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**Social Security Administration**

**Home Office Ergonomics**

**Self-Assessment with Tips and Techniques**

**Script DRAFT (April 20,2021)**

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**NOTES:** About 42 minutes in current form (7000 words at 165 WPM)

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| **Slide** | **Script** |
|  | Title Slide Social Security Administration Home Office Ergonomics Self-Assessment with Tips and Techniques |
|  | Menu |
|  | Working at home on your computer?  Well, join the crowd because you are not alone!  Many people who typically have worked at their regular office setting are now working at home.  With this change we want to show you information on setting up your home office using sound work practices.  Hello everyone, welcome to ***Social Security Administration Home Office Ergonomics***. |
|  | In this training we’ll focus on helping you establish a home office that is comfortable, safe, and productive.We’ll go through a step-by-step home office ergonomics self-assessment process.The *SSA Home Office Ergonomics Quick Reference Guide* is available as a resource. You have the option to download and complete the ***SSA Home Office Ergonomics Worksheet***. |
|  | Here is an extremely important point.The information included in this training is not intended to provide medical advice.If you are experiencing significant medically related issues you should consider following up with your medical professional to receive appropriate care. |
|  | People often ask what is the best home office set up?  Your set-up will be unique to your particular situation |
|  | What is ergonomics?  Ergonomics has many definitions for example, user friendly and fitting the job to the worker. |
|  | Basically, ergonomics is all about relationships.  Picture yourself sitting at your workstation.  Does your chair provide you with comfortable back and hip support?  Does the position of your keyboard and mouse provide for comfortable hand and arm position and support?  Does the position of your monitor provide you with a comfortable head and neck position?  When you apply ergonomics in the setting-up of your home office you establish safe and functional relationships with your chair, desk and computer. |
|  | We are made to be movers and shakers.Sustained sedentary positions are not good for us.Anyone have a dog or cat in the home office?Many of us do.Ever notice the first thing they do when they get up after a nap?Yeah, they take a really good stretch.How do they know how to do this?We suspect you did not send them to stretching school when they were puppies and kittens.They instinctively know to stretch and they act on the instinct.We have the same need; we just don’t act on it! We are meant to movers and shakers! |
|  | The 20/20/20 Micro-break Guideline encourages taking a physically active micro-break of about 20 seconds in length about every 20 minutes and practice for the next 20 days to make it a habit.  Everyone agrees it makes good sense.  Remembering to actually do it may be another matter!  Plan a strategy that works for you: post-it notes, drink a lot of water, set reminders on your calendar, etc.  Make it happen as much as possible and reap the reward. |
|  | Let’s outline some home office setup considerations.  First, we’ll discuss some ideas about where to locate your home office.  Next, do you need to share the office with other household members?  Your chair is a vital component.  Chairs in the home office range from kitchen chairs to fully featured office ergonomics chairs.  We’ll discuss chairs in detail in a moment.  How about the desk or table you use? We suspect for many people it might be a fixed height desk or table.  For others it may be a height adjustable work surface.  What type of computer equipment do you have?  We know some of you may be utilizing the laptop that came from your regular office.  Perhaps, some of you have a desktop computer. |
|  | You need to get a sense of what is possible and then come up with creative solutions to make it work in your home office.  We’ll take you through a step-by-step setup process and offer suggestions based on your situation.  For example, we know of a home office in a spare area in the basement that is 5 feet by 7 feet.  In that office is a desk, a chair, a desktop computer with two monitors, a stand for a printer and other office equipment, a rolling file cabinet, a bookshelf, two desktop lights and an overhead light.  It works quite well for this person.  We know of another person who occasionally works at home, this person tends to use the kitchen counter and a stool with a laptop.  It really comes down to figuring out what works best for you! |
|  | As you think about where to locate your office in your home, identify some potential options based on these questions.  Will it be a dedicated or shared space?  Will it be used only by you or by other household members as well? |
|  | In some households there may be an area or room that can be dedicated for a home office. By dedicated we mean you can leave it setup in the office configuration.  It may be a spare bedroom. We have seen closets that have been turned into a functional office space. It might be an existing space on an available kitchen counter or dining room table.  A dedicated space may offer additional privacy – both visual and auditory; this could be an important factor to consider based on the type of work you perform. |
|  | Some home offices may be part of a multi-purpose area.  During work hours the space may be a work desk but come mealtime you may need to shift it back to being the kitchen or dining room table.  For a shared-space home office, a primary objective is to make it as easy as possible to make the transition.  Think about how you can quickly pack up the office equipment and store it in an easily accessed location.  Perhaps a travel backpack could be used to pack and store the equipment.  Small rolling file drawers are often used to store office supplies and other equipment and be readily rolled out of the way. |
|  | Will the office be yours only or will you share it with others? We call it a single-user office if only you use it. You can get it setup for yourself and leave it that way.  If it is shared by others, we call it a multi-user office. No question this does add more complexity to the setup. For example, one person may be 6 feet tall and another may be 5 feet tall. You need to consider how the chair and potentially the desk height may need to be adjusted from one person to the next. |
|  | We have found that many shared-space home offices evolve over time as we get more proficient at figuring out the most efficient way to setup and take down the office components.  Work on “making it work” the best for you.  Determine if your home office space will be shared or dedicated, if it will single or multi-user. |
|  | Experience tells us that home offices have a wide range of chair and desk configurations ranging from a fixed height chair and desk setup to a fully height adjustable chair and desk setup and all combinations in between.  We also recognize the living room couch or recliner sometimes becomes the workstation while others may have the option to work in the standing position as well.  We’ll work through strategies for the desk setup but first let’s talk chairs. |
|  | No doubt about it, your office chair is a critical component in your home office.  Depending on the chair at hand, you might be using a kitchen or dining room chair that doesn't have any adjustments to an office chair that does have quite a few adjustment features.  In a minute, we’ll go through some ideas on some recommended ways to sit in the chair, but first if your chair does have some levers, play with them to get a sense of what they do. |
|  | Here are some of typical office chair features and adjustments.  Probably the seat is height adjustable and many chairs also allow the seat to tilt or rock and it possibly have a seat depth adjustment.  If the chair can tilt or rock it may also have a tension knob to adjust the rocking tension.  Figure out what your chair’s seat can do!  The manufacturer’s name and chair model may be listed on a label on the bottom of the seat; if so, check on-line for the chair’s adjustment features. |
|  | Look to see if the back support is fixed with no adjustment or if it is height and angle adjustable.  If it is height adjustable, see if you can get the low back cushion in the back support about in line with the inward curve in your lower back.  With some chairs you can independently adjust the angle of the back in relation to the seat. |
|  | Office chair armrests may be in a fixed position, but some are height adjustable and may be side-to-side adjustable as well.  Some chairs even have armrests that can be rotated front to back.  Armrests are intended to provide support for your forearms to unload weight from your neck and shoulders when you are using your hands.  Explore what your chair has to offer. |
|  | Most office chairs will have 5 legs to limit the tippy nature of the of the chair.  Caster type indicates if the caster is suitable for the floor surface in the office area.  You will see a hard plastic shell caster for use on a softer floor, like carpet, we consider a chair floor mat to be a softer surface.  You will see a soft rubberized caster on a hard surface floor like linoleum, wood or tile. |
|  | Unfortunately, many people don't use their chairs to full advantage.  We’re asking that you take a good look at your chair and invest some time to understand how it works. |
|  | Here’s a question for you, “Is there only one best way to sit?”  Or does it make sense to adjust your chair throughout the day, if you can?  What are some chair adjustment strategies? |
|  | When you’re doing hand related activities like using your keyboard and mouse or handwriting, see if you can adjust your chair to the “upright keyboard position”.  The chair back support is fairly upright with your head balanced over your neck and shoulders and you have good access to using your keyboard and mouse. |
|  | Other times when you’re not using your hands on your keyboard and mouse, see if the chair can tilt back some to let it rock.  If your chair does have a rocking chair function remember to look for a rocking tension adjustment knob usually located under the seat of the chair.  If this is too loose the chair will flop backwards when you recline and you will not be happy.  The correct tension will make it feel like a comfortable rocking chair.  We call this the “semi-reclined conversation position” because it works well when you’re reading or talking on your phone or to someone nearby. |
|  | If you find your chair lacking in features, can you modify it?  That is a good question and the answer in many cases is yes.  For example, by adding a seat cushion you can sit higher in the chair.  A small pillow secured on the back support can improve your lower back support.  Pads placed on armrests can improve arm support. |
|  | If you find any maintenance issues with your chair, please don’t ignore them.  Either have the chair repaired or consider replacing it. |
|  | Now if you recognize that your chair, with or without modification, is not a good fit, consider replacement options.  Check with your supervisor and/or SSA Ergonomics Program website for guidance. |
|  | Of course, the best advice we can offer you about your chair is to, “Get out of it on a regular basis!”  Intermittently stand up and work at a counter if that is possible.  Stand when you talk on the phone when you can.  Drink a lot of water. You know what we’re talking about.  Remember the Micro-break Guideline.  Bottom line – work hard on getting out of your chair during breaks. |
|  | We mentioned earlier that ergonomics is all about relationships.  We also will say it really is all about inter-relationships.  For example, if you have a fixed height desk you may actually raise the height of your chair to obtain the recommended relationship between your body and hands in relation to the desk.  This may result in your feet no longer being supported on the floor and then you will need a footrest to get the foot support you need.  All of these factors are inter-related.  We’ll take you through general guidelines for computer set-up and use.  Then we’ll go through a series of typical home office set-ups so you can figure out how to make your particular situation work for you. |
|  | Position the keyboard and mouse on the work surface so the wrists are reasonably straight with no pressure on the forearms from the edge of the worksurface. |
|  | People primarily tend to position a keyboard and mouse in one of two ways: “piano player” or “forearm supporter”.  Piano players position the keyboard and mouse close to the edge of the worksurface.  They relax their elbows at their sides, bent to about 90 degrees and float their hands over the keys.  Armrests, if available are used.  Forearm supporters position the keyboard and mouse farther forward on the worksurface and rest their forearms on the worksurface.  Either method works but a crucial difference is that the worksurface heights are different for the two styles!  The worksurface height needs to be slightly higher for the forearm supporter. |
|  | A keyboard wrist rest may be in place used to rest the palms when not actually keying.  It may be built into the keyboard or be separate.  Mouse wrist rests are not recommended; as they “lock” your wrist in one position.  We also encourage the use of keyboard shortcuts to reduce overall mouse use.  They can save time and minimize repetitive motions.  Check your software program for a list of them. |
|  | A great deal of information comes to us through the computer monitor.  Our guideline is to position the monitor so the top of the screen is about or slightly above eye level when you are seated or standing and at least arm’s length distance.  An exception to this may be for someone who wears bifocal eyeglasses and views the monitor through the bottom part of the lens.  In this case, one option is to lower the monitor to improve head and neck position.  Some individuals have tri-focals or dedicated computer glasses to manage their visual needs. |
|  | Two monitors are becoming very common these days.  If you use two monitors determine how to best view them.  If you view both monitors about 50% of the time each you are a primary/primary monitor user.  Position the monitors so they are centered on your nose.  You will then have equal right and left head rotation.  On the other hand, if you predominantly view one monitor you are a primary/secondary user.  Position the primary monitor directly in front of you and the secondary monitor angled to the side and adjacent to the primary one.  With these general guidelines in mind, let’s discuss laptop and desktop computer set-up strategies. |
|  | Some home office setups will have a laptop as the primary computer system.  You’ll use the laptop’s keyboard, touch pad and monitor.  If this is your situation, as you see in this example, try to position the laptop height so your wrists are straight when using the keyboard and touchpad.  You may be able to angle the laptop on an inclined stand.  Because the monitor is attached to the laptop, experiment with angling the monitor to minimize the amount of forward head tip to view the monitor.  The way our eyes work, we have about 20 to 30 degrees of downward eye gaze to look at materials lower than eye level.  The setup in the lower example may be suitable for bifocal users. |
|  | Some home office setups will have a laptop with a docking station that allows you to have a separate keyboard, mouse and monitor.  Position the keyboard and mouse so the wrists are reasonably straight.  Look at this setup, you can see the laptop is the processor for the computer system, but he has a separate keyboard, mouse and monitor on a stand.  To make use of the laptop monitor as a second monitor he has it on a stand to position it in an appropriate viewing position.  In this example, the monitor is positioned so the top of the screen is about eye level and at least arm’s length distance.  Another laptop option is to have a separate keyboard and mouse but still use the laptop monitor placed on a stand to position it at the correct viewing height and distance. |
|  | If you utilize a desktop computer you will have a separate keyboard, mouse and monitor.  Follow the Computer Set-up General Guidelines we discussed to position the keyboard and mouse so the wrists are reasonably straight and the monitor position allows for neutral head and neck position |
|  | With the general guidelines in mind let’s go through several specific home office set-up scenarios. |
|  | First let’s take a look at a fixed height table or desk and a fixed height chair scenario.  If you are able to sit all the way back in the chair with your lower back supported with your hands on the keyboard.  AND you have 1 to 3” of space between the back of your knees and the front edge of the chair,  AND your feet are directly on the floor,  AND your wrists are straight with keyboard and mouse use,  AND your monitor is adjusted appropriately.  Guess what?  You guessed it – you fit. You are one of those individuals that fit in this fixed height scenario.  We can predict you at 5’9” to about 6’ 1” tall and you fit in “adult standard” dimension furniture. |
|  | What about this next scenario?  Your home office also consists of a fixed height desk or table and a fixed height chair.  Now though when you sit in your fixed height chair and place your hands on your fixed height desk, your wrists are not straight and may be in contact with the edge of the desk.  You are sitting too low!  What can you do?  A different height chair could be an option to sit higher.  Another option could be to place a cushion on the chair’s seat so you can literally sit higher in the chair and obtain the recommended wrist position.  Now, if that means your feet no longer are supported on the floor, create a footrest (two packets of printing paper, a box or similar material) that provides support for your feet and legs.  Now with the changes made, your wrists are straight and you have an acceptable arm and hand position with good foot and leg support. |
|  | How about if you're at a fixed height desk or table but your chair is height adjustable?  First adjust your chair height so when you put your hands on the keyboard and mouse you achieve the desired relationship between your arms, wrists and hands on the keyboard and mouse. Use a seat cushion if needed.  Next check your foot support.  For some people, your feet may not be on the floor.  We never want to dangle our feet for any length of time when seated.  You want your feet supported.  To support your feet, you need some type of footrest.  Footrests are available commercially but a sturdy box or stool at the right height will work just fine.  Check the computer equipment positioning and adjust as needed.  You are good to go. |
|  | If you have the ability to adjust the height of your desk and have an adjustable height chair here's the strategy to get your body in a good position with good support.  First, adjust your chair height to get your feet placed directly on the floor.  Next, adjust the height of the desk so when your hands are on the keyboard and the mouse your wrists will be relatively straight.  Look at the example. This person has adjusted her chair height, so her feet are on the floor.  The desk height has been adjusted so her wrists are straight and her shoulders are relaxed.  Her monitor is at a height that promotes neutral head and neck position.  She is good to go. |
|  | In the last several years we have seen a trend toward more standing workstations in the office and are starting to see that trend occur in home offices as well.  Fully powered sit/stand desks intended for the home office are in the marketplace.  If circumstances indicate that you are moving towards a full-time home office status, considering a sit/stand arrangement may be an option.  It is important that the table will raise high enough to at least match your standing elbow height and go low enough to accommodate your appropriate seated height. |
|  | For right now though you can probably figure out some creative ways to stand at work.  Maybe a counter for your laptop with modifications or you can place a box on a desk to achieve the correct height.  In the example the separate monitor is on a stand. |
|  | This brings up the question, “What is the correct standing height?”  Here is the strategy.  With whatever shoes you will wear when standing – here is a side note, we do encourage some cushioning for your feet when standing.  If your shoes are good for walking, they also will be good for standing.  At any rate, to determine your standing worksurface height, you want to be able to stand comfortably “tall” with your elbows at about 90 degrees, your shoulders relaxed and your wrists straight with hands on the keyboard and mouse.  Use a footrest to allow for alternative foot position.  Shift weight forward to the balls of the feet and backwards to the heels when standing on both feet or alternately when standing with one foot in front of the other.  Perform “heel lifts” frequently.  This will improve lower extremity circulation.  Remember you don’t want to stand up all day.  Mix up some standing, with seated activities and get in some walking as well.  Modify the time periods.  Remember this mantra.  “Don’t wait until it’s too late!”  Move on a regular basis! |
|  | Are we saying never sit on the couch or recliner and use your laptop?  The answer is no! You can certainly spend some time on the couch, just not for hours on end!  Recalling that ergonomics is all about body and arm position and support here are tips for couch and recliner use with your laptop.  Place pillows underneath your elbows to support your arms and shoulders.  Be careful they allow for ventilation for the laptop.  Angle the monitor for optimal head position.  Make sure your legs and feet are well supported.  Sofa servers can work pretty well.  Limit your time spent on the couch.  Get in the habit of the micro-breaks! |
|  | If you reference hard copy often, you may want to use a document holder.  The holder elevates and positions documents on an incline thereby improving head and neck posture.  This can be placed either directly in front of the you between the monitor and keyboard if enough room is available or can be placed on a desktop copy stand placed adjacent to the monitor. |
|  | Your telephone may be one of your essential work tools.  Think for a moment about how much time you utilize the telephone.  If you make only a few short calls a day, a telephone handset will probably work well.  Avoid cradling the handset between your ear and shoulder particularly if you are using your keyboard or handwriting.  Hold the handset with your hand.  If you spend hours on the phone every day or if you make frequent short calls, you may want to use a headset.  It allows for “hands-free” computing and promotes neutral head and neck position.  You may also want to consider using the speaker phone feature of your phone for hands-free listening while computing. |
|  | If you have a webcam, it may be built into the laptop or be a separate camera/microphone.  Make sure you can maintain a comfortable position when using the webcam. |
|  | If you find yourself frequently reaching outside of your comfort reach area, consider moving the item closer if possible or relocating it entirely.  It’s amazing how much “stuff” we can accumulate in our offices.  The old adage, “a place for everything and everything in its place” makes good sense.  On a regular basis remove clutter that can negatively affect your posture and functionality. |
|  | Office lighting is a significant issue.  When you think about home office lighting, consider two factors: general illumination for the entire work area and task lighting that is specifically focused on your work area itself.  General illumination in the office area may be an issue: either too much or not enough.  Think about controlling light coming through windows with shades or blinds as needed.  Running the back of your hand upward on the lower blinds will close them but leave the upper blinds open.  Can the computer setup be at 90 degrees to windows to avoid glare? |
|  | Task lamps are a great way to add additional light where needed.  For example, you may use a desktop lamp to provide additional light on your documents.  How you position the task light is important.  Don’t point it directly at your computer screen; that will create glare.  Make sure it is not in your direct line of vision. |
|  | Ergonomics is a potent tool.  We hope you were able to identify and act on the opportunities to optimize your home office setup and work practices.  Improved comfort, well-being and productivity will be your reward!  We appreciate your time and attention! |