



# A Guide to Assessing Office Risks While Working From Home

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This guide contains information obtained from original and scientific resources. Reasonable efforts have been made to publish reliable data and information, but the preparer could not be held responsible for the misuse of the information or consequences of their use. The preparer tried to communicate the information smoothly and in simple language to make it easier for the professional, practitioner, and others to implement. However, the preparer suggests that you read and research more to find what works best for your workstation or workplace.

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The world has witnessed great fluctuations in the nature of doing business after the COVID-19 (new Corona) virus has swept our lives since the beginning of 2020. Among those changes that we began to face was Work From Home (WFH), in which some companies adapted to and moved their employees to work from their homes, and others issued orders to allow their employees to continue WFH until the end of this year, such as Google, Amazon and Facebook. Or as in the case of Twitter, where they gave permanent employees the freedom to choose to work from home.

We must remember here that the employer is still responsible for providing a safe work environment even if you work from your home (Article 122, Saudi Labor Law, 1436 AH) - which may be unknown to many. But, suppose here that you wanted to establish an office work environment in your home, and you wanted to know whether or not your new work environment is healthy. Here, I share with you some things that you could do to assess your work environment on your own without the need for a professional evaluation.

A few simple questions will help guide your recommendations:

**1) Is this primarily a general assessment for preventive purposes?**

Take the opportunity to educate employees while evaluating the workstation. Instruct them in some basic health principles and teach them how to make adjustments on their own. Encourage them to have the experience by themselves. Make general recommendations public while keeping in mind the goals of the employer. Ask yourself (does my employer have a small or large budget for the changes? How does he want to take decisions about modifications and new purchases?).

**2) Is the job evaluation for a person with a specific problem?**

Ensure that the specific physical complaint(s) is addressed and considered, whilst also looking at factors such as lost time, modified work, and treatment. Based on the objective results, plan to be assertive about adjustments (with the employee and employer) than you would have been if you had made a preventive assessment. Before submitting formal recommendations, it is important for the evaluator to clarify any budgetary restrictions with the employer. There are two main points to keep in mind:

A) One size does not fit all: the nature of a person's size, physical limitations, or injury might lead to adjustments that are not necessary, which is one of the main factors that make assessments different from those performed by non-professionals.





B) What might look good today might not look good tomorrow: allow time for trial and error for adjustments. Also, explain that no single posture is ideal for long periods. Discuss the importance of occasional moving and changing postures as part of the evaluation and recommendations.

## Doing the Assessment

### 1) The big picture:

Before getting started with the details, ask the employee to sit at his workstation or his own office and collect some first impressions. Is the workstation clean or crowded? Organized or scattered? Work equipment old or new? What tasks does the employee perform at his desk? What do you see as a big problem as soon as you look at the office? What needs to be modified immediately?

### 2) The height of the chair:

Unless the desk top is height adjustable (say sit-stand table), the chair height is a way to position the employee in a proper height position with his desk (a keyboard tray could be added if needed). The arms should be relaxed at the sides, the elbows at an angle of approximately  $90^\circ$ , the wrists in a normal position, with the hips and knees at approximately  $90^\circ$  of flexion (see Almajidnomics edition 1 episode 2 & BS 1335-2 for the proper chair design).

### 3) The position of the feet:

If the chair height adjustment is high, it means that the feet would never be anchored to the ground (and thus lose valuable support for the back and neck), you will likely be required footrest. Try some books or a stack of printing papers as a preliminary test. If this works, submit a proposal to invest in a comfortable footstool.

### 4) Backrest and arms:

Is the chair backrest adjustable? How close can you get to a normal spine position (S-shape)? Look at the backrest height and tilt adjustability, experiment with adjustments. Show the worker how to make adjustments as well, so that he can modify it as he sees fit.





Is it possible to adjust the seat depth? Some chair designs allow the backrest to slide in and out. Adjust the seat depth to support the thighs within 2 to 3 inches from the knees, without putting pressure on the calf muscle. Are there armrests? Can they be controlled? Possibilities include height, width, and rotation. The armrests should be cushioned, and adjusted to comfortably support the arms at the sides without tilting or allowing the shoulders to be raised.

### 5) Computer screen:

The position of the screen depends on the individual having vision problems and how they use the computer. If you spend most of the time looking at the screen, it should be placed directly in front of you. However, if the primary function involves looking elsewhere (for example, looking to the other side for writing on the screen), it might be a good idea to have the screen and the writing position on one side. The top of the screen should be at eye level or slightly less [2-3" below eye level (50-74 mm)]. Make sure the screen is at an arm's length from where you are sitting. If you use double screens for your task, then ISO 11064-4 raised some issues concerning such working environment, which you might be interested to look at.

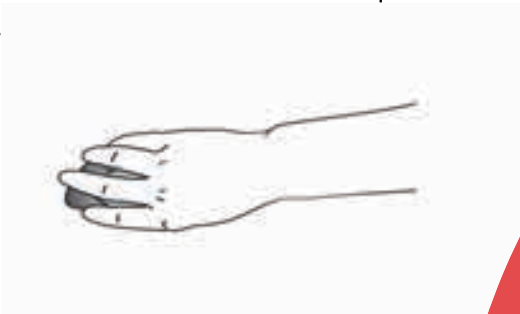
The exception is for wearers of bifocal or progressive lenses (for nearsightedness and farsightedness), who might need the screen as little as possible. Distance recommendations are usually between 18 to 30 inches from the eye. Observe the employee's work for some time, and look at the position of the head, neck, and movements to provide clues about the best posture.

### 6) Keyboard:

Place the keyboard directly in front of the worker. The wrists must be on neutral, flexible, or gently extended posture. The wrist rest should be, if used, roughly the same height as the front row of switches, it should be used as a way to rest the hand whilst the worker is not typing.

### 7) Mouse:

The position of the mouse should be as close to the keyboard as possible, whilst avoiding extending the arm. Mouse pad could be used to rest the hand (as mentioned above). Take caution of how to use it. If the employee is trying to rest his shoulder and there are no worries about the forearm or the wrist, it might be acceptable to "support" the wrist whilst using a mouse, especially for the type of mouse containing a (side ball) that does not require a lot of movement on the wrist.





### **8) Lighting:**

Look for light that is too high or too low. There should be sufficient lighting to read from external documents (e.g., papers), but you should avoid glare on the computer screen. A good way to check for glare appearing on your computer screen is to turn off the screen. Glare on the screen can cause eye strain or bending of the head / neck to try to eliminate glare. If there is a window, look for the ability to block light when needed or, if needed, position the screen at a 90° angle to the window to avoid sunlight from behind or directly into the eye.

### **9) Accessories:**

The most commonly used supplies should be placed at a close level to avoid head and neck bending or eye strain. The phone should be close at hand, but not between the ear and the shoulder (in case you use the phone a lot, it is recommended to use headphones). Many employees will resist the headset for a number of reasons. However, for those who use the phone while using a computer or typing/writing, the headphone must be used regardless of how long the phone has been used. Writing space should be clear and sufficient for good arm / hand posture. All other accessories, such as staplers and staple removers, printers, fax machines, and safes, should also be evaluated based on their frequency of use and any issues the employee might encounter.

### **10) General arrangements:**

What are the most used items? Are they close at hand, or should the desk be reorganized? Is the work area crowded, leading to awkward posture? Are there options for changing the employee's posture, from sitting to standing and vice versa? Is it possible to walk to the location of the printer or throw away the waste to encourage movement?





# Recommendations



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Once you have completed the evaluation process, you must determine what changes, if any, to make and which equipment options should be purchased or replaced, then the recommendations should be prioritized. Types of changes might include:

### **1) Equipment and Tool Changes:**

Unless there is an unlimited budget to purchase, start with the least expensive options. Moving items, modifying existing furniture, adding a small cushion to a chair, adjusting screen height or tilt, or finding an unused (better) chair in another office are all examples of low- or no-cost adjustments that can lead to big changes. If you have prior permission, make some initial adjustments right away as you work for the evaluation. More permanent adjustments may involve working with the concerned employee's manager. Browsing equipment catalogs and websites online may give you lots of ideas.

### **2) Changes in Work Practices:**

Is there anything about the way the work is done that can be modified? Using the speakerphone feature on the phone, standing whilst talking on the phone, changing the position of the chair several times a day, adding breaks in which the employee practices some exercises are all examples of how employees can change their activities to improve the work environment in their daily office jobs.

### **3) Organizational Changes:**

What organizational factors, if any, could be changed to improve it? Can tasks be divided differently among employees so that one person does not perform the same, repetitive activity throughout the day? Can breaks be organized differently - for example, four 8-minute breaks during the day instead of a continuous 30-minute break? Is there a diplomatic way to deal with major work stress issues to see if they can be resolved?

### **4) Documentation:**

Document your evaluation and communicate with relevant people or authorities within the company to make the necessary changes (this may include the employee, department head, occupational doctor (if applicable), and human resources department).





## Conclusion

Is the worker a couch potato (sits all the day)? A workaholic who works all day, seven days a week? Smoker? Take the opportunity to include recommendations and education about how lifestyle affects pain and body function.

And remember, with an employee sitting still for long hours on a daily basis, small changes can have big long-term effects that reduce or eliminate the stress that leads to discomfort in the musculoskeletal system. Your role in the evaluation can greatly affect the health and productivity of an office worker.





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