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How to work comfortably on your notebook

Consider these ergonomic tips to improve your productivity and comfort

Do you use your notebook's monitor as a secondary display on your desk? Do you work directly from your notebook for long periods of time? Are you someone who spends very little time in the office, and instead works from conference rooms, cafés, or traveler workstations? If you answered "Yes" to any of these questions, read on and learn how to set up your notebook to improve your posture and reduce potential discomfort.

I use my notebook as an alternate/secondary display on my desk. How should I set this up?

Monitors should be arranged in a manner that minimizes repetitive neck rotation and keeps you from bending your neck the way you might be prone to do when using dual monitors.

Are you able to use an additional monitor as opposed to the notebook screen?

If not, order a notebook stand or monitor blocks and follow the instructions below for appropriate set-up. Pull your chair close to your desk and situate your monitor(s) so it's approximately an arm's length away. The top one-third of the screen should be at, or just below, eye level.

Please note: If you wear progressive lenses or bifocals, your monitor's height will be lower and tilted slightly upward if possible.

Place your monitors so that they are at equal height. Your primary monitor should be positioned directly in front of you with the "G" and "H" keys of your keyboard centered in front of the monitor. Your secondary monitor should be placed at equal screen height and angled inward, forming a slight arc around your body (see Figure 1).
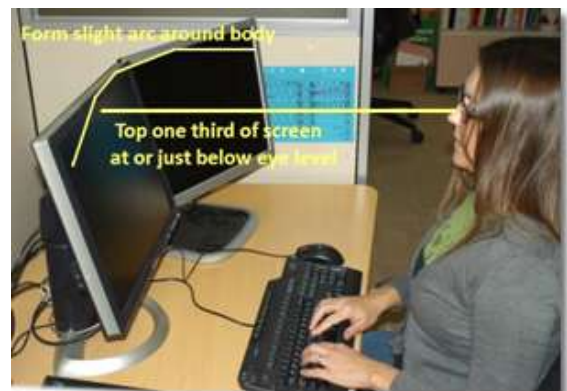

Figure 1: Your primary and secondary monitors should form a slight arc around your body and be placed at equal height.

If you use three monitors, place the third monitor to the alternate side of your primary display and set it up in the same manner as described above.

I work directly from my notebook for long periods of time. What should I be concerned with in terms of ergonomics?

When placed on a work surface, the height of your notebook screen can cause you to hold your neck in an awkward position, which can lead to considerable discomfort and tension (see Figure 2). Using the red touch point/joystick button—or the touchpad—for sustained periods of time can also create discomfort. Likewise, use of the keyboard can result in awkward wrist posture while typing.

If working primarily from your notebook on the desktop, follow these steps to ensure proper positioning and minimize discomfort:

1. Obtain an external monitor, notebook stand, or equivalent (such as monitor blocks). This set-up will allow you to raise the height of the notebook screen so that the top one-third portion of the screen is at, or just below, eye level.
2. Get an external keyboard..
3. Use an external mouse. A standard (wired) mouse is usually used in the office; however, it is a good idea to obtain a wireless external mouse for use away from the office.

I spend very little time in an office environment, and instead work from alternate locations such as conference rooms, cafés, and traveler workstations. Any ergo tips for me?

When working in cafés, conference rooms, or traveler's workstations for lengthy periods, attempt to locate a height-adjustable chair and adjust the height to promote neutral wrist posture when using your mouse or typing. Utilize a portable notebook stand or notebook lifter, a mini-keyboard, and an external mouse (see Figure 3). These products are lightweight and easy to pack, and may be carried with the notebook in a carrying case or backpack.

Note: A full-size keyboard is ideal. Mini-keyboards, however, are available as a more-portable alternative.

Figure 2: Failure to set your notebook up properly can result in bad posture and lead to possible discomfort.
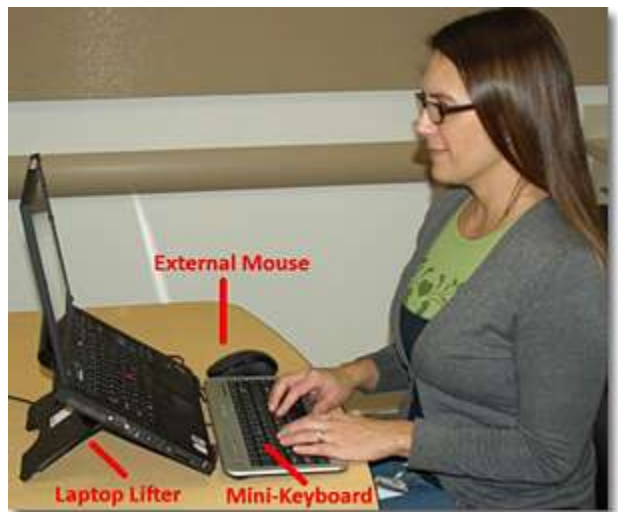

Figure 3: Utilize a portable notebook stand, mouse, and keyboard to help improve your posture.

When working from home for sustained periods, elevate the height of your notebook screen so that the top one-third of the screen is at, or just below, eye level. Use an external keyboard and mouse (see Figure 4). This will minimize awkward posture and create a more-comfortable working environment.

Figure 4: Make sure you follow proper ergonomic guidelines when working from home, too.

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