How to protect your workforce when working from home

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HKARMS 香港風險管理與安全協會
Hong Kong Association of
Risk Management and Safety

How to protect your workforce when working from home

- How to protect your workforce when you are working from home
- How to protect your workforce when they are working from home

- Good practice and lessons learned for people WFH
- A risk management exercise for WFH hazards

What is this and what does this have to do with WFH?

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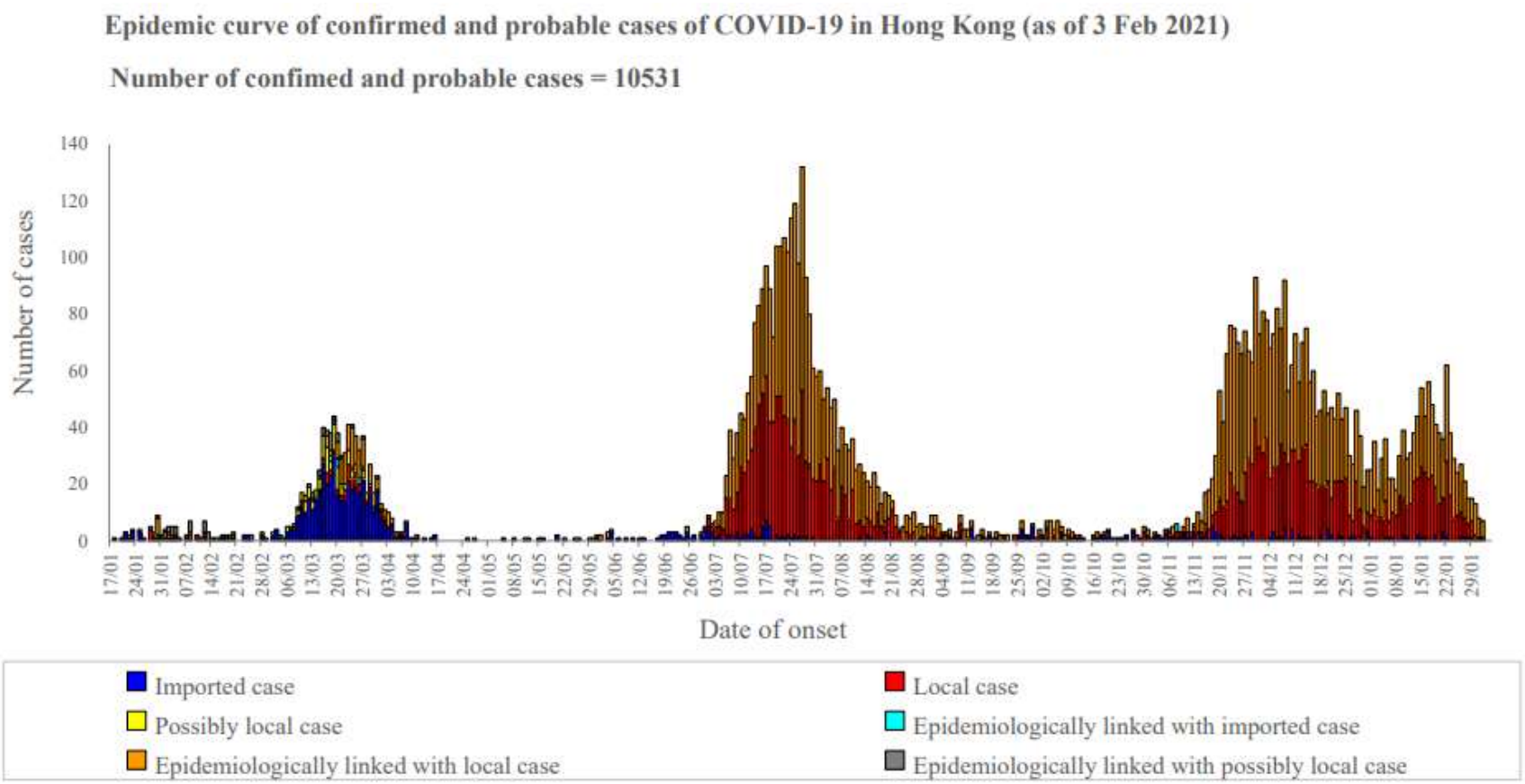
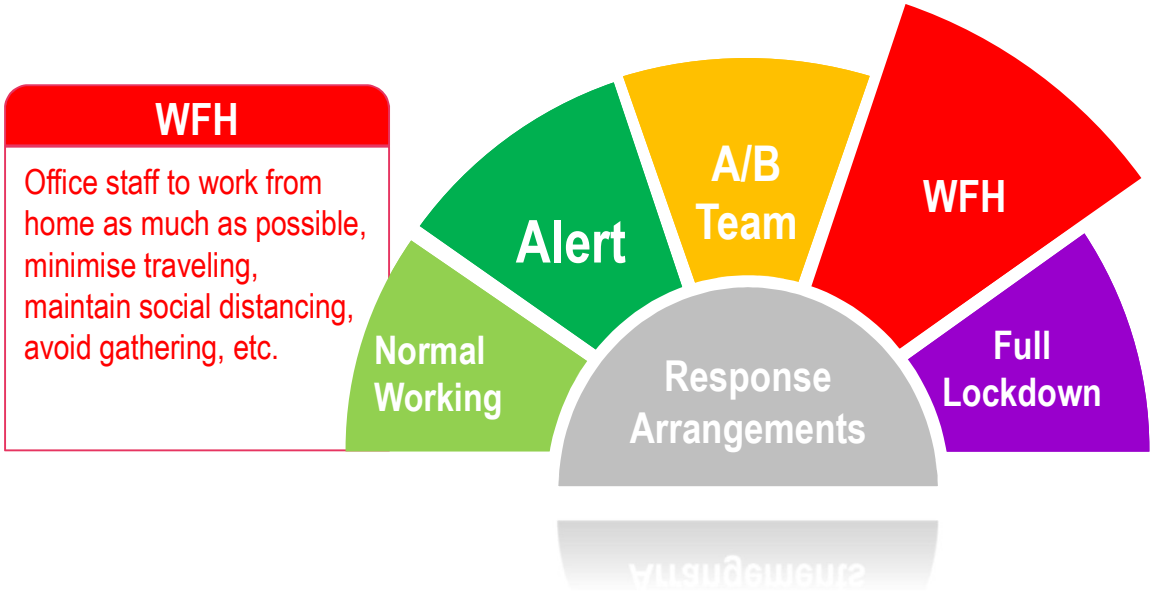
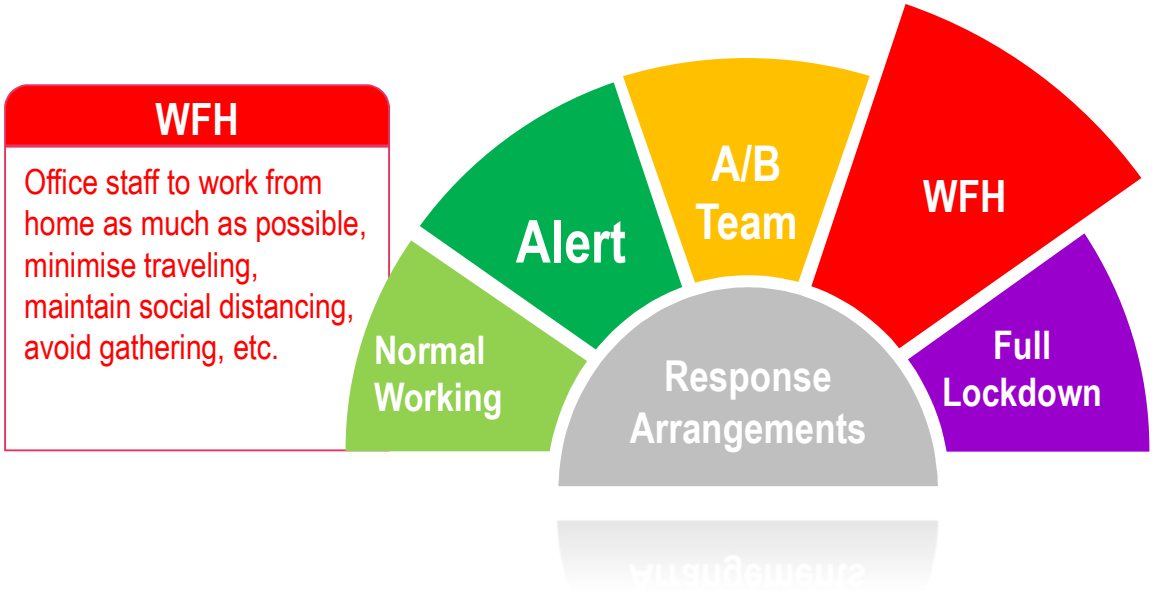
COVID-19 Outbreak: status in HK



Office staff have gone through phases of special working arrangements



WFH, a new normal 新常態?



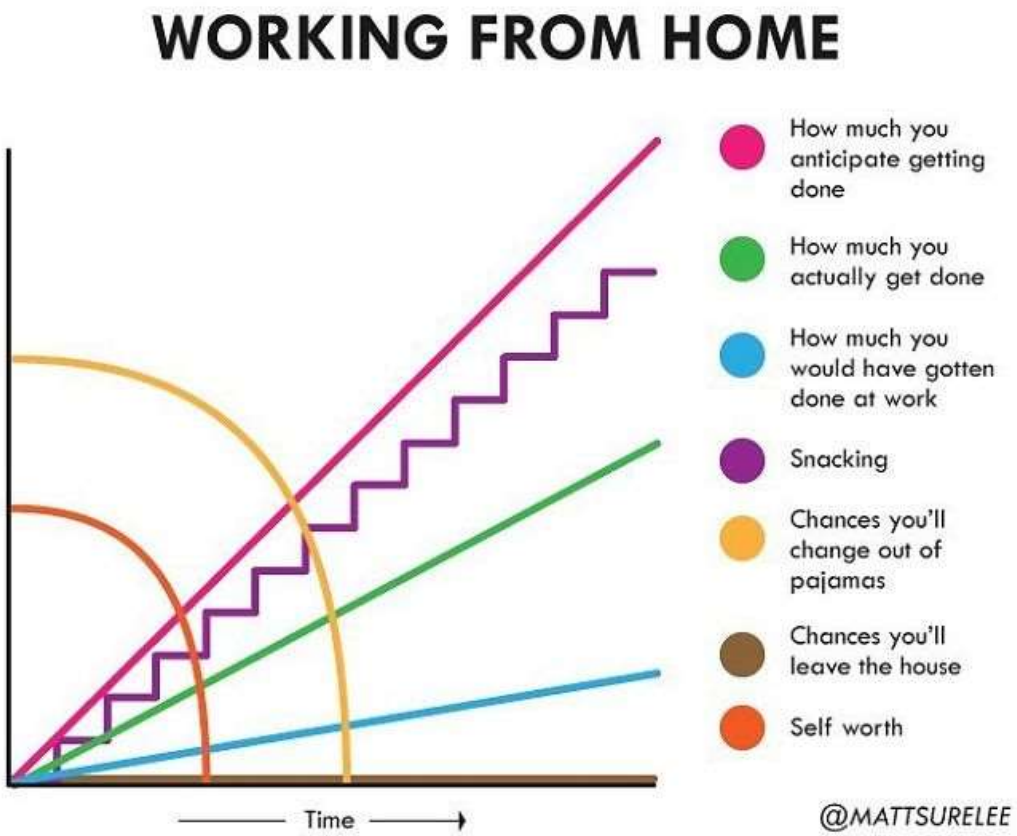
We used to say: make sure our employees going home safely everyday

New normal: make sure our employees coming to work safely

WFH = no work gets done?

Do companies accept staff working from home?

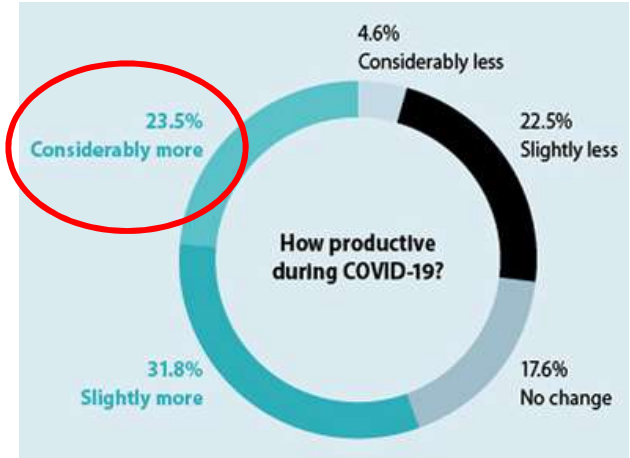
WFH - Fundamentally changes the way we work

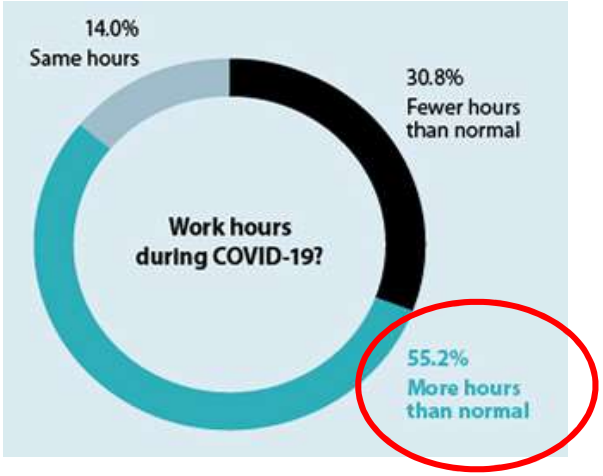


Does WFH lead to higher or lower productivity?

WFH – Survey results from employers

Source: Founders Forum aggregate survey data 400+ responses





WFH– wellbeing survey from employees

- Significant increase in musculoskeletal complaints especially neck, shoulder, back
- 50% respondents reported not being happy with their current work-life balance, 33% feel isolated, over 20% worried about job security, depression
- Increase symptoms of fatigue, possibly due to long and irregular working hours
- Poor sleep, disarrayed work/ sleep cycle, and increased risk of exhaustion
- Mistrust between supervisor and workers
- Lack of exercise, gaining weight …

working from home can mess with your head

Is WFH a good thing or a bad thing?

WFH – no work gets done?

- According to one overseas study, remote employees work 1.4 more days per month than their office-based counterparts, that is, three additional weeks of work per year

Pro	Con
Flexibility to take care of appointments and errands	Might be asked to do household chores and ruining errands during office hours
Save travel time, meeting waiting time	No travel buffer time to cool down from work stressors
There are fewer interruptions from unnecessarily long meetings and chitchats	The sudden loneliness and quietness may affect the social active workers
Enable work-life balance or work-life integration	There is no physical/ mental separation between work and leisure time

- For employee's health issue, WFH is not always better or worse than traditional office arrangements. It is about how we address and control the risks

Employer's general responsibility

- Cap 509 Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance. S 6: **Employers to ensure safety and health of employees:**
  (1) Every employer must, so far as reasonably practicable, ensure the safety and health at work of all the employer's employees.
  (2) (e) a failure to provide or maintain a working environment for the employer's employees that is, so far as reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health.

What about WFH?

Employer's general responsibilities

- Consider modifying or developing policy or guidelines on implementing WFH
- Carry out health and safety risk assessments
  - The work can be safely performed by WFH
  - Adjustments are made according to the tasks
  - Working time as per company's policy
  - Equipment and tools to work are suitable
  - Ensure the company's equipment is properly taken care
  - Workers have relevant information, instruction and training
  - Attention to workers well-being and mental welfare
- Checking out staff welfare = not trusting / spying on staff?

Risk: lack of clear policy, lack of trust, lack of communications, and?

Injured at home while WFH, worker's compensation?

Construct a WFH policy

- Establish a clear purpose of the policy
  - Should improve your training and competence framework
  - Align with your core values
- Define the scope
  - Clearly stipulate all role restrictions; e.g., client-facing responsibilities, software limitations, cybersecurity risks, etc.
  - Which type of employee is eligible to work from home?
  - Stipulate any tenure that is required for employees to take advantage of WFH: Three months, one year?
  - Impact to front line staff morale?
- Outline the WFH request/ approval process
  - Formal submission or conversation with manager? Provide step-by-step procedure
  - Time sheet, work plan
- Explain the approval process

Risk: unclear sick leave/ special leave policy, unclear chain of command, unclear scope/ applications, and???

Is WFH restricted to COVID-19 epidemic?

Construct a WFH policy

- List acceptable reasons to work from home
  - Parenting responsibilities
  - Illness in family
  - Typhoon 10?
  - Pet is sick?
  - Employee needs more Vitamin D, so need to take day off and go to beach?
- Designate specific core working hours
- Outline communication, responsiveness and availability expectations
- Set technology support and requirements, software, internet speed, personal computers
- Note office supplies and maintenance requirements
- Define cyber security requirements
- Set productivity and performance expectations to track productivity

What have gone wrong at your organization??

Management's general responsibilities

Take leadership – demonstrate commitment

- Keep in regular contact with WFH staff
- Communicate the organisational plan
- Use varied methods of communication
- Set clear boundaries between working and non-working hours – allow workers to have a healthier work-life balance
- Encourage workers to discuss well-being/ mental ill-health concerns

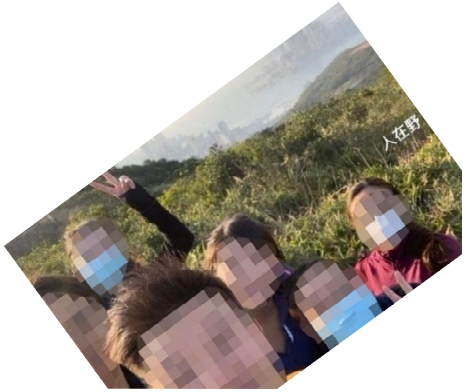
Strong lines of communication SHOULD be established early on. It will also help to maintain business continuity and reduce disruption to business processes

Employee's general responsibility

- Cap 509 Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance. S 8: **Employees at work to take care of others and to co-operate with employer**

What can go wrong?

What have gone wrong at your organization??



Employee's general responsibility

- To protect themselves and others and to cooperate in the implementation of preventive and control measures during WFH
- To notify employer if suffering from any disease, physical or mental problems
- Comply with the company's policy or guidelines on WFH
- Taking own care on safety, health and well-being
- Follow the working time as agreed with the employer and in line with the working time legislation
- Fulfilling the designated duties, taking care of company's equipment
- Practicing work-life balance and stay active
- Being available and accessible during work hours, maintain regular communication

WFH is to reduce your risk during traveling and minimize face-to-face interaction by staying home

It should be a joint responsibility between management and staff

What are the risks?

- Can everyone WFH at ease?
- How do managers supervise WFH staff?

- Compromise between productivity and safety & health
- Most beneficial when staff and managers jointly plan for their work and deliverables, as appropriate

New normal: work-life integration, stay safe, stay healthy

Risk mitigation: Making WFH successful

- Make communication a priority
- Plan workloads and deadlines with flexibility
- Pay attention to safety, health and wellbeing
- Evaluate your work plan regularly
- Trust vs trustworthiness

Management to provide guidelines, support and tools to enable WFH effective and efficient

Staff to treat WFH as if working in office and strive to increase productivity

About communication

It's easy to feel lonely while WFH, stay connected with your team to maintain your motivation

Overcommunicate if needed.
Maintain regular contact with team

Use video capabilities during meetings

Keep your team informed about your priority & work progress

Staying motivated during WFH

Workload and deadlines

- Ensure you have all the tools and accesses required to complete tasks remotely
- Work Prioritization: Handle critical and urgent tasks according to deadlines
- Work Flexibility: ensure that work deadlines and timescales are reasonable
- Creating a schedule, keep personal and professional time separate
- Hold regular office hours, easier to get back to normal life after WFH
- At the end of the day, list down all the work you did

To attain a sense of achievement during isolated working, establish a checklist for daily/ weekly tasks to record your work progress

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Making WFH productive and fun

Make a dedicated workspace, work from one place: work at the same place / desk

Ignore the distractions, create boundaries

Dress the part – boost morale and mean business

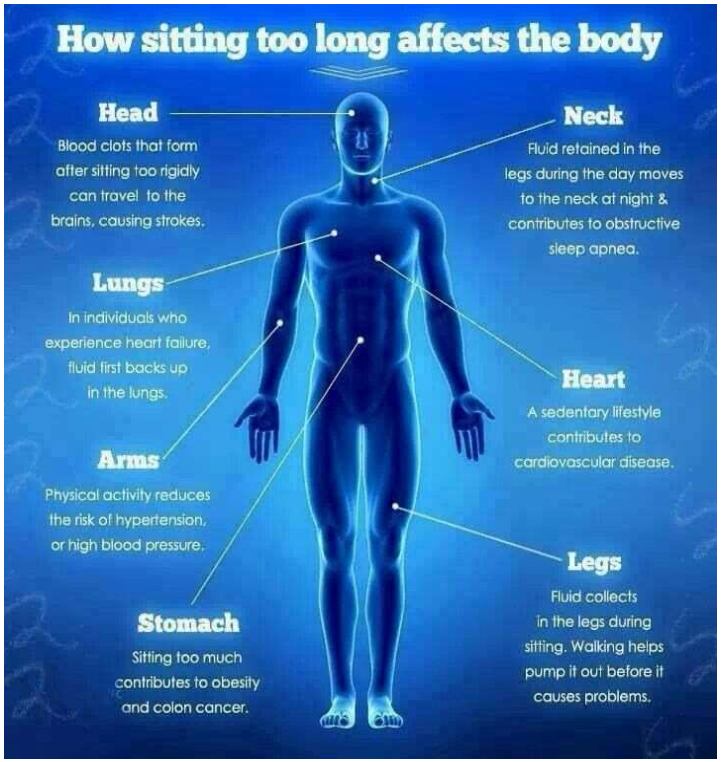
Set rules with the people you're living with, no interruptions during calls

Reward yourself, elevates your mood and prepares you for another good day

Staying productive at home- attend online learning to grow

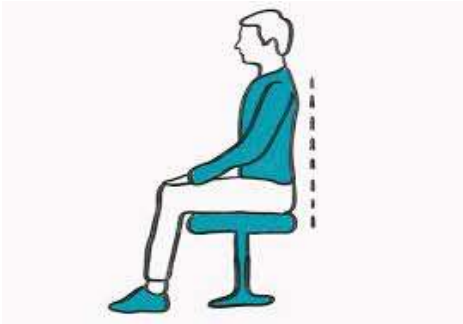
What happens when you sit for a long time?

- Weight gain
- Heart disease – Poor blood circulation in the body
- Weakened muscles
- Increases risk of diabetes
- Upper limb disorders (neck, shoulder, arm, wrist and hand pain)
- Stress fatigue
- Temporary eye strain
- Carpal tunnel syndrome, Cubital tunnel syndrome



WFH Tips

- Sit in upright position without crouching, with feet flat on the floor
- Neck Exercise: Sit straight and drop head slowly to one side, taking ear towards the shoulder. Feel the stretch
- Eyes – Look outside your window for a while every now and then
- Keep your workspace clean and organised
- Get a quality amount of sleep (7 or 8 hours)
- Small pot of indoor plants – help bring nature indoors, brighten drab corners and purify indoor air



What not to do when WFH for a prolonged period

- Don't work from the couch
- Don't overschedule yourself
- Don't do household chores during work time
- Don't let work time invade personal time
- Don't forget to socialize with coworkers, even from afar
- Don't forget to take breaks

Take breaks and look after yourself

Security

- Observe company's information security policy
- Avoid unnecessary travel and observe personal safety and security
- When working outside, watch for personal belongings and notebook

What can go wrong?

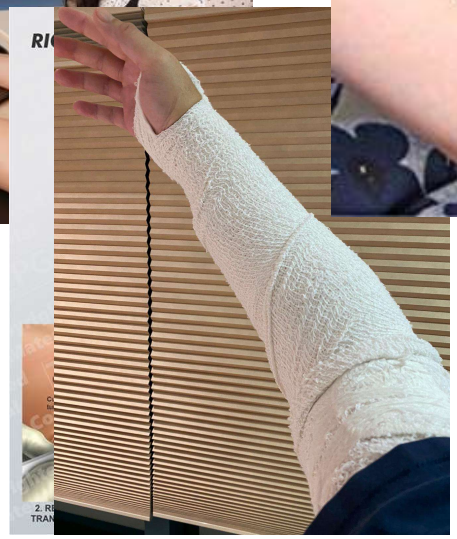
What are they and what do they have to do with WFH?

Carpal tunnel syndrome 腕管綜合症

- The most common cause of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is as a result of a repetitive strain injuries relating to computer use
- Heavy use of a computer mouse or keyboard, combined with awkward working postures of the hands and wrist, can result in a repetitive strain injury to the wrist(s)

Cubital tunnel syndrome 肘管綜合症

- Involve placing extensive pressure under the elbow where the ulnar nerve is located
- Caused by leaning the elbow on a hard surface, such as a desk, for hours at a time…
- The condition commonly occurs in individuals who perform certain repetitive motions that involve a frequent bending of the elbow as well

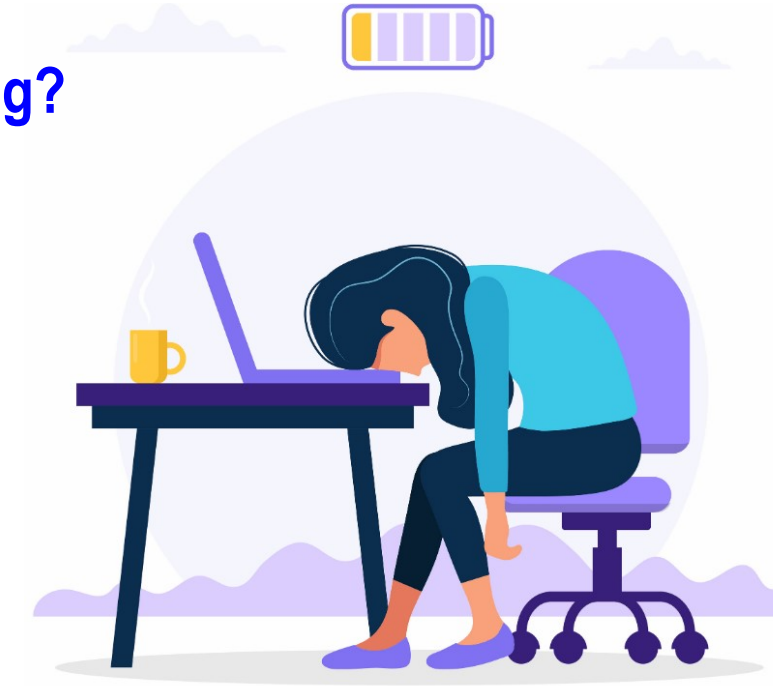


Mental health and well being

- Includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being
- Affects how we think, feel and act
- Mental and physical health are equally important components of overall health
- Mental illness increases the risk for many types of physical health problems, particularly long-lasting conditions

What can go wrong?

- Stress and anxiety
- Fake news
- Loneliness relating to quarantine measures
- Isolation due to social distancing measures
- Becoming trapped in a foreign location due to lockdown measures
- Health-related stigma / discrimination



Taking care of your mental health while WFH

- Learn to accept your worries – know your boundaries
- Focus on what you can control - think about what you can do to control the threat and protect yourself.
- Engage in absorbing activities which capture your full attention after work. For example – exercise, cooking, mindfulness meditation
- Refrain from setting impromptu goals as deadlines for finishing work
- Build a gratitude habit... But watch for your calorie in take
- Be open and realize that you do not have to be perfect
- Control your information intake
- Consider your information sources – how credible and reliable is the information?

Don't be afraid to ask for help or support

As a manager

- Build trust
- Be empathetic to the employees' situation, we all have our own family issues
- Practice active listening, encourage positive communications and mindset within the team
- Focus on goals, not activity
- Avoid micromanagement
- Encourage the team to take care of their physical and mental wellbeing
- Take care of your own physical and mental wellbeing

Don't be afraid to ask for help or support

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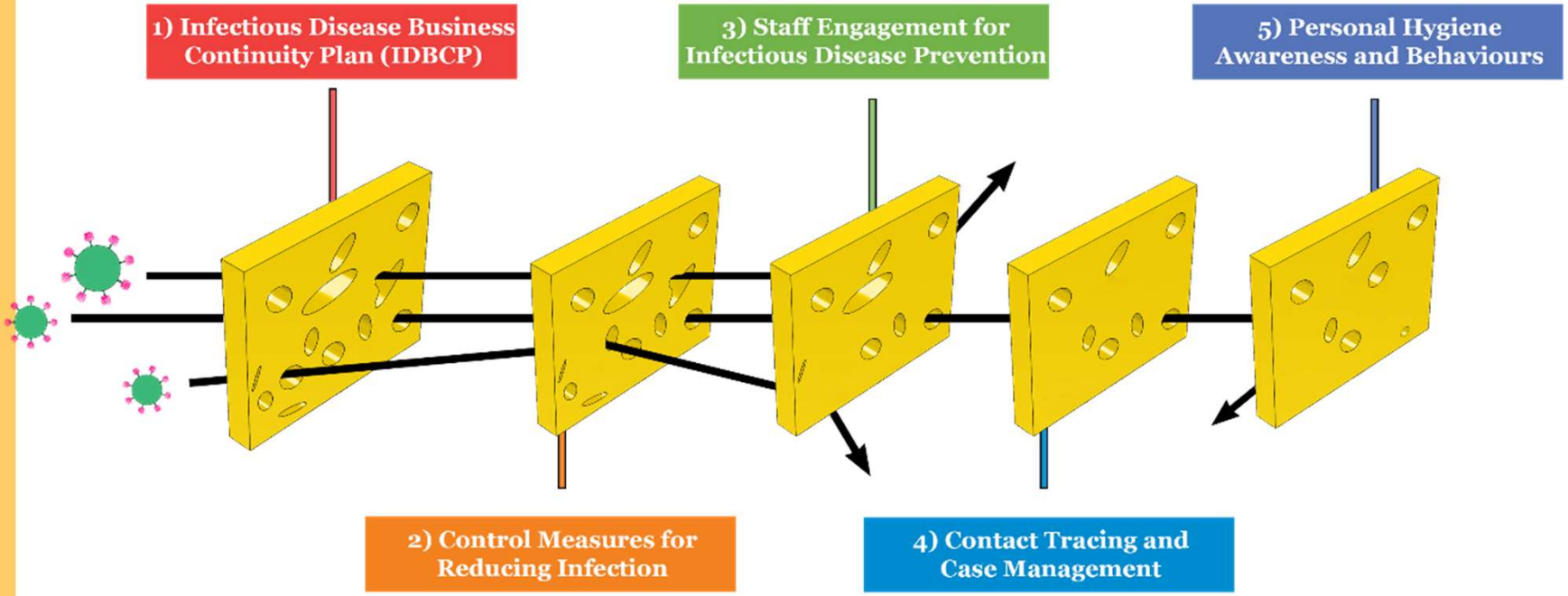
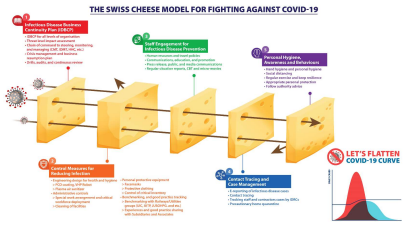
How many layers of swiss cheese do we need for COVID-19?



<u>All</u> H&H risk control systems have holes, as leaders, we need to continually find and plug these holes but the ultimate defender is ---

YOU

Takeaway



Proactively implement as many defense layers as you can to address risks from the new normal

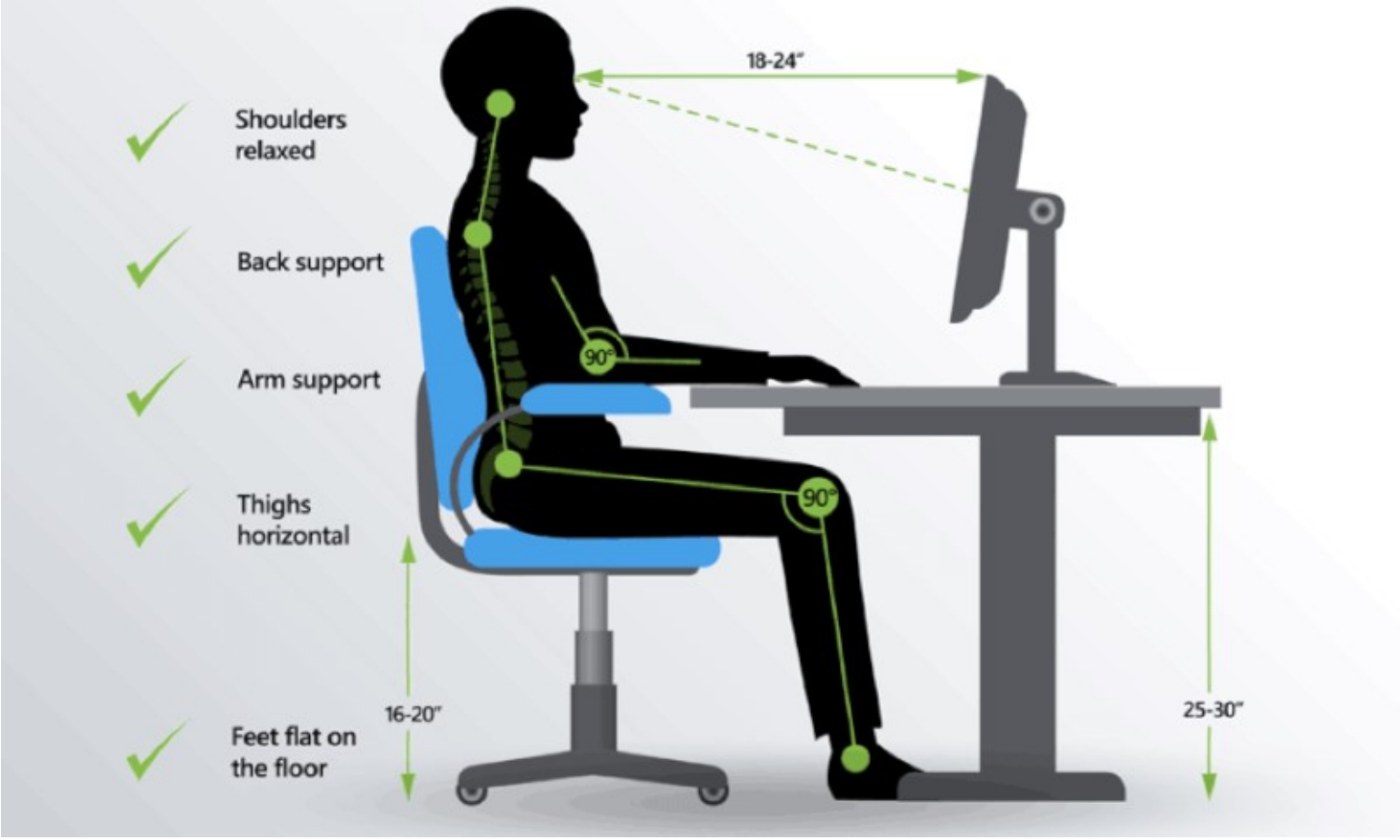
WFH needs careful planning

Continue to learn and adapt

Communicate

Communicate

Simple tips to improve working posture

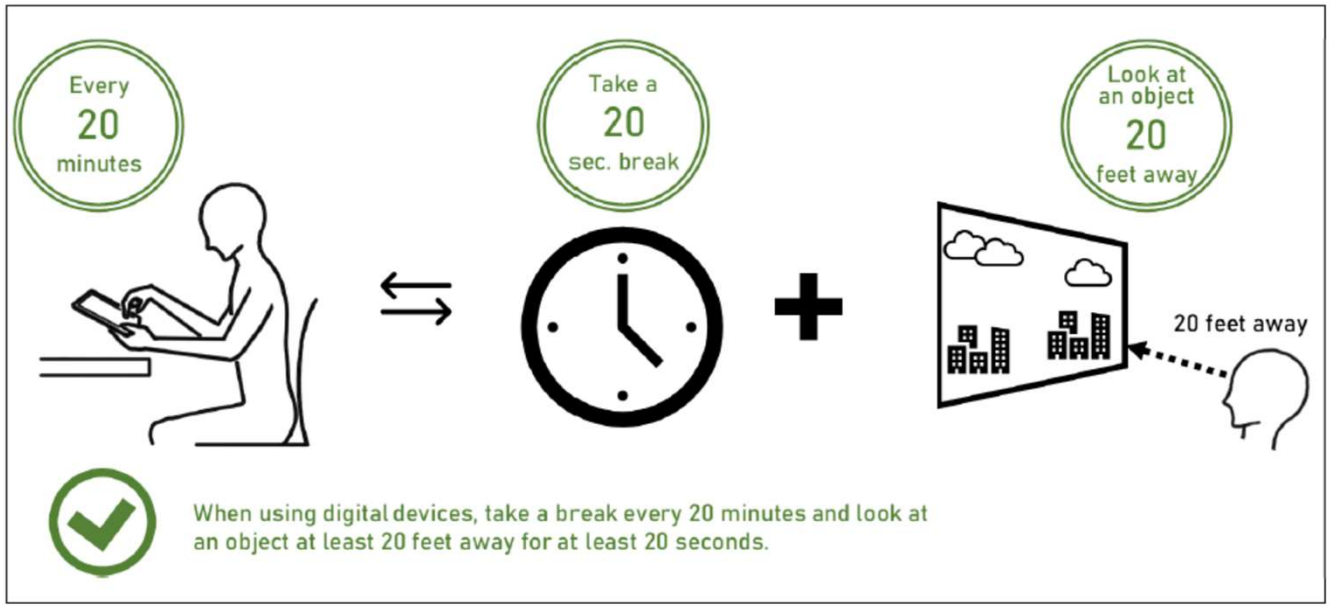


WFH Tips

- If possible, walk around when you are on the phone
- Stand up while you read emails or reports
- Move your rubbish bin away from your desk so that you have to get up and throw anything away
- Perform Yoga
- 5 min stroll for every hour you sit
- Stretch your legs and arms every hour

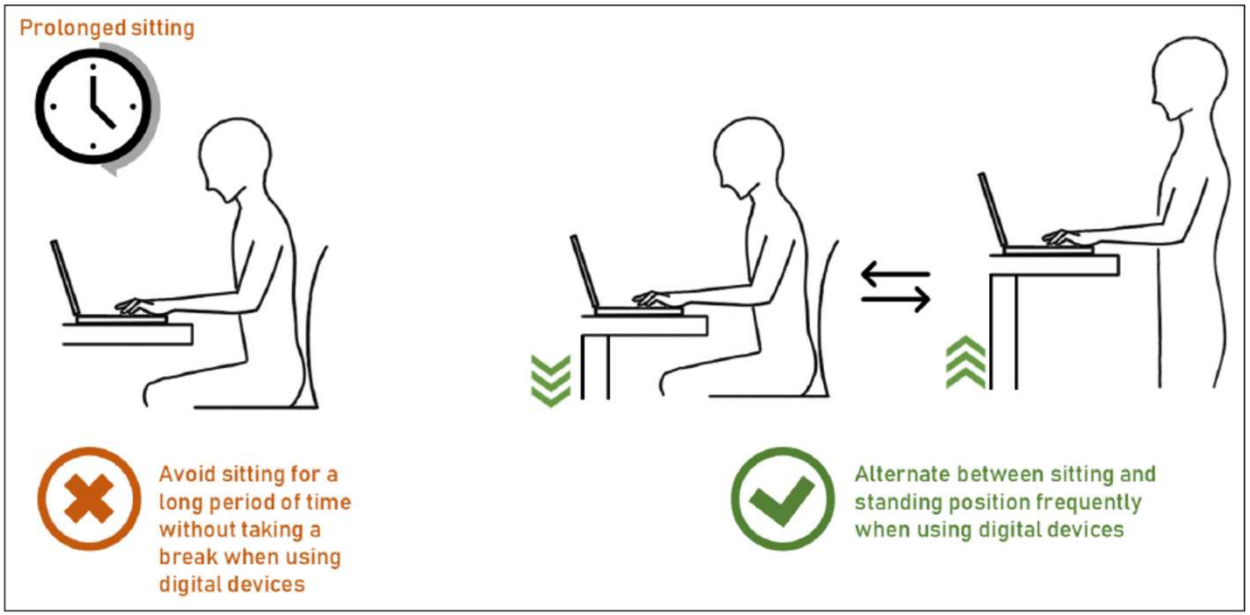
Practical tips for WFH

Practice the 20-20-20 rule when using digital devices for teleworking/home-learning.



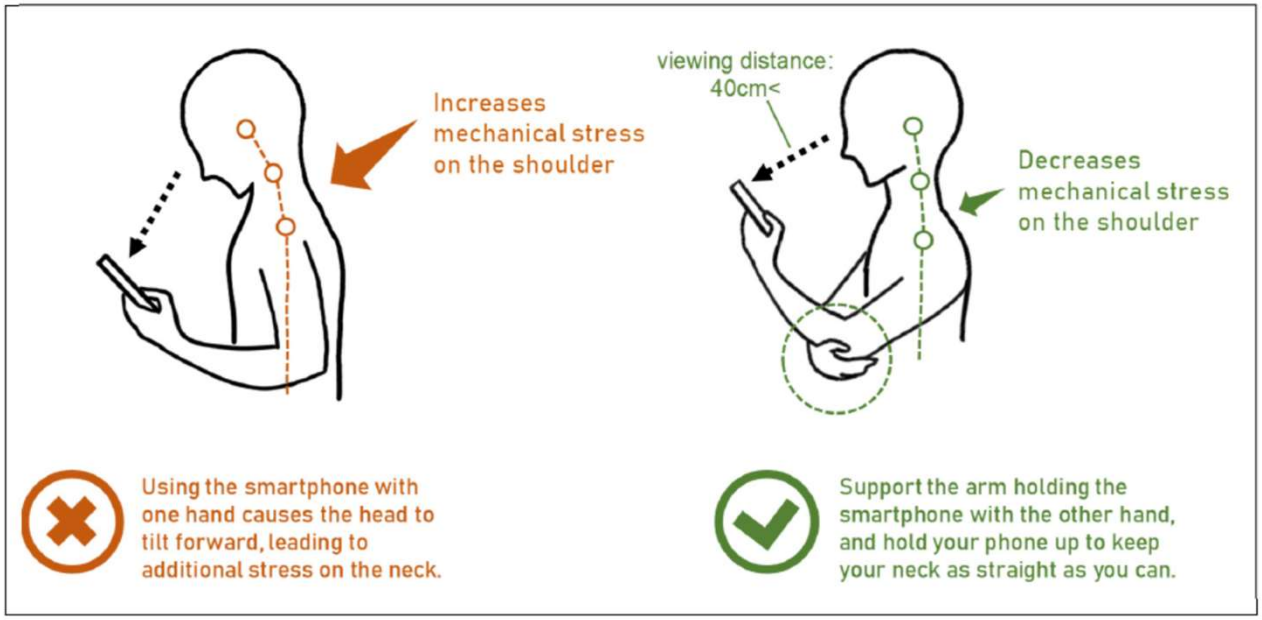
Practical tips for WFH

Alternate between sitting and standing position
when using digital devices such as a tablet and/or laptop



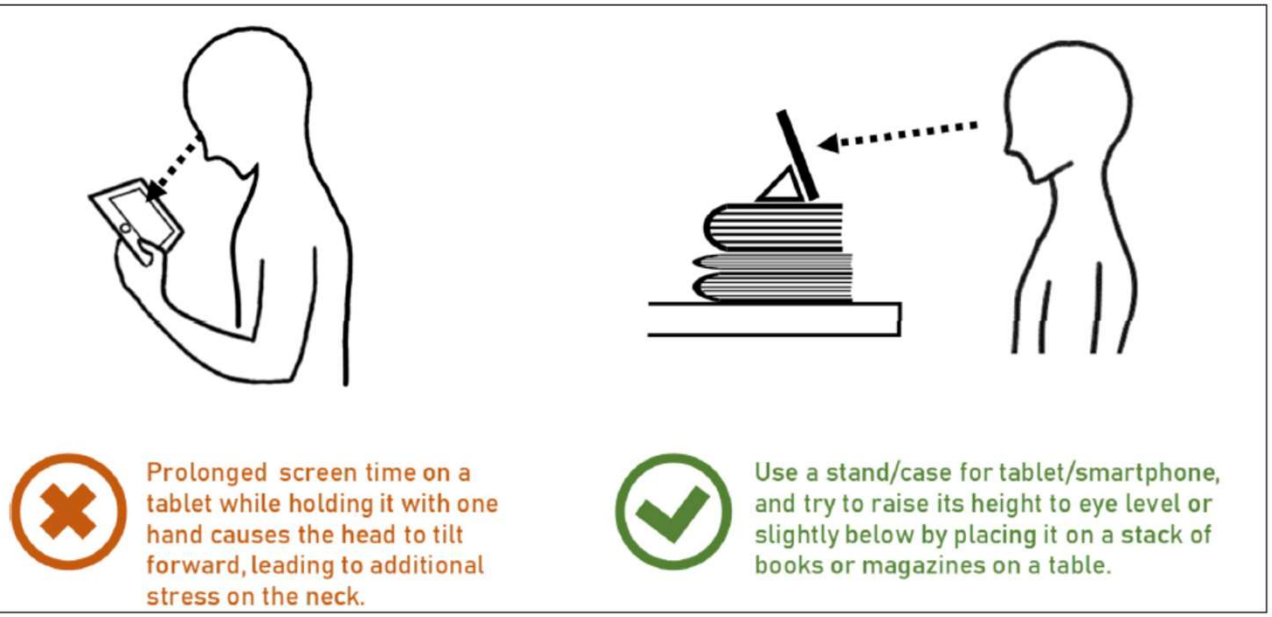
Practical tips for WFH

Support the arm holding the smartphone with the other hand, and hold your phone up to keep your neck as straight as you can



Practical tips for WFH

Use a stand/case for tablet/smartphone and try to raise its height to eye level or slightly below by placing the device on a stack of books or magazines



Practical tips for WFH

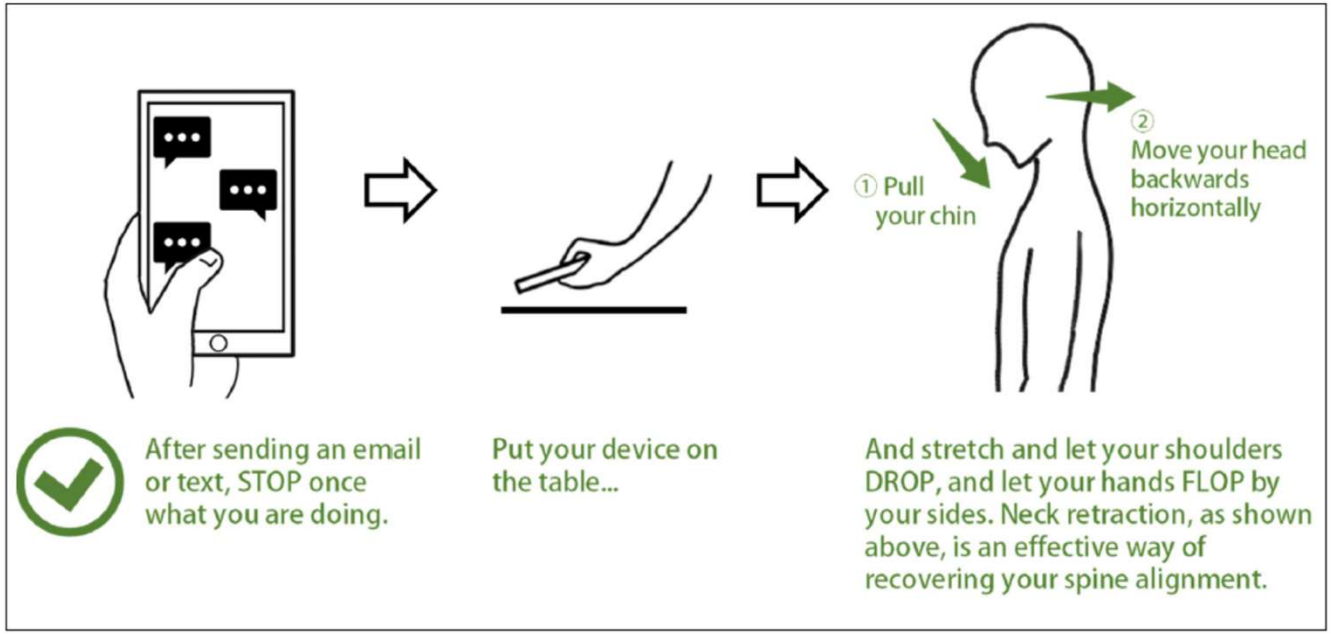
Use landscape orientation as standard
when browsing or watching content on the digital devices.

Holding the tablet in portrait style with one hand makes the character size and content appear smaller, resulting in poor visibility.

Rotating your screen to landscape mode can increase the character size and make the content appear larger in many cases.

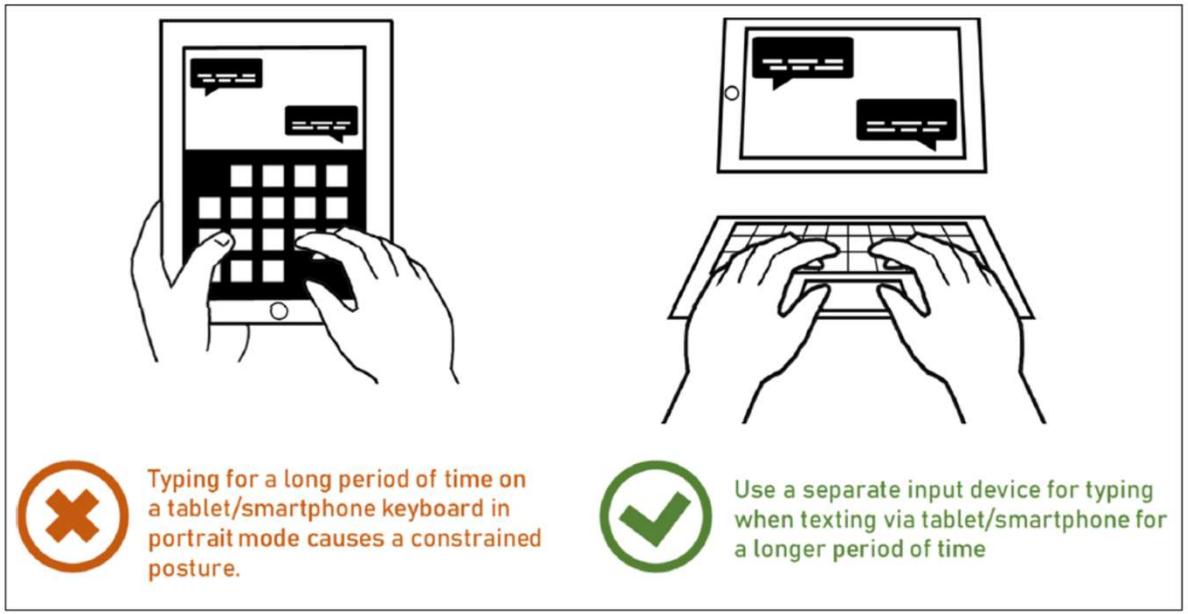
Practical tips for WFH

Stop-Drop-Flop! [1)]
Try to adopt this simple way as a habit for taking micro pauses



Practical tips for WFH

Use an external HF/E keyboard
when texting via tablet / smartphone for a long time



Additional tips

ERGONOMICS
For Working Remotely

Having a sore back? Feeling more fatigued? Having headaches frequently?

Try below tips to set up an effective ergonomic home office!

A bad work station setup can affect different parts of your body

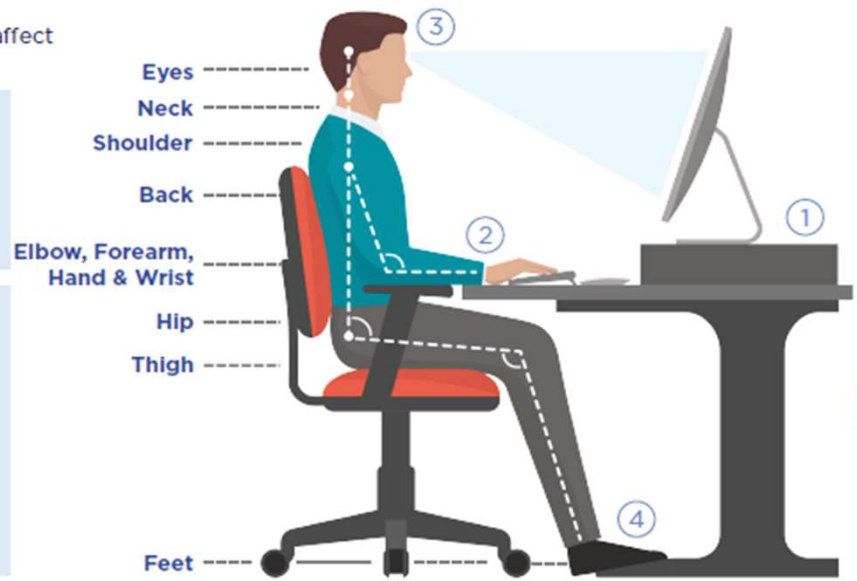
The average adult now spends **50% - 70%** of the day **sitting at work**

Poor ergonomics can lead to development of **Work-related Musculoskeletal Disorder (WMSD)**

It is one of the most common work-related health issues in every industry.

Source: British Psychological Society

Paying attention to your work environment at home, your desk setup and work activities is an important part of good home ergonomics. Having a comfortable work station setup improves your focus and productivity. It also prevents any unnecessary strains or injuries.



1 Have a dedicated work space. Avoid working on the bed or sofa as they don't support the best posture and can cause back strain

2 Have your chair and desk set up at the right height. This will allow your forearm to rest comfortably in horizontal position. An adjustable chair will make this process easier

3 Place your monitor at an arm-length distance from yourself and at your eye level to avoid neck strain. Have the monitor directly in front of you

4 Make sure there is space under your desk for your legs to move freely

5 Have proper lighting (natural/artificial) with minimum glares and shadows to reduce the risk of eye strain and headaches

6 Use headsets/hands-free phone options if possible. If you have to use a hand phone, hold it in your non-dominant hand. Avoid cradling your phone between your shoulder and head

7 Avoid sitting down for a long period of time. Take a 5-10 minute break once every hour. Step away from your screen, stand up and do stretches

Contact our Medical Experts and/or Business Development Managers for guidance on how to introduce these tips to your workforce.

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WORK FROM HOME SURVIVAL GUIDE

EVERYDAY HEALTH

Keep a consistent sleep schedule

Create a designated workspace

Make a home-to=work "commute" like enjoying a cup of coffee

Use your breaks to get up and stretch

Change out of your pajamas and get ready for the day

Eat a real lunch and stay hydrated

Schedule time for live online workout classes

Have a clock-out time to avoid overworking yourself

Make time for self-care

Thank you

Thank You

End