

Safety Note

1 April 2020

COVID-19: The reality of working from home

Background

Many UQ workers are now working from home as we implement physical distancing to assist in reducing the spread of COVID-19. The [Preparing for Working from Home](#) guide sent out 18 March 2020 provided guidance and resources to help UQ workers assess their workstation using our [online self-assessment tool](#) and [Home Office Inspection Checklist](#).

However, at the time, we were ensuring access to our IT systems was a priority and perhaps working from home seemed like a future event that may or may not eventuate. Maybe your workstation set up was acceptable initially, but now you have some time to commit to ensuring your work at home set-up is as comfortable as possible. We are not sure how long we will be working from home, so it is prudent to review your workstation set up and ensure you are as comfortable as possible and minimise your risk of discomfort or injury.

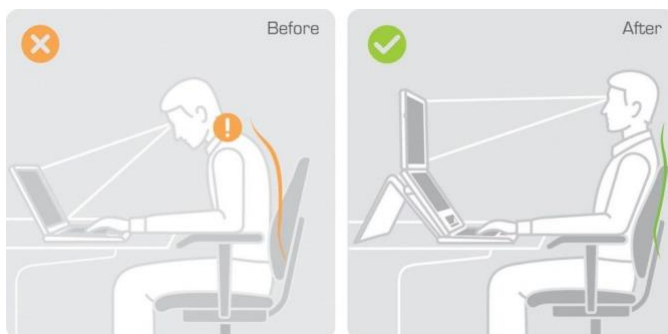
Computer-related musculoskeletal disorders

If you have begun to experience any discomfort in your muscles or joints since starting to work from home, it is recommended that you take photos of your home office workstation (including at least one with you using the workstation, if possible) and submit it along with your completed [Home Office Inspection checklist](#) to your [local WHSC](#) for advice. If you do not have a WHSC, please send it to hsw@uq.edu.au.

Common problems and solutions

Laptop use

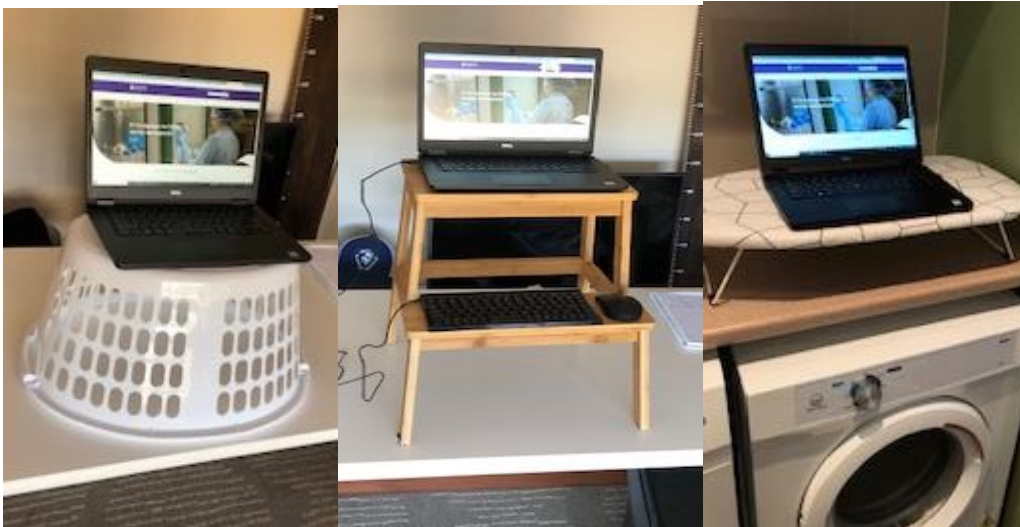
If you are using a laptop as the sole computer and monitor, you may be sitting with the head forward and neck in a flexed position, possibly resulting in neck pain and headaches. Using the laptop keyboard and track pad may cause forward reaching or leaning forward onto the desk, leading to upper back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

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.



Some examples of DIY home standing workstations. Make sure to alternate between sitting and standing to minimise discomfort.

For more advice visit the [Symptom Checker](#) section of the online self-assessment tool.

Steps you can take to support your health and well-being

- Make sure you take a lunch break.
- Plan to eat as if you were away from home, prepare your lunch and snacks, drink water to avoid snacking.
- Go for a walk during your lunch break- or at least make sure to get away from your home workstation.
- Change your posture as frequently as you can; consider checking your emails using your phone or tablet away from your desk, perhaps from the couch or that backyard hammock for a few minutes.
- Make time to chat with colleagues (zoom, email, slack, etc.).
- If you normally use a footrest at work, you probably need one at home - try using a few books or a small box to support your feet while sitting at your home desk.
- Consider additional advice outlined in the [Keeping well working from home safety note](#).