

Important Announcement

2 February, 2021 at 8:21 AM

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WELLNESS

10 Ergonomics Dos and Don'ts for Those Now Working from Home

Tips for making sure you stay safe and comfortable in your temporary workspaces

10 Ergonomics Dos and Don'ts for Those Now Working from Home

43



April 1, 2020

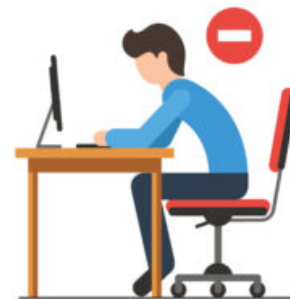
By *BU Today* staff

In an effort to stem the number of coronavirus infections, millions of Americans are now working from home, transforming kitchen tables and bedrooms into temporary home offices. Many are working under less-than-ideal ergonomic conditions—a kitchen chair that’s too low, a table that’s too high. You get the idea. Poor ergonomics can make or break your work-from-home experience.

With that in mind, *BU Today* reached out to [Carolyn Herkenham](#), a Boston University [Environmental Health & Safety](#) senior specialist and industrial hygienist, and licensed physical therapist [Kelly Pesanelli](#) (CGS’94, Sargent’96,’98), a Sargent College of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences lecturer in health sciences, for some tips and tricks to help you create an ergonomic workstation at home.

DON'T hunch over your laptop

It’s easy to work on your laptop for a few hours on the weekend, but doing so for 40-plus hours a week can lead to back, shoulder, and neck strain. If you can, use an external monitor or laptop stand (with an external keyboard and mouse) to prop up your screen. When looking at the screen, your eye line should be level with the address bar on your web browser.



Fit the backrest curvature of your chair to the small of the

height

Find a working height so that your elbows naturally fall flush with your table/desk height. This will promote better wrist alignment



An image illustrating the 20/20/20 rule. Illustration courtesy of JustStand.org

DON'T turn your couch into a workstation

As tempting as it is, the couch is not an optimal place to work at your computer for the entire day. Although it may be comfortable, having your legs or full body in a vertical position can lead to muscle numbness and discomfort.

DO customize a space to fit you

Try to set up a workstation that you can make entirely your own. Sharing a workstation means you need to adjust your computer height, chair, and furniture every time you sit down. Often, you may choose to skip adjusting the workstation altogether. If you are the only person using the space, customizing will reduce the time



DON'T skip lunch and make sure you stay hydrated

It's easy to snack throughout the day instead of eating like you did in the office. Making a meal and staying hydrated gives you the opportunity to stand up, walk around, and let your eyes have a rest from the computer screen.

DO make sure you get up and walk around

The goal is to get in as many steps as possible during the day, even if you are at home instead of on campus.

If you are interested in speaking to a BU Environmental Health & Safety professional, you can fill out an ergonomics self-assessment [here](#).

Carolyn Herkenham can be reached at cherkenh@bu.edu. Kelly Pesanelli can be reached at kpesan@bu.edu.

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There are **43** comments on
10 Ergonomics Dos and Don'ts for Those Now Working from Home



JENNIFER P MAY 20, 2020 AT 3:25 PM

I did not know about the 20 minutes/20 seconds rule! Good to know! Thank you!

↩ Reply 🔗 Link



CINDY AUGUST 28, 2020 AT 3:44 PM

I did know about the 20/20 rule. Do it! It makes a huge difference!

↩ Reply 🔗 Link

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These are useful tips. Thank you!

↩ Reply 🔗 Link



CYNTHIA MAY 21, 2020 AT 9:06 AM

This is very helpful, some stuff I was aware of but some new tips I can definitely use.

← Reply ↗ Link



DAVID MAY 27, 2020 AT 3:15 PM

Wow i feel so smart now, thanks!.

← Reply ↗ Link



LEE MAY 27, 2020 AT 3:35 PM

Thanks, good tips!

← Reply ↗ Link



LESLIE JUNE 11, 2020 AT 9:02 AM

I am confused by the full vertical position reference in working from the couch. Would that not be horizontal or reclined?

← Reply ↗ Link



BARBARA KNOX FEBRUARY 3, 2021 AT 7:33 PM

Great point, Leslie. I am an ESL professor but I didn't notice the mistake. I think you're right: The author should have written "horizontal or reclined". Then it would make sense.

← Reply ↗ Link

STEVE OCTOBER 5, 2020 AT 3:15 AM

I have been experiencing finding the best chair to use a couple times a week but it's really

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fun ever since I invested in an ergonomic chair.

← Reply ↗ Link

STEVE OCTOBER 6, 2020 AT 3:17 AM

Most of the models of the office chairs are equipped with wheels or rollers at the bottom, that allows the position of the chair be adjusted as per requirement.

<https://www.workaroundtc.com/best-computer-chair-for-long-hours/>

← Reply ↗ Link

RAUF DECEMBER 22, 2020 AT 3:26 AM

Really amazing and helpful content for people like me who are working from home during this pandemic. Thank you for sharing

← Reply ↗ Link

SAM SMITH JANUARY 4, 2021 AT 9:29 AM

It wouldn't make sense to add a lot of pressure on your back muscles and spinal discs by using cheap quality computer chairs for long hours of sitting. So do check computer chairs for long hours <https://www.accessoriesadviser.com/best-computer-chairs-for-long-hours/>

← Reply ↗ Link

BARBARA KNOX FEBRUARY 2, 2021 AT 2:21 PM

A lot of people cannot afford a monitor, let alone a laptop. Many suggestions here are fine for the wealthy but what about students who may have budget constraints?

I don't think I can afford an external monitor at this time either. What do you recommend for those that can't afford your solutions? I'm concerned about hunching over my laptop!

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Sometimes we need to be resourceful persons with all the stuff we have at home.

For example, we can pile some books in order to put the laptop a little bit higher and avoid buying a new desk. We can use some pillows to make the

chairs more comfy or even cleaning the table or desk to work in a nice place. Having a schedule even if we are at home can make our days more organized and productive.

← Reply ↻ Link

BARBARA KNOX FEBRUARY 3, 2021 AT 7:14 PM

Thanks for the suggestion, Lupe. I'm afraid the angle of my elbow will not be 90 degrees. I think Kelly's solution of buying an external keyboard is the cheapest way to improve my workstation. What do you think? I definitely use pillows and books for my chair in the kitchen! Great ideas! I also use a shoebox to support my feet since I'm short:)

← Reply ↻ Link

MELANIA SOLIS DE CARRILLO FEBRUARY 2, 2021 AT 5:55 PM

I think people with laptop who cannot afford an external monitor, could make changes with the table. Maybe they can afford a little personal table with variables heights and try the best fit for them. The problem is what happen if they can afford a table?

← Reply ↻ Link

BARBARA KNOX FEBRUARY 3, 2021 AT 7:18 PM

A lot of my furniture, I get off the street so these are great ideas, Melania. In the Bay Area, people are always moving. You can also find free stuff on Craigslist!

I'm thinking a keyboard is cheaper than a monitor so I'll put my laptop on my printer and attach a keyboard. I might be able to get a keyboard for free. Lots of computer equipment is disposed of. So, I would also be helping the environment and preventing it from going into the landfill!

← Reply ↻ Link

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MARIA M FEBRUARY 3, 2021 AT 5:20 PM

I think this article helped me a lot to take into account that comfort is important for productivity, adding to the point you mention it is necessary to think that temporary space is different for everyone, and we are looking for a more comfortable space a possible solution is to measure the time we are in

front of the monitor and take breaks very often, use everything we have at home to make our space healthier.

← Reply ↗ Link



ADRIANA EMBRIZ FEBRUARY 2, 2021 AT 2:52 PM

Thank you very much for the tips they are really helpful.

← Reply ↗ Link



DONGLING MA FEBRUARY 2, 2021 AT 3:46 PM

I love that 20/20 rule, it must be super helpful. I would like to have a try.

← Reply ↗ Link



ADRIANA EMBRIZ FEBRUARY 2, 2021 AT 3:49 PM

Thank you very much for the tips they are really helpful.

← Reply ↗ Link



YIN YIN KYAE FEBRUARY 2, 2021 AT 4:08 PM

The 20/20/20 rule is helping me a lot now. I've heard about this and forgotten it. This article reminds me to follow this rule I need the most right now. Thanks for the article.

← Reply ↗ Link



HIROKO FEBRUARY 2, 2021 AT 4:13 PM

Great advice! I started to use a laptop stand (with an external keyboard and mouse) to prop up my screen and I feel great and I have less pain in my back. I recommend it.

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BARBARA KNOX FEBRUARY 3, 2021 AT 7:20 PM

That's what I'm thinking of doing too! Thanks for letting me know that it worked for you!

← Reply ↗ Link



LADA FEBRUARY 2, 2021 AT 4:15 PM

make great space home sometimes is not possible . Yes, is truth make great how is possible. Writing I do on table . Some assessments I am able to do from bed.

↩ Reply 🔗 Link



HIROKO FEBRUARY 2, 2021 AT 4:17 PM

I think 20/20/20 rule sounds good to my eyes, I often looking at screen for a long time in a day without break. Thank you for the great advice!

↩ Reply 🔗 Link



GUADALUPE ARBELAEZ URIBE FEBRUARY 2, 2021 AT 4:46 PM

Thanks to those tips, working from home is less stressfull and monotonous.

Usually, I start my day with some exercise, meditation or yoga. Also lighting some scented candles or even being in the computer standing up make a difference and change my daily routine.

A good advice is to go for a walk while I am on a call (those calls I don't need to turn the camera on), it is a different environment and at least I move my body.

↩ Reply 🔗 Link



BARBARA KNOX FEBRUARY 3, 2021 AT 7:20 PM

I start my day with meditation too. I'm using the Ziva technique. Have you heard of it? How did you learn to meditate?

↩ Reply 🔗 Link

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I haven't heard about that App.

I know Down Dog, a very complete app that offers Yoga (all levels), Meditation and even Tabatas!

I don't know how to meditate, because my mind and thoughts go everywhere when I am trying to do it, but I least I try it haha :p

← Reply ↗ Link

MELANIA SOLIS DE CARRILLO FEBRUARY 2, 2021 AT 5:58 PM

Definitely I need the 20/20 rule. I need to stand up frequently because I like to be hydrated and this force you to leave your seat and go to the bathroom :)

← Reply ↗ Link

MAYA M FEBRUARY 3, 2021 AT 1:53 AM

I think I'll put everything into practice especially. I'll follow the 20/20/20 rule, for every 20 minutes on a computer screen, I should spend 20 seconds looking at something else from 20 feet away.

← Reply ↗ Link

BARBARA KNOX FEBRUARY 3, 2021 AT 7:23 PM

Do you set a timer, Maya? How do you remember to follow the 20/20/20 rule? I work next to a window and I like looking out the window. I think it would be more difficult if I was in an office without a window.

← Reply ↗ Link

EVELYN CASTANEDA FEBRUARY 3, 2021 AT 10:18 PM

Well, I think all people who works at home needs to know this tips, because I have heard some organizations that provide their employees the basics condition for work at home, and they give them training and tips for be productive.

But many people who study, entrepreneurs and self employees don't know about stay safe and comfortable in your temporary workspaces. Therefore this tips are

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For example for me was interesting 20/20 rule because when I'm working or studying I'm very concentrated but I need to apply this rule.

Thank you so much...

← Reply ↗ Link

YINGSHAO ZHENG FEBRUARY 4, 2021 AT 11:49 AM

I will be follow the 20/20/20 rule
for every 20 minutes spent looking at a computer screen and should spend 20
seconds looking at something else 20 feet away. This gives your eye muscles a
break and helps reduce eye strain. It's very important to protect our eyes.

← Reply ↗ Link

JIEYI CHEN FEBRUARY 4, 2021 AT 2:55 PM

This is the first time I heard about 20/20/20 rule. I think this rule helps me a lot.
Protecting my eyes. Let me have enough time to relax my eyes.

I also think the rule of “don't skip lunch and make sure you stay hydrated” is also
important. When I have something to do, I often forget to drink water or just eat
some snacks for lunch. So I need to change my way and set up more healthy way.

Thank you for sharing this great article.

← Reply ↗ Link

HECTOR CARRILLO FEBRUARY 4, 2021 AT 3:15 PM

I totally agree with the recommendations on this article, especially with the one
regarding to not skipping lunch and stay hydrated, because, sometimes, when you
are very busy, you could forget to have lunch or even drink water, but skipping
meals has more negative effects and and the end it won't save you a lot of time
and could make you work slower and getting tired faster.

← Reply ↗ Link

SERGIO HERRERA RIVAS FEBRUARY 11, 2021 AT 11:22 AM

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Formula 20/20/20 sounds amazing and is an excellent way to avoid to be tired
and stressed, I hope we can go back to the regular ways to do all thing but right we
have to do our best to continue being productive.

← Reply ↗ Link

JIANLI XIAO FEBRUARY 13, 2021 AT 9:45 PM

This is a good article! When you use a computer, it is very important to sit correctly and walk properly. I have cervical spine and shoulder problems. In fact, this is related to some of my bad behavior. I have learned more from it. Thank you for sharing!

← Reply ↗ Link

THET YU (CHRIS) NAING FEBRUARY 15, 2021 AT 9:23 PM

I totally agree, Kelly. This is a good article and the ergonomics about all Dos and Don'ts really help us when we work with the computer in these days. My wife also had a shoulder problem because of working with the computer long time. That's because she didn't follow all dos and don'ts rules. Now she is practicing and it will help her in the future. Thank you for sharing, Kelly.

← Reply ↗ Link

THET YU (CHRIS) NAING FEBRUARY 15, 2021 AT 9:17 PM

This ergonomic Dos and Don'ts article is totally amazing and useful for me. Before reading this article, I use my computer (laptop) every where I want and I found out that I couldn't concentrate more than 15, 20 minutes. After I tried to practice with this ergonomic Dos and Don'ts, I noticed that it's really helpful and I can pay more attention to the things (reading news, doing homework assignments) on the computer more than an hour. Of course, every 20 minutes, I practiced 20/20/20 technique and it made me relax to keep doing. I really appreciate Barbara for sharing this website to be comfortable using with the computer.

← Reply ↗ Link

ALICE HUI FEBRUARY 16, 2021 AT 6:05 PM

Thank you for sharing this article, which is super helpful. I used to have a shoulder

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than 40 minutes, it would remind me to stand up and walk around. It's helpful since time passes quickly when working before we notice it. Now I will set a new reminder to give my eye muscles a break.

← Reply ↗ Link



SARA BOLANOS FEBRUARY 16, 2021 AT 9:43 PM

It was a such interesting article. I didn't know about some of this tips before. Now that I spent most of my days in front of the computer I'm going to be implementing this tips. For example DO follow the 20/20/20 rule "For every 20 minutes spent looking at a computer screen, you should spend 20 seconds looking at something else 20 feet away".

↩ Reply 🔗 Link



JULIESCA FEBRUARY 19, 2021 AT 2:28 AM

I put in practice the 20/20/20 went I was doing assignment of "Intro to computer" and the result was amazing..

↩ Reply 🔗 Link

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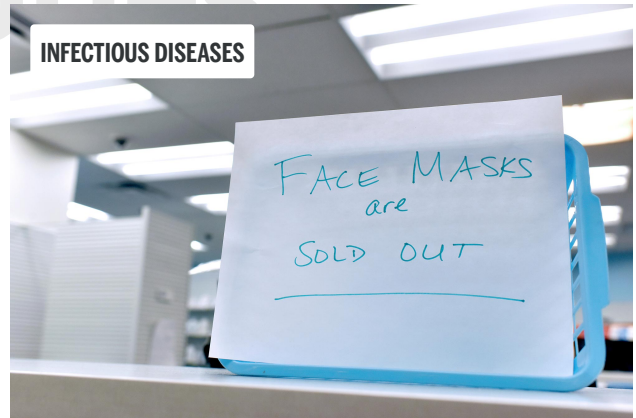
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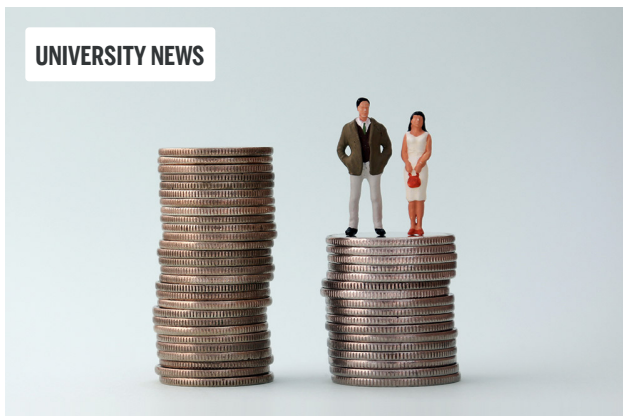
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