

Good advice on working from home

It looks as if there will still be periods of time with work from home for the employees at IST. Work from home may mean more sedentary hours, fewer possibilities of adjusting your workstation to your needs, and less collegial contact.

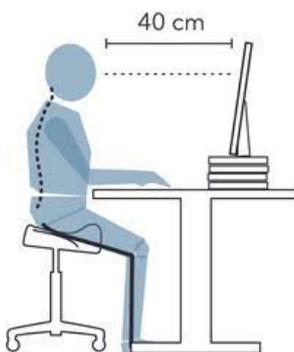
Here is some good advice as to how you get through the workday at home in the best possible manner.

The layout of your workstation at home

Even if most of us have a place at home where we can sit and work at a computer, few of us have furniture that can be adjusted individually. Instead, we try to adjust ourselves to the furniture. This can lead to tension and pain in the body after a few days. Luckily there is something that you can do to set up your workstation more suitably.

Sedentary work at the computer

First of all, it is important that you can support your arms when you sit at the computer. You will have to find a position where you can rest your forearms on a firm surface, when you work at the computer. This is particularly important, if you experience pain in your shoulder, neck, or head in connection with the computer work. This means that you will have to sit close to the tabletop and at a height where it is possible to maintain relaxed shoulders and approximately at an angle of 90 degrees in your elbows, while you can place your feet flat on the floor. The backrest must support the small of the back, while armrests are usually in the way. Do not use the backrest the whole time but move forward on the seat and sit without support when you write and lean back and use the backrest when you read, take a break, or speak on the phone.



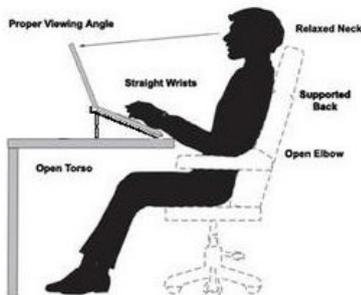
Try different chairs and sit at different tables in your home in order to find the best height. Perhaps you will need some cushions. Perhaps you have an exercise ball at home which may be good for varying the way you sit.



If you have special equipment for your computer, for example a mouse trapper for your keyboard or a mouse, it might be an idea to take it home for the period you are working from home.

The position of the screen

If you are working on a laptop, it might be difficult to place the screen at such a distance and at such an angle that you can avoid looking downwards and thus risk tension in neck and shoulder. If you already have a private desktop computer with a separate screen, it may help to connect the laptop with this screen. Alternatively, you could perhaps bring your screen from your office to your home. Perhaps it is necessary to put something, e.g., books, beneath the screen to place the screen at such a height that you can sit with your neck relaxed and look straight ahead.



If you have an external keyboard, you can place the laptop on a pile of books or the like on the table, so that the screen is at a more suitable height.

If you have neither a separate screen nor an external keyboard, it might help to place the keyboard of the laptop at a slant by putting something beneath the computer that raises the part facing away from you.

Lighting

The result of poor lighting is that you strain your eyes which may lead to tired and dry eyes and headache. Seat yourself preferably with your side to the window. If you sit with your back to the window, the light can reflect on the computer screen. If you sit facing the window, the contrast between the screen display and the window glare is big. Either choice can strain the eyes.

Other sedentary work

To many of us, part of our work is reading. It can be articles, textbooks, examination papers, or other academic material. In those cases, you can benefit from sitting somewhere else, for example on the couch with your feet up.

Standing work

Do vary between standing and sedentary work. By standing work at the computer, the same rules apply as by sedentary work at the computer with regard to position of the screen and support of the arms. It may be difficult to find a suitable place in your home that can serve as standing work at a height adjustable table. Instead, you can plan online meetings to take place for example standing at the kitchen counter or at another work table in your home. You may put a pile of books beneath the laptop during online meetings, so that you will be at eye level with the other participants.

Take breaks and get moving

At work, we are used to having natural breaks, where we visit each other in our offices, have meetings or coffee breaks with our colleagues. Many of you have probably experienced that when we work at home alone, we may sit still for quite a long time. But it is important that we remember to take breaks to get our body moving.

You should avoid sitting still for more than 45 minutes at a time. You can set an alarm and instead take a break of 5 to 10 minutes to do practical chores in your home, get coffee, or do exercises.

Make use of exercise videos, preferably live. An example is Firmaidrættens 10i12 exercises on Facebook – daily targeted exercises for sedentary work: <https://www.firmaidraet.dk/arbejdspladsen/dyrk-sammenholdet/10i12/> There is also an archive of exercises.

At klinik.dk, you will find specific videos of exercises that counteract pain various places in the musculoskeletal system: <https://www.klinik.dk/hjemmearbejdsplads/>

If, despite your best intentions, you get less exercise than usual, it may help to wear compression stockings – the kind recommended for long flights will do fine. This may counteract the feeling of heavy legs and feet.

Walk & Talk

Working from home saves commuting time. But this could mean that you lose part of the daily exercise which the trip to and from work gave. Therefore, it may be a good idea to take time during the day for a walk and get some fresh air in your lungs. If possible, you can spend the time on a Walk & Talk with a colleague on the phone. It will provide the opportunity for both solving some specific tasks and for maintaining the social contact with your colleagues. At the same time, you will probably experience an added bonus of the walk – your focus and efficiency of your work could easily increase.

The surroundings

Fresh air

Air out several times during the day, regardless of the weather. Good ventilation gives better air quality, so you avoid a headache.

Disturbances

To some people, working at home can give more peace to work, because we are not being interrupted by our colleagues. But if there are other family members at home during your working hours, it may be difficult to create the necessary peace to work. If possible, try to set up a “designated working space” in your home – preferably in a separate room. In any case, it may be necessary to agree on house rules on when and how people may interrupt you. You can also clarify for example when you take breaks and can be disturbed and when you have important meetings.

Social contact with colleagues

Besides the contact that can occur in connection with online meetings and Walk & Talks, it might be a good idea to arrange with your colleagues to meet online on Zoom or Teams for coffee or lunch breaks during the week. You may put the appointment in your calendar, which makes it easy to get to know how the others are doing.

Sources for further inspiration (Danish only)

Fysiodanmark: <https://fysiodanmark.dk/hjemmearbejde-effektivt-og-uden-smerter/>

Firmaidræt: <https://www.firmaidraet.dk/arbejdspladsen/dyrk-sammenholdet/10i12/>

Krop og Fysik: <https://www.krop-fysik.dk/indret-en-god-hjemmearbejdsplads/>

Ergomentor: <https://www.ergomentor.dk/produkter/indretning-af-dinhjemmearbejdsplads/>

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SDU:

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