Learning and Working at Home

RCS provides a safe working environment in all its buildings which has been risk assessed, monitored and maintained to a high standard. We are unable to do this for teaching taking place in homes and you may not have the ‘perfect’ environment but we do want everyone to teach, and be taught, in a safe environment. Staff have had Health and Safety training so can adopt the same principles they are taught at home and should confirm that students have enough space for the activity they are doing. Students have not had training so we encourage you to ensure the area you are working in is safe and clear of obstructions. The following will help students, and staff, work safely at home.

General Advice

* Keep any electrical cables tidy to avoid trip hazards
* If standing and moving make sure you have clear floor space for the activity you are doing
* Take breaks from screens - at least 5-10 minutes every hour but ideally 5 minutes every 25 minutes
* Keep hydrated by drinking water regularly
* Working online may be more tiring or stressful for some people so have rest breaks and move regularly
* Ensure the lighting in the room you are using is suitable for the activity
* If possible use a space that has a window that opens for ventilation
* Try to keep the temperature at a comfortable level for you but if you feel tired or too hot take a break
* If sitting at a computer for several hours try to ensure a good workstation setup – please consider the working at home advice below.

Working on Computers & Tablets at Home

If you have a home office with a desk, chair and personal computer please try and achieve the **ideal sitting position** (see image below). If you can’t achieve this you could try implementing some of the measures suggested in the rest of this document where relevant.



I will be working from a kitchen/dining table with a laptop/tablet

Location

If possible use a table and chair rather than your sofa or bed.

Sitting position

Have a look at the ideal sitting position image above. Try and mimic this as far as you can.

Chair

Try and keep your knees below your hips and an open 100 degree hip angle (see image above). As it is unlikely that you will have an adjustable chair you can try to get into an ideal sitting position using a cushion or pillow (folded in half) to sit on and a rolled up towel against your lower back for lumbar support. These measures will help to take the strain and load off your spine but only use them if they feel comfortable. If you are unsure, contact a Health and Safety Adviser (see ‘Additional Help and Support’ below). Make sure that your feet are planted on the floor. If you can’t do this use a biscuit tin, Tupperware container or similar as a footrest.

Screen height

If you have a laptop or tablet stand, use this to raise your screen. If you do not have one of these, raise your laptop/tablet up using books, biscuit tins etc. as best you can. You may not achieve the ideal position but aim to raise your laptop/tablet by a minimum of 15 cm. Your eyes should naturally hit the top third of your screen when you are looking straight ahead. Even a small height adjustment should help. The goal is to avoid dropping your head as much as possible to try and avoid neck and shoulder strain.

Mouse and Keyboard

If you are raising up your laptop/tablet use an external keyboard and mouse so that you are not working with your arms too high. Your elbows should be at a 90 degree angle, tucked closely to your body, and your wrists should be in a neutral position. This posture helps keep you from rounding your shoulders and pulling your neck muscles.

If you can’t attach an external mouse and keyboard, leave your laptop in place on the table rather than raising it up but **you must take more breaks**. Try and move every 15 minutes (more on taking breaks and exercises below).

Screen Glare

If you can, try not to put your laptop/tablet directly underneath a bright artificial light. Try and use natural light as much as possible.

Wellbeing - Taking Breaks and Exercises

**Regardless of your set up, the best way to look after your musculoskeletal health is to take regular breaks and to move around as much as possible.** The more ‘makeshift’ your set-up, the more important it is for you to move. If you have a good home office set-up, take a break for 5-10 minutes every hour e.g. make a hot drink or walk around the room. For other set-ups take a break every 15-20 minutes.

Here are some tips to help you to move more:

* Stand up every time you use the phone
* Try and do more activities away from the screen e.g. reading paperwork
* Do simple workstation exercises
* Keep hydrated and drink water
* Enjoy healthy snacks and avoid sugary or fatty foods
* Stay connected and maintain social connections with your team, family, friends and community.
* Set up a reminder e.g. a timer on your phone. You can also install apps such as Break Reminder (find it on Microsoft Store) on your computer that allow you to set reminders.

Here are some workstation exercises you can do in your micro breaks.

<https://www.posturite.co.uk/help-advice/useful-resources/learning-guides/workstation-exercises>

It is quite normal to feel anxious or stressed during these situations. **Tell us if you are feeling isolated, anxious or concerned.** Contact your line manager or HR or our Employee Assistance Program for free and confidential help. **We’ve got resources that can help.**

* [Our EAP is available to all RCS employees and offers support, advice & assistance with specific COVID-19 resources available.](https://www.advantageengagement.com/p_index.php?id_division=d00&amp;id_module=m000)
  + Call 0800 243 458 or +44 (0)208 987 6550.
  + email: assistance@workplaceoptions.com
  + SMS (for call back) +44 (0)7909 341229
* [Healthy Working Lives](https://www.facebook.com/healthyworkinglives/) – resources from the NHS Healthy Working Lives team updated regularly
* [Words with Friends](https://www.facebook.com/WordsWithFriends/) – an online interactive word puzzle you can play with friends available on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/WordsWithFriends/) or in the App Store and for Android. Challenge your colleagues for a bit of distraction!

Webinar

We recommend that you watch this Posturite Webinar (YouTube), which discusses issues around working from home with computers and will help you to put this guidance into practice.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBFf1NZkJKE#action=share>

Additional Help and Support

You can get advice from, and report any issues to, your line manager and the Health, Safety & Wellbeing Department – [healthandsafetydepartment@rcs.ac.uk](mailto:healthandsafetydepartment@rcs.ac.uk)

If anyone has any questions or wants workstation setup advice please don’t hesitate to contact me via email or on Microsoft Teams.

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