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Live Well, Work Well: Ergonomics Tips for Working from Home

Working from home comes with its own set of challenges. If an employee finds themselves working from home for a prolonged period of time, it is especially important to take steps to prevent ergonomic injuries. Taking small steps can go a long way to injury prevention at home.

Health at Home

Ergonomics is defined as the science of fitting a workspace to an individual's needs. Ergonomics aims to increase efficiency and productivity while reducing discomfort and the likelihood of injury.

Many factors of ergonomics may be taken for granted in the workplace and be severely lacking in a home environment. For example, while at the office, you likely have access to a suitable desk and chair, but when you work from home, you might not have an ideal setup.

Poor ergonomics can lead to not only reduced employee efficiency, but also a number of health issues that may have long-lasting effects, including damage to muscles, nerves, blood vessels, ligaments and tendons. Musculoskeletal disorders can be caused by a wide variety of tasks, many of which may seem innocent, such as sitting with poor posture or having to bend or reach repeatedly.

Workstation Considerations

In order to make your home a suitable work environment, there are a number of factors that you should consider for your workspace, including your:

- **Chair** - A sturdy chair that supports the curvature of the spine is ideal for working. Chairs should also allow for adjustments so that your feet can rest flat on the floor and your thighs are parallel to it. While typing, your arms should be parallel to the floor as well.
- **Desk** - Use a work surface, such as a desk or table, that has space underneath for your legs and feet. If a work surface is too low, adjust your chair accordingly. The situation may also be able to be corrected using sturdy supports to boost the legs of either the work surface or the chair. Cushion your wrists from the surface edge with padding or a wrist rest.
- **Screen** - Arrange your laptop or monitor screen directly in front of you and approximately an arm's length away with the top of the screen at, or slightly below, eye level.
- **Layout** - Organize files and materials so that you don't have to constantly bend and strain to reach them.
- **Equipment** - When using a keyboard and mouse, keep them on the same surface. Position your arms so that your hands are aligned with, or slightly below, your elbows. Make sure your wrists are straight and your upper arms stay close to your body. If you use the phone frequently, put it on speaker or use a headset in order to avoid having to cradle the phone between your head and shoulder.

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Preventing Hazards

In addition to arranging your workspace properly, you should also be aware of new risk factors that may be present. Be careful not to overload electrical outlets or create tripping hazards with power strips or extension cords running across the floor of your home.

Taking Breaks

Even while at the office, employees shouldn't spend eight straight hours sitting at their desks. This applies to working at home as well. Take regular breaks to stand, stretch and move around a bit.

In Conclusion

Working from home has its pros and cons. While your home may not be the ideal work environment, utilizing the strategies in this article can go a long way toward preventing unnecessary injuries.