

Fit for Work

Employment plays a big part in keeping us healthy – just going out to work is good for us, both physically and mentally.

Many people spend a large proportion of their time at work. It's common to feel too busy doing your job to take the time to consider how it impacts on your health.

Office workers particularly spend hours sitting still and carrying out repetitive tasks. The human body isn't designed for this; we're supposed to be moving around, so all this time spent at a desk needs to be well managed.

Common causes of sickness absence include lower back pain and “work-relevant upper limb disorders” (Repetitive Strain Injury) can cause discomfort in the arms, wrists, fingers, neck and shoulders. Other problems include feeling pressurised, anxious and low in mood.

These types of conditions are experienced by most adults from time to time. If identified early and managed well, they should not result in time off from work.



Physiotherapists believe that when it comes to staying healthy at work, the emphasis should be on what you CAN DO , not what you can't do.

How to help yourself

- Rotate your tasks. Alternate computer and telephone use – or go and speak to someone face-to-face.
- Maintain good posture – don't slump and slouch.
- Try to get out of the office every day for some fresh air.
- Pay attention to what your body is telling you. Report any health problems to your employer as soon as possible.
- Micro-breaks – try to take a break for a few minutes at least hourly. Lunch and tea breaks provide excellent opportunities to get away from your desk.
- Don't skip meals and drink plenty of water.



Do some easy exercises every hour or so

- Holding a small bottle of water, sit or stand with your back straight and slowly bend your arm at the elbow in a bicep curl. Keep your elbow close to your body. Repeat 10 times on each arm.
- Hold the bottle above your head with your arm straight. Slowly bend at the elbow to lower the bottle towards your shoulder, then straighten again. Repeat 10 times, then swap arms.
- Facing a wall and placing your hands on it for support, raise one leg straight out to the side and slowly lower it again. Repeat 10 times and switch legs.
- When you're sitting down, march on the spot for a minute or two.

Do some simple stretches

- Sitting in your chair, rotate your upper body to the right, to reach the right-hand side of the backrest with your left hand. Hold for 5 seconds then swap sides.
- Loosely grasp your hands behind your neck. Push your elbows back and draw your shoulder blades together. Avoid pressing into the neck. Hold for 5 seconds.
- Interlock your fingers. Push your palms away from your body, gently stretching the forearm muscles, fingers and shoulder blades. Hold for 5 seconds.
- Reach over your head, bending to the side at your waist and then straighten up. Swap sides and repeat 10 times.



At your desk

1. Adjust the height of your chair and computer screen so your hips are slightly higher than your knees. Your forearms should be roughly horizontal when using your keyboard and mouse, and your eyes should be about level with the top of your screen.
2. Adjust the backrest of your chair so you can lean against it comfortably, with your lower back well supported and your feet flat on the floor or on a footrest.
3. Place your mouse within easy reach and support your forearm lightly on the desk. Move the mouse from your shoulder, not your wrist.
4. If you spend long periods of time on the telephone, stand up to take every other call and preferably use a lightweight headset.

Do some physical activity to improve your health and fitness. Physiotherapists recommend 30 minutes of exercise that gets you slightly out of breath 5 times a week. If you don't have time for a 30 minute session break it up into 10 minute chunks throughout the day.

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