

Read about how to reduce the dangers of an ineffective workstation.

Learn about three often-overlooked workplace hazards and how to mitigate them.

A monthly safety newsletter from

7 Tips for a More Comfortable Workstation

Office workers in the United Kingdom spend an estimated 42 hours each week at their workstations. Because they spend so much time at their desks, an improperly designed workstation can severely drain workers' productivity, focus and even their physical health. Poor workplace ergonomics can even cause workers to develop musculoskeletal disorders, which are responsible for an estimated 8.3 million lost working days each year. The three most common causes of ergonomics-related injuries are:

- Improperly adjusted furniture and equipment
- A poorly organised or inappropriate workstation layout
- Prolonged awkward, twisted or static postures

However, office workstations are not solely responsible for the development of chronic aches and pains, since 42 per cent of office workers have the option to work from home. So, regardless of whether you are working at the office or from home, you need to ensure that your workstation is suitably organised. To help you set up your workstation to avoid developing a musculoskeletal disorder, follow these seven tips:

1. Sit close enough to your keyboard so that your shoulders, wrists and hands are relaxed.
2. Sit up straight so that your back is firmly but comfortably against the chair back and your feet are flat on the floor.
3. Position your monitor directly in front of you at eye level so that you do not have to twist or turn your neck.
4. Aim your monitor away from any windows to reduce glare, which, over an extended period of time, could lead to sore eyes or headaches.
5. Take three one- to two-minute breaks each hour to exercise your eyes by focusing on a distant object and then at an object nearby.
6. Take frequent breaks throughout the day to stretch your wrists and fingers. Put your hands together, then spread your fingers out and 'steeple' them—separating your palms but keeping your fingers together.
7. Take a five-minute break each hour to stretch and relax your back, neck, arm and leg muscles. A walk around the office is a good way to do this.

From 2013-2014, there were 526,000 cases of work-related musculoskeletal disorders in Great Britain, according to the HSE's latest data. Poor workplace ergonomics is a common cause of these disorders.



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3 Workplace Hazards You May Not Have Considered

Regardless of the job, there will always be common workplace hazards you must watch out for: slips, trips and falls, vehicular accidents, illness, etc. But, there are also unexpected hazards—and it is these hazards that are the most dangerous because employees are ill prepared for them. For that reason, you should be on the lookout for these three often-overlooked workplace hazards and learn how best to mitigate them.

1. Hand-arm Vibration Syndrome

Hand-arm vibration syndrome occurs when a hand-held power tool is used regularly for an extended amount of time or when regular contact is maintained with a vibrating machine. The condition can disrupt the circulation in the hands and forearms as well as damage the muscles, nerves, joints, tendons and bones of the hands and arms.

To reduce your exposure to the condition:

- Explore lower-vibration alternatives to high-vibration work and equipment.
- Take breaks while using high-vibration equipment.

2. Loss of Smell or Taste

Head trauma can lead to the development of

anosmia, the loss (or impairment) of smell and taste. This condition can be particularly dangerous as it could influence weight loss or gain, and increase an individual's risk of developing diabetes.

To reduce your exposure to the condition:

- Wear protective equipment for your head in dangerous areas at all times.
- Wear slip-resistant footwear at all times.

3. Reproductive Hazards

Intense or prolonged exposure to certain types of chemicals can cause cancer, erode the reproductive health of workers and even damage a developing foetus.

To reduce your exposure to these hazards:

- If you are considering having children, tell your manager that you would like to tailor your work so that you can avoid any activities that could potentially threaten your reproductive health.
- Wear air-tight, corrosive-resistant personal protective equipment.



Safety in
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60 per cent of adults stare at a digital screen for at least five hours per day.



This amount of exposure could lead to digital eye strain. Symptoms include blurred vision, headaches and eye fatigue, as well as back and neck pain.

Source: The Vision Council

Real-life Case Study

Lucy is a receptionist at a Newcastle bank, and her days are filled with answering the phone and directing messages to partners. Between phone calls, Lucy makes appointments, responds to emails and takes client messages for partners on her computer. After eight months of this routine, Lucy started to experience sore eyes and headaches by the end of every working day.

After talking with her manager about her emerging health issues, Lucy completed a Display Screen Equipment assessment to verify what was causing the problem. The assessment revealed that the position and angle of her computer monitor created an excessive amount of glare which forced her to squint and stare at her screen too closely.

After diagnosing the problem, Lucy and her manager were able to rearrange her desk so that her monitor would not be affected by the glare. Additionally, Lucy took more breaks away from her computer to let her eyes rest.

Since changing her routine, Lucy no longer leaves work with sore eyes and headaches.