

Tips to Avoid Back and Neck Pain While Working From Home



 **Cooper**
University Health Care



Keeping Your Back and Neck Healthy While Working from Home

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced an unprecedented number of Americans to work from home. An unintended consequence of this has been a noticeable increase in the incidence of lower back pain because of improper back support in most work from home settings.

The Cooper University Health Care spine care experts have some tips to help you avoid back and neck pain while working from home.

Back and Neck Pain, What You Need to Know

Back and neck pain can range from a mildly annoying dull ache to severe, disabling pain that restricts movement and interferes with your ability to function normally. It generally falls into two categories:

- Acute pain comes on quickly and intensely. Pain that occurs suddenly in your back or neck due to an injury is considered to be acute pain. This type of pain usually lasts 6 weeks or less.
- Chronic pain may come on quickly or slowly, and linger for weeks, months or even years. It can be continuous or intermittent (it comes and goes). Chronic pain is less common than acute pain.

Back and neck pain can be caused by many different things including traumatic injury, strenuous activity, being out of shape, degenerative conditions such as arthritis or osteoporosis, a herniated disk or pinched nerve, or spinal deformity.

An estimated 80% of U.S. adults will experience low back pain at some point in their lives, and it's the leading cause of disability worldwide.

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Choose the Proper Work Space

Most offices follow the American National Standards Institute in the design of their computer workstations and use ergonomic furniture and accessories. But, with the necessity of makeshift home offices, and the decrease in physical activity due to the disruption of our normal everyday routines, these postural issues are becoming rampant.



"Many of today's workspaces are designed to promote proper posture while spending hours sitting at a desk or workstation," says Steven S. Yocom, DO, Co-Director, Spine Program and Neurosurgeon. "This includes ergonomic chairs, desks of the correct height and desktop computers set to the correct height."

A large majority of people working from home are choosing to work while sitting on their sofa or bed, or at the kitchen or dining room table. Avoid working all day in these locations, especially the sofa.



By avoiding these less than ideal conditions, you could do your back a huge favor. Try to set up your home office to avoid poor posture and slumping. Have your computer set to the proper height to avoid neck and upper back strain.



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Dr. Yocom, Associate Professor of Clinical Neurosurgery, Cooper Medical School at Rowan University, is the Co-Director of the Cooper Neurological Institute Spine Program. He specializes in complex spinal surgery. He utilizes advanced spinal techniques and cutting-edge technology to operate on all types of spinal disorders. He also lectures and trains other spinal surgeons both locally and nationally. Dr. Yocom employs minimally invasive surgical techniques in his practice. He is the Director for the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine's Neurosurgery Residency training program.



ALBERT J. GUARINI, PT, DPT, MTC

Albert Guarini, PT is the Physical Therapy Manager at the Bone and Joint Institute. He is certified in Manual Physical Therapy, the Graston Technique and Vestibular Rehabilitation. Mr. Guarini specializes in orthopedics (pre and post-operative rehabilitation, neck/back pain, sport-related injuries), post-concussion/vestibular rehabilitation, and manual physical therapy.

To achieve proper monitor height, consider the following tips:

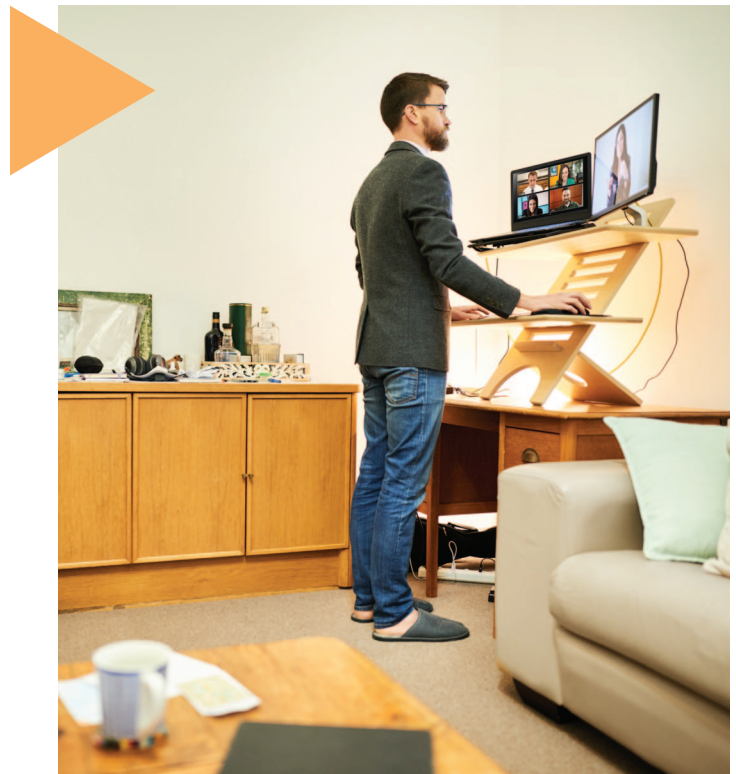
- Adjust the monitor height so that the top of the screen is at—or slightly below—eye level.
- Your eyes should look slightly downward when viewing the middle of the screen.
- Position the monitor at least 20 inches (51 cm) from your eyes—about an arm's length distance. If your screen is larger, add more viewing distance.
- Keep glare down by adjusting the screen position.
- Maintain the distance between your screen-scanning eyes and your screen by tilting the monitor back 10° to 20°.

Maintain Good Posture While Sitting

While working from home, it is important to maintain good posture while sitting at your chosen work space. It is best to have an adjustable office chair to help attain the best position. If you don't have an office chair that supports your lower back, try to place a rolled up towel behind the small of your back.

To sit ergonomically, even at home, follow these steps:

- Keep your feet flat on a sturdy surface.
- Position your knees, hips, and elbows at 90-degree angles.
- Make sure your wrists are in a straight and neutral position.
- Keep your neck straight with your eyes looking slightly down into top third of computer or laptop screen.
- Keep everything you need within arm's reach.
- Get up to stretch occasionally.



Take Breaks from Sitting

Incorporate standing breaks at least every 1 to 2 hours, by raising your desk and standing for 10 to 20 minutes to wake up your body. Consider a standing desk as long as you can work without leaning over and straining your neck.

"Sitting for long periods of time, even in the proper position, can tighten your muscles and can cause your lower back to hurt," says Dr. Yocom. "Taking breaks to stand, or using a standing desk, can help take the pressure off the lower back."

One thing to consider while taking breaks to stand is the positioning of the neck. If you do not have a standing desk at the proper height, you might use your standing break for reading or attending. Try to minimize the time typing while standing. Stand for no more than 45 minutes at a time.

"If you do not already have an exercise routine, consider a few things: your current activity level, any recent injuries, and your cardiovascular health."

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Don't Forget to Exercise

Another potential pitfall of working from home can be a decrease in your physical activity. Even the simple act of commuting to and from an office includes a certain amount of physical activity. Without a commute, that activity is gone. Some simple fixes for this include:

- Incorporating 20 to 30 minutes of fairly strenuous exercise into your daily routine.
- Getting up from your workspace every 30 minutes to walk around or climb stairs.
- Some form of stretching.

"If you do not already have an exercise routine, consider a few things: your current activity level, any recent injuries, and your cardiovascular health," says Albert J. Guarini, PT, Physical Therapy Manager at Cooper University Health Care.

You should always begin by consulting with your primary care physician. A physical therapist can also be a great resource, especially if you have a current or pre-existing injury. They can perform an examination to alert you of muscle imbalances and provide you a starting point to get your body ready for exercise.



Cooper University Health Care Spine Program

Cooper University Health Care's multi-disciplinary team of spine specialists can help ease your pain and improve your quality of life using the latest treatments and technologies available.

Our experts excel at diagnosing and treating a wide range of spinal conditions, using both surgical and nonsurgical techniques.

Why Choose Cooper for Spine Care?

Patients and families in the South Jersey community and beyond choose Cooper for spine services because of our:

- **EXPERTISE:** Our board-certified spine specialists have years of experience diagnosing and treating people of all ages with common and complex issues affecting the spine. Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey has named Cooper University Hospital a Blue Distinction® Center for Spine Surgery. This designation recognizes our clinical expertise and excellent care.
- **INNOVATIVE SURGICAL OPTIONS:** Our team strives to offer patients many treatment options, including nonsurgical solutions. When surgery is necessary, we emphasize approaches, including spinal fusion that lead to faster recovery and reduced pain after surgery.
- **ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY:** Our operating rooms are equipped with advanced technologies that provide you with diagnostic and treatment benefits. Our operating table incorporates imaging technology that guides doctors during intricate surgeries. Minimally invasive instruments allow for smaller incisions during surgery with the same effective results.
- **TEAM APPROACH:** At Cooper, a team of specialists work together for your benefit. Orthopaedic surgeons, neurosurgeons, neuroradiologists, and physical therapists all collaborate as needed to ensure you receive the highest level of care.
- **RESPONSIVE CARE:** Our doctors keep the lines of communication open with all patients. We encourage you to reach out with any questions or concerns about how a diagnosis or treatment may affect your life.

Committed. Compassionate. Complete.



For more than 130 years, Cooper University Hospital has been a valuable and highly respected South Jersey institution. We've built a reputation as one of the most trusted health systems in the region with nearly two million patient visits annually.

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For more information, a list of our locations, or to schedule an appointment, [CLICK HERE](#) or call **800.8.COOPER** (800.826.6737).

As an academic health system, Cooper offers patients quality health care, from primary care to specialty care, in one or more of its premier Institutes and Centers of Excellence, including:

- MD Anderson Cancer Center at Cooper
- Children's Regional Hospital at Cooper
- Adult Health Institute
- Bone and Joint Institute
- Digestive Health Institute
- Heart Institute
- Neurological Institute
- Surgical Specialties Institute
- Women's and Children's Institute
- Center for Urgent and Emergent Services
- Center for Trauma Services

Cooper is putting Your Health First with rigorous cleaning and disinfecting at all of our facilities, providing space to maintain physical distance, and requiring masks to be worn by staff and patients. It's safe to come into our offices and hospital.

