

Adjusting the “New Office” (Home) in Covid-19 Pandemic

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EDITORIAL ARTICLE

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that emerged at the end of 2019 began threatening the health of millions of people. World Health Organization has declared COVID-19 pandemic as public health emergency of national and international concern. As homes are converted into offices for many in this COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to spread awareness regarding proper ergonomics practices to avoid any health issues in future [1].

The seismic shift to working from home, or “remote working”, in response to the on-going COVID-19 danger was as rapid as it was life-changing for many businesses, particularly in the service sector. One look at Google Trends gives you an idea of how big this issue has become. The concept of remote working would be their reality for the foreseeable future.

The good news is working from home can be a rewarding, productive and enjoyable experience. Many large IT companies have 90 to 95 per cent of its employees working from home, according to estimates by International Labour Organization [2].

Increased work load along with responsibilities at home has left people exhausted. Sleep disturbances become a problem as many are worried over job security and decreased immune response. Frequent updates on the pandemic are creating anxiety and insomnia in many people. Good mental health promotes good physical health by involving in dancing, yoga, gardening that brings in positive thoughts and happiness.

Various health problems can arise due to bad ergonomics while working in home. Burnout, stress eating as a result of financial concerns, having to manage children and working near spouse, being less active than normal leading to losing the physical activity become silent but dangerous risk factors for development of Non Communicable diseases.

With online conference calls, video calls, and webinars now a mainstay of many of our work environments may lead to noise induced hearing loss, Overwork in home may lead to mental fatigue and being emotionally overwhelmed. Social isolation can contribute to feelings of depression and sadness.

Working from home involves working from behind a computer/laptop for the entirety of the work day. Unfortunately, this can lead to wrist and hand strain, as well as carpal tunnel syndrome [3].

Millions of workers have been uprooted by COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) and been thrown into a “new normal” of working from home offices [4]. To further complicate things, many individuals were provided with only a laptop and home workstation. As the COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) pandemic spread in early 2020, offices and schools were closed and entered into a much more virtual world. The “new normal” has changed our business casual attire to home casual, our in-person meetings into web conferences, and our in-person school rooms into online assignments and virtual lessons. We engage in more screen time than ever before, and we spend long durations in office areas that are poorly designed for long-term use.

With this rapid stoppage of the economy, workers were shifted instantly from the office to set up an office area with what they had in their home: dining tables and chairs and other makeshift desks, no external input devices or monitors, and environments with dual functions, potentially used by multiple people (e.g., kids for school, adults for work, and family for dinner). These home offices may not fit the worker ergonomically, which could result in a fairly rapid onset of discomfort in the body that may lead to more serious problems in the future.

From this point forward, home offices will likely be a mainstay for a large part of the population, both in the short term and in the long term. In the short term, companies will likely continue the stay-in-place home offices to reduce the potential of widespread COVID-19 infection within the workplace. As a result, millions of workers need safe home offices. In the long term, companies have realized that work can be completed at home, and this will likely lead to regular work hours performed at home. Home offices are appealing to workers due to less commuting, better work-home balance, and less stress due to being in the comforts of home. Home offices will need to incorporate sound ergonomic concepts to ensure the long-term health of the workers. As the home offices become a permanent option for many workers, companies will need to provide proper accommodations with

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Table 1: Tips to follow “work smarter not harder”.

Tips	Plan
1. Make a morning plan	Start the morning with gratitude and positive vibes, allot half an hour to one hour for meditation, physical activity.
2. Create a workspace	Try to find a small space that you can carve out as your own workstation. If you have the luxury of a spare room, convert the room as an office. Keep few essentials like pen, notebook.
3. Reward yourself with brakes	By taking 5–10 minutes at the end of each hour to recharge, you'll be doing yourself (and your productivity) a favour.
4. Keep clearly defined hours	Form your own schedule of work based on needs and target. Maintain emotional space with family.
5. Avoid social media and news feed	Avoiding social media will reduce stress, improves self-esteem, maintain relationships.

respect to ergonomics, otherwise, the widespread discomfort will progress into more detrimental conditions such as musculoskeletal disorders. Increased prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders will have direct impact on the companies' bottom line through treatment costs, compensation costs, and absenteeism and improve the presenteeism. The tips can be used easily implemented and followed (Table 1).

To conclude, practice meditation and improve communication. Avoid social media, newsfeeds about COVID 19, allot time for you in morning for positive vibes. Practicing good work ergonomics will help to fight the stress and improve quality of life [5].

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