

What makes a home office safe and productive?

As working from home becomes more common, it is important to ensure your workers are operating in a safe and healthy environment.

Traditional work practices are changing as we embrace greater flexibility, meaning more Australians are working from home.

Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2016 data reveals almost a third of all people employed regularly work from home. To a large extent, the pursuit of a better lifestyle through a greater work/life balance is driving this, while others work from home to 'catch up' on their workload.

Organisations have an obligation to provide a safe working environment for their workers, whether they are fulfilling their role from home or in the office. This includes ensuring the home office meets ergonomic safety standards and workers are adopting healthy behaviours.

As an employer, you can fulfil your obligation in ensuring a safe and productive home office environment by satisfying yourself that your worker's home office is set up in accordance with the following seven ergonomic strategies:

1. Start with a good chair

For the majority of workers, a standard three lever chair is most suitable (not the large-backed, reclining type), as it is easily adjustable. For those who want to look further, synchro or 'active-chairs' can be investigated.

The Australian standards (Australian Standard AS/NZS 4438 – Height-adjustable swivel chairs) recommend the following features:

- ▶ Adjustable in height (standard 140mm height to match 720mm desk height)
- ▶ Height adjustable backrest, providing sufficient support to the lumbar. Some chairs also provide a tension adjustment feature
- ▶ A seat pan that matches the worker's thigh length. When seated all the way back in the chair, the user should have a two – four finger space behind the back of the knee
- ▶ A five-star base for stability
- ▶ Well padded – worker should not be able to feel any hardness in the seat base

Although price is a consideration, it is more important to ensure the chair fits the worker, is suitable for the tasks being performed, and has a warranty on parts (ideally seven – ten years). Armrests are generally unnecessary, unless there are mobility concerns.

A 'bargain' chair will usually have poor or average strength components and assembly, and is likely to break down after a year or two. It is recommended to visit an ergonomic furniture shop rather than a stationery company.

2. Know all the features of the chair

Whichever chair is purchased, if it is not adjusted correctly, can cause issues. Consider running our office ergonomics training sessions to help your workers to understand how to adjust their chair and workstation.

Please contact LGIS on (08) 9483 8888 to enquire about this service.

If possible, use a checklist (see number 7) or assessment to ensure the following adjustments have been made:

- ▶ The backrest is in the correct position to provide lumbar support
- ▶ The chair height ensures shoulders are relaxed and hands comfortably on the keyboard in front of worker
- ▶ Seat pan is flat or in a slight recline to ensure the worker sits back in the chair
- ▶ If feet cannot touch the ground completely, use a footrest to support thighs

3. Ensure good, even lighting

External glare and reflections should be controlled by curtains or blinds. Ensure the worker is not facing a screen with bright daylight (like a window) beyond and behind the screen.

Overhead lighting should be ample, without shadows near the keyboard. Consider an extra desk lamp if needed, but ensure the light source is covered and kept out of the field of view.

4. Use the right desk

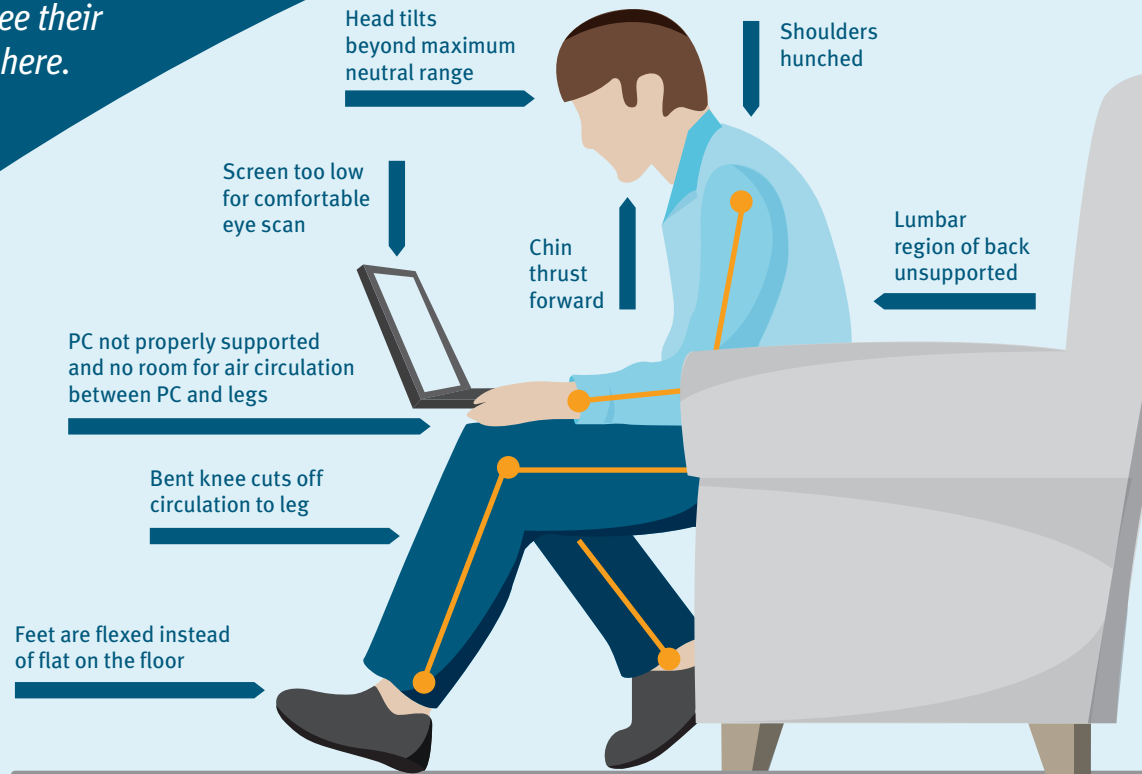
An appropriate desk will provide sufficient space for a computer and its hardware, plus paperwork, lighting and easy to reach storage. It should be deep enough (recommend 850mm) for monitors, keyboard and paperwork, of suitable thickness (20-30mm max) and long enough for tasks (1500mm average).

Whether a worker is using a desktop computer, laptop or a tablet, it is recommended they always have an external keyboard, mouse and monitor placed at the appropriate height. For data entry tasks, a document holder placed between the monitor and keyboard will decrease the likelihood of neck discomfort.



Avoid poor home office ergonomics!

The TV room, couch or bed are not suitable home office arrangements – see their negative impacts here.



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Look for a chair that meets Australian standards (Australian Standard AS/NZS 4438 – Height-adjustable swivel chairs)



To encourage workers, set an activity goal of moving for two minutes every 30 minutes.

5. Control unwanted noise and distractions

Unwanted noise can easily send productivity plummeting. The working environment should have minimal distractions and disruptive sounds, providing a low-noise environment that is most conducive to concentration and productivity.


6. Provide education and support to workers

Movement is key. With plenty of debate about, and interest in, standing workstations, it is important workers understand movement is the best strategy. Small movements of the wrist and neck over the day can reduce tension. Encourage workers to take regular breaks from their chair or workstation, as movement will ensure blood flow through the legs and lower back. To encourage workers, set an activity goal of moving for two minutes every 30 minutes.

7. Assess and evaluate

It is vital a thorough assessment be completed on any home work environment. This can be done by a worker conducting a self-assessment of the workstation to ensure it is adjusted correctly and the appropriate equipment is available.

Alternatively, a representative of your human resources or occupational safety and health team can visit the home office and complete a similar assessment, or LGIS can assist.

Please visit the LGIS website (lgisw.com.au) for access to a range of resources that are designed to assist you with the prevention and reduction of workplace injuries. To book an ergonomic assessment, or for further information on the LGIS injury prevention programs, please contact the LGIS allied health team on  (08) 9483 8888, or your regional risk coordinator.