

Being Smart with Your Home Office Space

The onset of COVID-19 has drastically changed the way Americans work. According to [research from Stanford University](#), 42% of the U.S. labor force is now working from home full-time. As businesses navigate the pandemic and adjust their bottom lines, this shift to at-home offices could become permanent for many.

To avoid this new way of doing business from becoming a literal pain in the neck, health experts are now encouraging those who work from home to pay close attention to home office ergonomics.

Robbie Garrett is an OSF HealthCare physical therapist assistant in Bloomington, Illinois. He says ergonomics boil down to everyday safety.

“Ergonomics are important because they will help you in an everyday situation, whether you are working from home, whether you are working in a facility, a factory, anything like that,” explained Garrett. “Ergonomics is basically how you can maintain your body position and be safe and healthy and not cause any type of injuries to yourself.”

Improper ergonomics can cause a wide range of issues over time, including musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), which are injuries or disorders of the muscles, nerves, tendons, joints, cartilage or spinal discs.

A [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) report](#) on work-related MSDs and ergonomics found that MSDs account for nearly 70 million physician office visits every year in the United States.

Garrett says three of the biggest ways to avoid these injuries and keep work pain-free are to keep your computer screen at eye level; pay attention to your arm and wrist placement by making sure your arms are in a natural position and wrists are straight; and, keep your feet firmly planted on the ground with your knees and hips level.

One work station set-up Garrett says to avoid is the couch and TV tray combo.

“The couch and the TV tray – as much as it sounds fun to be in that position all day long, sitting on your couch and working from your TV tray, it’s really not good,” he said. “The couches these days lend us to slouch a lot more. Everything is built for comfort, not for posture. It’s not your grandma’s couch that you used to sit on that was super uncomfortable because it was hard and made you sit up straight, and the TV tray is usually not at the right height for you.”

Even after creating an ergonomically sound workspace at home, simply sitting all day can be really rough on our bodies. Garrett says it’s also important to take hourly breaks to get up and move.

“Every hour, at least, get up, move around a little bit, five to ten minutes is going to make a huge difference in the pressure you put on your body from being in a sitting position. The longer we sit, the more compressive forces there are on the body. We all sit at our desk, at our computers for a longer period of time, we start to slouch, our head starts to go forward, our shoulders start to round, and over time that can lead to different ailments.”

Ignoring even minor aches and pains should also be avoided, no matter where you are working. Minor injuries can become major issues if left untreated and unchecked. Talk with your doctor or physical therapist if you have any concerns about pain or discomfort.