Temporary Laptop Use at Home

Working at home on your laptop? You aren’t alone! Many people who normally work in an office setting are now temporarily working from home.

For many people this may mean sitting on the couch with the laptop on their laps. They are called laptops after all! However, in terms of your comfort and productivity, as well as decreasing the potential for sore wrists, elbows, shoulders, neck and back, we would like to share the following basic guidelines for temporary laptop use at home.

General Principles

Ergonomics

Ergonomics is all about the physical relationship between you and your office equipment, in this case your laptop. Laptop design, having the screen attached to the keyboard, means that if the keyboard is optimally positioned for the user, the screen is not. Likewise, if the screen is optimally positioned, the keyboard is not.

Your goal is to obtain a comfortable, well supported position that keeps your head balanced on your neck with your arms, back, and feet well supported.

30/30 Movement Guideline

Move and change positions on a regular basis throughout the day. Don’t lock into one position!

About every 30 minutes take at least a 30 second physically active micro-break. Get up, stretch, take a walk. Remember to MOVE . . . MOVE . . . MOVE!

Various Workstation Scenarios

When working with a laptop, follow the guidelines listed below most closely matching your situation, using items you have at home.

Adjustable Height Table/Desk and Adjustable Height Chair

- If both your table/desk and chair are height adjustable, first adjust the chair height to place your feet flat and your thighs parallel to the floor.
- Adjust the table/desk height so your wrists are straight and your forearms are parallel to the floor when you place your hands on the laptop keyboard.
- Angle the laptop monitor so you can see it with the least amount of forward head position.
Fixed Height Table/Desk and Adjustable Height Chair

- If your desk or table is at a fixed height, place your laptop on the desk/table.
- If your chair height is adjustable, adjust the chair height so your wrists are straight when you place your hands on the laptop keyboard when you sit all the way back in the chair. You can place a small pillow behind your lower back if additional lumbar support is needed.
- Once your wrists and forearms are neutral, if this caused your feet to come off the floor find a box or stool to rest your feet on, so they’re not left dangling.
- Angle the laptop monitor so you can see it with the least amount of forward head position.

Fixed Height Table/Desk and Fixed Height Chair

- Place the laptop on the table/desk. If your wrists are straight when you place your hands on the laptop, you are good to go!
- If your wrists are not straight you need to adjust your seated height. Look for a different height chair or put a seat cushion in the chair if the chair is not high enough.
- If this caused your feet to come off the floor, find a box or stool so your feet are not dangling.
- Angle the laptop monitor so you can see it with the least amount of forward head position.

Couch/Furniture

Are we saying never sit on your couch or easy chair and use your laptop? No, you can certainly use your couch some of the time.

- The same guidelines apply to obtain a comfortable, well supported position that keeps your head balanced on your neck with your arms, back, and feet well supported.
- Use pillows under your forearms to provide support for your arms and shoulders.
- Some will also find it helpful to place a pillow under the laptop to ensure your wrists are straight when your hands are on the laptop keyboard. Make sure the soft fabric surface doesn’t block the laptop vents because this could cause the laptop to overheat. Also, there are sofa servers or bed trays that may work to position your laptop when seated on the couch.
- Make sure your feet and legs are well supported.
- Just remember the 30/30 movement guideline and MOVE, MOVE, MOVE!

Standing Counter

Try to mix in some standing time while using your laptop.

- Look for a countertop that allows you to stand comfortable with your elbows about 90 degrees with your wrists straight (parallel to the floor) when using the laptop keyboard.
- Angle the laptop monitor so you can see it with the least amount of forward head position.
- Good shoes are important for standing. Good walking shoes will be good for standing.
• Use a footrest so you can alternate one foot up on the footrest to provide for alternate foot placement and allow you to vary your body position. If you don’t have a footrest, a box, a ream of paper, or books can be a good substitute.

Other Considerations

Spare Keyboard and Mouse

If you happen to have an extra keyboard and mouse around the house, you can use the laptop as a monitor while using a separate keyboard and mouse placed on a work surface. Simply position the laptop on a box or books to lift the screen top to eye level (or slightly lower if using bifocals) at a comfortable distance.

Eyeglasses

Make sure your eyeglasses, for example use of bifocals or trifocals, don’t result in you holding your head out-of-neutral head and neck positions when viewing the monitor.

Telephone

Use your phone’s speaker setting for hands-free operation when using your laptop. Better yet, use a headset if you have one.

Lighting

Make sure you have adequate light to read documents wherever you need to read from documents and use your laptop at the same time.

Reduce Glare

To reduce the potential for eye strain and eye fatigue, don’t position your laptop directly in front of a window so you are facing into the light. You should always try to place your laptop perpendicular to a light source.

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