

HOME RESOURCES PACK

AECC University College Chiropractic Clinic share their advice to help you get comfortable while working from home, help you to establish a Spine-Friendly approach to daily activities. Each section in your 'home resources pack' discusses a topic and then gives you some evidence-based self-help exercises and actions to take.

Pain prevention advice includes:

1. Sitting and Working
2. Getting Some Exercise
3. Keep Moving

In these unusual times, the Chiropractic Clinic has been providing a telephone consultancy service for our patients with back pain those living with musculoskeletal conditions.

Our telephone consultancy service is open Monday – Friday from 9 am to 5 pm. To arrange an appointment, please call 01202 436222 and leave your name and contact number.

The team at the Chiropractic Clinic aim to continue to share more advice as the lockdown period continues.

1. SITTING AND WORKING

During this pandemic, most of us are experiencing disruptions to how we go about our working days, and many of us will have problems when working at a computer at home. This situation is actually nothing new because, since the introduction of laptop computers, people have been getting into trouble trying to work on their laps, dining table, coffee table, bed, or kitchen counter. Either the screen is in the right place, or the keyboard – but rarely both!

The purpose of desk chairs and the work-station assessments that you are undoubtedly familiar with is to put your spine, hip, and head in the best position to take the strain out of your neck, back and shoulder muscles, and to take the pressure off your low back. Generally, the better your desk posture, the longer you can work without problems. The more compromised your posture is, the less time you can work without a posture break.

So how should you be sitting?

Ideal

- Sitting with a slight hollow in your low back.
- Not slumping forwards.
- Keeping your head up and back, not poking your chin out forwards.
- Have your keyboard at elbow level, not too high, not too low.
- Sit straight-on to the screen and keyboard.

If possible!

- Have your knees below the level of your hips.
- Your gaze should be about 10 degrees downwards towards the centre of the screen, which should be tilted slightly upwards.

Have a look at this useful video from the British Chiropractic Association for more details: [Computer Posture Advice](#)

Techniques to help with neck and back pain

All the research confirms occupational sitting is not good for neck pain or back pain, so here are some techniques to help.

- There's no such thing as 'an ideal sitting posture' because we're not designed to sit all day. Therefore, vary your sitting position regularly, e.g. change the height of the chair or its angle of tilt frequently, use then don't use the backrest, switch chairs, get up and move around. Any movement will be positive to stop the load from constantly accumulating in the same spots.
- Take Posture Breaks! Get up and move every 30 minutes to reduce the pressure on your discs and to give your postural muscles a chance to recover.

Exercises to help with prolonged sitting

Microbreaks - Change your position! Get up and move. Walk around the garden, or go and make a coffee. Anything that alters the stresses on your body is worthwhile.

Posture Correction - Reset your sitting position. Think about whether you are sitting up or slouching. Bring your shoulders up to your ears and then let them drop down and backwards. Imagine that your head is mounted on drawer-sliders and bring it backwards, like opening a drawer. This movement may give you a double chin (but

no-one is watching, right?), but don't strive to force a double chin by pulling your chin down to your chest.

Hip Mobility - Perform a gentle thigh and hip flexor muscle stretch by standing and pulling your foot up to your bottom with your hand, or by lying on your back on the bed, sofa or a table and let one leg at a time hang off the side. In both cases, you are trying to feel a gentle stretch in the front of your thigh and hip, in the area of the front pocket of your trousers.

Pelvic Neutral - as you are sitting, imagine that your pelvis is a bucket. Without moving your upper body (so that there is no movement visible above desk level), roll forwards on your sit-bones so that you pour water out of the front of your bucket. Then roll backwards on your sit-bones to pour water out of the back of your bucket. A good neutral position is about mid-way between the two extremes. You should find that you have a slight – but not excessive – hollow in the small of your back.

Tips for improving desk setups

In a perfect world, you are working at a desk with a decent chair and a computer setup that places your hands in the right place without compromising your head and neck position. If like most of us, you are working on a work-issued laptop, then you are going to have to make some changes!

The chances are that if the keyboard is not in the right place, then you have to curl forwards over the screen, and the muscles in your neck are taking the strain. This is likely to cause neck aches and pains, and perhaps headaches. If this sounds familiar, then the easiest work-around is to use an external keyboard and mouse and put the laptop up on a stand or a pile of books at the appropriate height. The keyboard and mouse can then sit on the desk at the right height for your hands.

The next consideration is your chair. A good desk chair will help you to find the right spine position, as we have described earlier. The sofa won't! The key features of a desk chair are lumbar and mid-back support, and you should be able to get into a comfortable position without having to use your muscles to keep you there. If your current home chair is making you work, then we strongly recommend that you invest in something made for the job. This doesn't have to be expensive, but it does need to be supportive!

This photo shows a nicely adapted desk/laptop arrangement, with a plug-in keyboard and mouse giving a good forearm, hand, elbow and hip position.

What if I don't have a desk?

The absolute last resort is working on your lap or coffee table while sitting on the sofa, so if you don't currently have a suitable desk, then you are going to have to get creative. With COVID-19 looking set to keep us all at home for some time, you should look very seriously at obtaining a suitable desk and chair.

These do not have to be expensive or particularly sturdy, but they need to be the right height. If this is not an option, then perhaps you are stuck with working on the kitchen counter, the main issue being that they are too high, or don't allow you to get your knees underneath, forcing you to twist sideways, or slump forwards. The height problem can be addressed by using an adjustable bar stool. If you can empty the cupboard (or even take the cupboard door off!), then you can get your knees under as well.

While creative, these are at best short-term workarounds, and for the good of your spine, you really need a better solution. Almost anything is better than the sofa-and-coffee-table scenario!

Useful link: [The British Chiropractic Association – computer posture advice.](#)

Summary

- Make every effort to make your desk setup as optimal as you can. A poor desk setup means very frequent posture breaks – perhaps every 10 minutes. A good desk setup permits more extended periods between posture breaks – maybe every 45 minutes. (but you should make it 30!)
- Take posture breaks more often than you think you should!
- Take care with sitting down and standing up.
- Be vigilant of your posture later in the day as your muscles fatigue.



2. GETTING SOME EXERCISE

General fitness

While we are not making regular journeys, maintaining general fitness and mobility is going to be challenging. While movements around the house are better than sitting still, step count is all about quality, as much as quantity. So 5000 steps per day between the sofa and the kitchen does not bring with it the same health benefits as a similar step-count recorded outside while walking with purpose.

If it is appropriate for you to do so within your own circumstances, get out and walk!

For more guidance on how much and how often you should be walking, follow this link for NHS guidance: [Walking for health](#)

Walking is easy, right?

When you walk, walk with some purpose – with a sense that you are trying to get somewhere rather than ambling as you might while browsing in a shopping centre. If you can, stand tall: lift your chest, bring your up with your chin slightly tucked, and swing your arms, like a relaxed march. This movement reduces tension in the lower back muscles. Walking is therapeutic for many causes of back pain when it is practised in this way, and, in general terms, the more you can do, the better!

How about running?

If you are thinking about taking up running, then you must allow your body time to adjust and to change in response to the sorts of loads that running imposes. You are much less likely to feel pain or to injure yourself if you follow a programme that builds over weeks to months.

If you have a background in another form of cardiovascular exercise, swimming or cycling perhaps, then your existing aerobic capacity may even exceed your body's ability to handle the stresses of running, and you may well run yourself into trouble. Be sensible and allow enough time for your body to catch up with your lungs by following a programme!

Take a look at NHS guidance on other useful forms of exercise, including the excellent Couch-2-5k programme for those new to running: [Physical activity guidelines for adults aged 19 to 64 from the NHS](#)

Gardening and DIY

Wear loose unrestrictive, clothing. Get yourself moving well before you do anything that requires reaching, bending, lifting, or awkward positions, and then start with the lighter jobs first. And mix it up..! don't spend hours bending over weeding a vegetable patch do 15 minutes there, 15 minutes sweeping the leaves, 15 minutes digging, then back to the vegetable patch. Some research shows us, *the longer we hold an 'inadvisable' position, the more likely we are to have problems* because our bodies lose the ability to withstand strain over time. We recover our capacity when rested in the same sort of time, or moving to a different position, so you can reduce your likelihood of injury by taking regular breaks and avoiding working in the same position for more than 15-20 minutes.

A break doesn't have to mean a sit-down with a coffee, but it does mean changing your position or activity.

Alternate standing jobs with sitting jobs with kneeling jobs, or example. Keep working, but be smart about how to use your time. You can also reduce the strain by keeping jobs close to your body where possible. This will give you more endurance and control, both of which reduce your injury risk and your fatigue.

If you were trying to loosen a tight jam jar lid, would you do it at arms' length or close to your chest?

Spine friendly core exercises

In general, movement is good for you. You are better trying to exercise than you are avoiding it and sitting down all day! Vikki, our Exercise Centre Manager, has put together an entry-level video that you can watch the video [here](#), these exercises are also good for the older generation.

Simple, effective exercises to look after your back have been uploaded to our YouTube channel [here](#), but if you need something more challenging, look online as there is a plethora of "core" exercise available, attempting an exercise that looks sensible and within your reach, is absolutely fine in the vast majority of cases. If you're still unsure and would benefit from some additional guidance, then call Chiropractic clinic reception on 01202 436222, and one of the team will be pleased to advise.

KEEP MOVING

We're all now spending a lot more time at home than we might like, which is why staying as physically active as possible is more important than ever. As discussed above we are sitting far too long for our own good and numerous studies dealing with aspects of our health, as diverse as joints and muscle pain, diabetes; cardiovascular health; mental health; bone density, and life expectancy and support this assertion.

In the current COVID-19 home working climate, the danger to all of us is that we are now going to be sitting for even longer, and this maybe the situation for long enough that there are changes in our habits that persist for long after the current restrictions are lifted.

Here is the key concept:

Our bodies are constantly adapting and changing according to what we are doing. We all know that muscles get bigger in response to training and waste when not used. The same thing is happening with our bones, ligaments, tendons, and fascia, which can become stronger, weaker, longer, or shorter over time.

Our muscles and tendons tend to adopt the length that we put them in, and our tissues tend to get tight and restricted, so we can quickly start to lose our movement if we don't stay supple by moving. If we sit all day, our hips and knees adopt right angle positions as the 'new norm'.

In simple terms, we tend towards getting stuck in the positions that we adopt for the longest periods of time. If this is sitting, then look at these specific measures to keep moving.

Microbreaks - Change your position! Get up and move. Walk around the garden, or go and make a coffee. Anything that alters the stresses on your body is worthwhile. Mix it up! - Stand at the desk, or sit on a high cushion for a while!

Posture Correction - Reset your sitting position. Think about whether you are sitting up or slouching. Bring your shoulders up to your ears and then let them drop down and backwards. Imagine that your head is mounted on drawer-sliders and bring it backwards. This may give you a double chin (but no-one is watching, right?), but don't strive to force a double chin by pulling your chin down to your chest.

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