Your Optimal Ergonomic Health at Home

It can be easy to overlook your ergonomic health when working from home, but a few simple steps can prevent injury and optimize efficiency and productivity.

During high-stress times and long workdays, it's important to be cognizant of the way you work within your environment. Here are tips from a Kaiser Permanente ergonomic specialist on how to avoid repetitive stress injuries and create a conducive at-home office.

Workspace Set up

Your chair, work surface, computer monitor, and mouse should support a neutral position of the neck, back, arms, and wrist, suggests Carson Demers, a physical therapist and ergonomic program coordinator at the Kaiser Permanente San Francisco Medical Center.

A work chair should allow feet to be flat to the floor and hips slightly higher than the knees in addition to having ample lower back support. A work surface, whether it's the kitchen table or a makeshift desk, should allow elbows to rest at a 90-degree angle.

Monitors should be eye level and at arm's reach. A couple of stacked books do the trick if you don't have an adjustable monitor. Get in the habit of lowering your gaze, not your neck, Demers said.

Lastly, for those working on a laptop, Demers suggests using a peripheral keyboard and mouse. This makes it easier for forearms to be parallel to the floor and wrists to be straight while typing and using a mouse.

Move Around

One of the best ways to avoid pain associated with strain, repetition, or sustained posture is to move around every 20 to 30 minutes. Adjustable working equipment, which fosters accurate posture, is often not available at home, so it's crucial to limit your body's exposure to less optimal postures and the added forces that come with poorly fitted environments.

"It's easy to get lost in your work at home," Demers said. "It's important to take micro breaks and get up from your sitting position, whether it's stretching, climbing stairs, or getting out of the house."

This helps increase blood flow and energy levels, decrease stress, and improve focus and overall wellbeing.

Routine

When it comes to productivity, sticking to a daily routine is vital. This means acting as if you are at the office when you're at home. Demers suggests waking up at the same time every day, showering, scheduling lunch breaks when you normally would at the office, and taking care of personal chores before or after the workday.

Mitigate Distractions

Kids, pets, dishes — there are a lot of potential interruptions when working from home. Although it's difficult to eliminate every distraction, designating a quiet, private workspace can help.

"Find a place where you can be as cut off from distractions as possible," Demers said, adding that it's also beneficial to let other people in the house know you need alone time. "It's positive to practice boundary setting."

If you have kids at home, set up activities for them prior to the start of the workday. Try your best not to answer the phone except for work calls and restrict doing household chores unless during a scheduled break.

Be Mindful of Your Body

When a new situation arises or anxiety is heightened, people tend to be out of touch with their bodies, Demers explained, because they are solely focused on the issue at hand.

Be aware of your discomfort or pain, and don't to ignore it. Instead, pinpoint it and make accommodations accordingly.

"Check in with your body periodically and tune into it before you get hurt," he said.