Safety Note

21 January 2022

COVID-19: The reality of working from home

Background
Many UQ workers are now back to working from home following the recent Queensland Government advice to slow the spread of COVID-19 in the community now that borders have reopened. For anyone who has not already reviewed their home workstation or perhaps have made changes to their home workstation since the last lockdown, it is recommended all staff review these resources:

- Utilise UQ’s Computer Workstation Online Self-Assessment tool to ensure your home workstation is set up as optimally as possible.
- The Safety Note - Keeping Safe When Working From Home provides guidance and resources to assist UQ workers set up a routine for effective working from home arrangement.
- Worksafe Working from home online learning module to raise awareness and knowledge of common safety, health and wellbeing risks when working from home.

Computer-related musculoskeletal disorders
If you experience any discomfort in your muscles or joints while working from home, it is recommended that you take photos of your home office workstation (including at least one with you using the workstation) and submit it along with your completed Home Office Inspection checklist to your local WHSC for advice. They can suggest minor changes that will help you work more comfortably. If you do not have a WHSC, please send to hsw@uq.edu.au.

Common Working from Home problems and solutions

Laptop use
If you are using a laptop as the sole computer and monitor, you may be sitting with the head forward and neck in a flexed position, possibly resulting in neck pain and headaches. Using the laptop keyboard and track pad may cause forward reaching or leaning forward onto the desk, leading to upper back and shoulder discomfort.

Use a box or some books if you don’t have a laptop stand to elevate your laptop and use external keyboard and mouse to minimise strain on your head, neck, shoulders and upper back.
Easy DIY laptop riser options

Some examples of DIY laptop risers. Try a wire file rack or a stack of old textbooks.

Prolonged sitting

If you normally use a sit/stand desk at work and are noticing lower back discomfort associated with prolonged sitting or maybe your home office chair is not as supportive as you would like, you may be able to create a standing workstation at home. Try moving your laptop around the house to find a standing height that works for you. Some options might be the kitchen bench, ironing board, laundry basket on top of the desk or a bookshelf. The optimal height should be close to your standing elbow height. Remember it’s still important to alternate between sitting and standing throughout the day. Too long in any posture is likely to lead to discomfort.

For more advice visit the Symptom Checker section of the online self-assessment tool.

Other simple changes you can make to your workstation

- Use an old textbook as a footrest.
- Use your paperback novels or old magazines for monitor risers.
- If you know you will be working predominately from home, consider retrieving specialty items from your campus desk to use at home (i.e. vertical mouse or compact keyboard). Make sure to ask your supervisor first and ensure you bring them back when you return to working on campus.
- Consider purchasing inexpensive compact keyboards and vertical mice, from local retailers like Officeworks or Kmart.
Steps you can take to support your health and well-being

- Make sure you take a lunch break away from your home workstation.
- Plan to eat as if you were away from home, prepare your lunch and snacks ahead of time. Drink adequate water to avoid snacking.
- Go for a walk during your lunch break or in the time you would normally be commuting to work.
- Change your posture as frequently as you can; consider taking phone calls away from the home office if you don’t need the computer.
- Make time to chat with colleagues (Zoom, email, Teams, etc.). Schedule an electronic coffee catch-up with a friend you would normally grab a coffee with on campus.