're working, and (2) setting time aside each day to fully relax.