



Guidance on Working from Home

for Employers and Employees

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Our Vision:
Healthy, safe and
productive lives
and enterprises

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1 Introduction to homeworking

Homeworking allows employees and the self-employed to work remotely from their main place of work on a full- or part-time basis and to set up a dedicated full-time workspace at their home

Information technology is improving all the time with the use of laptops, tablets and smartphones, which

are portable and relatively easy to set up and use at home. The ability to participate in virtual meetings, combined with the use of video conferencing, online training and other technologies allows in many ways, for an easy transition from the workplace to working from home.

Homeworking, if planned, can provide significant benefits such as:

- Better work-life balance
 - higher employee retention
 - reduced daily commutes
 - flexible working hours
- Less impact on the environment
 - less traffic on roads
 - less air pollution
 - less stress on existing infrastructure for example road/rail network
- Recruitment does not necessarily need to be based in a particular geographical location
- A customised work environment for the home worker
- Savings on office space and other facilities

However, homeworking does require management and coordination to ensure employees and the self-employed are not put at risk from longer-term health and safety hazards

or other issues that can emerge. Employers and the self-employed need to look at how best to prepare for this type of working arrangement.

The following list highlights some of the challenges that may be encountered:

- difficulty adjusting to new homeworking environment,
- staying focused and avoiding home distractions,
- difficulty monitoring performance,
- motivating employees,
- difficulty in building effective teams, team working relationships and team communications,
- over-working,
- stress and isolation from co-workers leading to reduced staff morale and a decrease in productivity,
- providing and maintaining equipment such as computers, desks, monitors, chairs and other equipment,
- carrying out and recording adequate homeworking risk assessments,
- training – continuous professional development and upskilling,
- catering for sensitive risk groups who may have particular needs.

Five key steps to managing homeworking



Figure 1- Five key steps to managing homeworking

a. Duties of employers

Responsibility for health and safety at work rests with the employer whether or not that work is being done at the employee's home.

Employers need to consult with their employees to assure themselves that:

- the employee is aware of any specific risks regarding working from home;
- the work activity and the workspace are suitable;
- they provide suitable equipment to enable the work to be done; and
- there is a pre-arranged means of contact.

Key duties that apply to the work activity and workspace include:

- managing and conducting all work activities to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees;
- providing safe systems of work that are planned, organised, and maintained;
- assessing risks and implementing appropriate control measures;

- providing safe equipment including personal protective equipment, where necessary;
- providing information, instruction, training and supervision regarding safety and health to employees; and
- having plans in place for emergencies such as, a fire or an accident at work.

b. Employee responsibilities

If you are an employee working from home, you have a responsibility to take reasonable care of yourself.

Employees must:

- co-operate with their employer and follow their instructions;
- protect themselves from harm during the course of their work, for example take care of any equipment provided and report any defects immediately to the employer;
- report any injury arising from the work activity to their employer immediately; and
- follow procedures that have been put in place by their employer.

It is necessary to have a homeworking policy clearly setting out employer and employee obligations. It should set out the criteria and requirements for when employees work from home. This policy should also include information on the arrangements put in place by the employer to assess risks and responsibilities of employees to report risks and work-related accidents to the employer.

The following should be taken into account to ensure that the homeworking environment is suitable for the work to be carried out such as:

- the type of work to be undertaken at home on a full time, part time or ad-hoc basis;
- whether there is a dedicated space that can be set up in the home that is safe, suitable and free from distractions;
- what equipment will be required or needs to be provided for example desk, chair, monitor, keyboard, printer; and
- what means of communication and training will be provided.



Employees must identify a suitable space within their home for homeworking. When identifying a suitable space, they need to:

- ensure that there is suitable light, heat and ventilation to be able to work comfortably;
- keep the work space tidy;
- keep the work area free from loud noise interruptions and distractions;
- make sure the floor is clean, dry and free from slip, trip and fall hazards;
- provide suitably located power sockets to avoid trailing cables and overloading of sockets; and
- ensure the availability of adequate broadband/phone.

Employers must identify what equipment/resources employees need to work from home and to agree these with the employee. Required equipment can be recorded in the homeworking risk assessment/checklist in Appendix 1.

Such equipment may include:

- work desk and adjustable chair,
- IT equipment, for example monitor, keyboard mouse, printer,
- a headset if dealing with frequent phone calls,
- work phone, and
- adequate stationery.

Managing risks of employees who work at workstations for long durations needs to be carried out to reduce the risk of developing an upper limb disorder. The symptoms of upper limb disorders can include pain, reduction in the ability to use the affected part of the limb and restrictions in the speed or range of movement. Assessing the homeworking environment and workstation is critical to managing these risks and can be done using the homeworking risk assessment/checklist in Appendix 1. Upper limb disorders can be caused through some of the following factors:

- repetition – using the same muscle groups over and over during the working day with no time for recovery;
- poor work posture – incorrect positioning of a monitor or a seat at a workstation can result in the employee adopting an awkward slouched posture; and
- a work environment with bad lighting or temperature control.

Poor lighting conditions at a computer workstation can result in eye fatigue and may result in the employee adopting an awkward posture to view the monitor.

Workstation top tips for employers and employees

Employers	Employees
Ensure that the employee's home workstation is assessed when working from home on a full- or part-time basis.	Take short periodic breaks or changes of routine away from the workstation.
Ensure that the assessor is capable of completing the assessment online with sufficient visual clues to provide an accurate assessment for example the use of video calls ideally with a smartphone.	Do not sit in the same position at a computer workstation for long periods of time and make sure you change your posture as often as possible.
Use of a risk assessment/checklist to record your findings – refer to Appendix 1.	Ensure that the mouse and keyboard are close to point of use.
Employees are informed that they are entitled to an eye and eyesight test.	Ensure lighting conditions at your workstation are suitable taking into account the time of day which can affect natural light.
Provide general training on the use of the workstation and equipment for example use of the chair, monitor/keyboard placement, task lighting.	Co-operate with your employer. Follow up with the Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessor after the online assessment to ensure that any corrective actions required have been completed.

Table 1 - Workstation top tips for employers and employees

Employees should be given instruction and information to make them aware of the risks associated when working from home, for example:

- homeworking policy;
- using the equipment provided for use at the workstation;
- instruction on using the workstation appropriately;
- information on the types of musculoskeletal disorders, the symptoms and the systems in place on how to report suspected musculoskeletal disorders to your employer;
- how the risk assessment/checklist process will be conducted;
- information on eye and eyesight tests; and
- how to plan work to allow for regular breaks or changes in work activity to reduce workload at a computer workstation.

Note: Training can be carried out in a variety of ways for example eLearning, online meeting/training or in-house training and records should be kept.

Work-related stress (WRS) is stress caused or made worse by work. It simply refers to when a person perceives the work environment in such a way that their reaction involves feelings of an inability to cope. It may be caused by perceived/real pressures/deadlines/threats/anxieties within the working environment.

More information is available [here](#).

What can cause stress?

Stress can manifest itself in many ways whether work-related or not. There are physical, psychological and behavioural manifestations; from increased heartbeat, raised blood pressure, digestive disorders, sleeplessness, anger or upset outbursts and secondary negative behaviours such as indulging in escape eating, drinking or smoking,

Homeworking may lead to reduced or no social interaction with fellow workers or customers. This lack of social engagement can weigh heavily on people for whom a social connection is an important element to work.

This isolating consequence of homeworking should not be ignored as it can lead to depression or other mental health issues.

Longer working hours may also occur more frequently when homeworking, as the boundary between work and home is not fixed.

There may be a potential for a reduced work-life balance or a limited demarcation between work and home life.

How to reduce stress

- Define your boundaries, for example use of a dedicated office space away from family and other distractions.
- Ensure you have a clear role and know what is expected of you.
- Structure your day and set goals and timeframes for work-related activities and breaks.
- When you finish work for the day, don't bring your laptop or work into your home space, avoid reading work-related content for example emails on your smartphone in the evenings.
- Discuss issues face-to-face for example if you feel your workload is getting too much, talk to your manager. Use of video conferencing can make you feel closer to that person and they are able to relate to you more. This may give a manager the opportunity to visibly see if stress is affecting you.
- Check in on each other for example set up virtual lunches, tea breaks with co-workers for work and non- work informal and formal communication.
- Social interaction is very important – arrange periodic visits to the workplace and ensure social interaction outside work.
- Plan exercise into your daily schedule – ideally schedule it in at set times on a given day, interchanging various different types of exercise, some indoors, some outdoors, some strenuous, some restful.
- Plan other restful passive activities – watching, listening or reflecting – building in restful short periods into the day and week helps us 'wind down'.
- Take breaks away from work – use annual leave as before as there is still the need to disengage for substantial periods and switch off from work.

Sensitive risk groups

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It is essential that work tasks, working conditions and the work environment do not adversely affect the health of sensitive risk groups such as pregnant, post-natal and breastfeeding employees, night and shift workers and young persons at work. In requesting an employee from a sensitive risk group, or an employee with a disability, to work from home, the employer should consider the suitability of the person to the work in the context of their homeworking space.

It is essential that work tasks and working conditions do not adversely affect their health and safety. In consultation with the employee the employer should consider:

- adequate lighting, heat and ventilation to allow comfortable working,
- adequate breaks,
- regular contact, and
- emergency contacts and procedures.
- safe access to the workspace,
- the equipment necessary to complete the work,
- suitable workspace,

Further information on sensitive risk groups can be found [here](#).

Each employee's homeworking environment will be different whether it is the individual, the type of work to be carried out, workstation location or equipment required. Employers are required to ensure that a competent* person carries out a risk assessment of an employee's workstation in the home. The risk assessment will identify possible issues that could cause injury or ill-health. Having suitable controls in place through the provision of appropriate equipment, training and good communication will help reduce future problems.

*Note: A competent person is someone with sufficient training, experience and knowledge who can carry out the Display Screen Equipment risk assessment of an employee's workstation.

Homeworking risk assessment/ checklist

When risk assessing the employee's homeworking environment the Homeworking risk assessment/checklist in Appendix 1 can be used. The process is broken into a two-step process;

Step 1 – Equipment/resources required

The homeworking risk assessment/checklist is sent to all employees who work from home on a full/part time basis. Employers in consultation with

employees will identify equipment and resources required to work effectively from home. When all equipment/resources identified have been provided and set up in the homeworking environment then the employer can proceed to Step 2.

Step 2 – Homeworking risk assessment checklist (non-exhaustive list)

When the equipment/resources checklist have been agreed, then the employer must engage the services of a competent person who can carry out the homeworking assessment/checklist in consultation with the employee.

The assessment can be done online for example through the use of video calls ideally with a smartphone so that the employee can move freely around the specific work location so as to help the assessor identify and direct the employee to areas that need to be assessed.

The assessor must record any specific issues identified at an employee's home workspace and agree on corrective actions with the employee. Once any corrective actions have been actioned then the homeworking assessment/checklist can be signed off by the assessor and employee.

Working from home can result in employees feeling isolated, working longer hours and blurring the lines between work and personal life. It is important that employees know they have support at all times during working hours.

To ensure they retain a strong connection with employees, employers should:

- ensure all contact details for employees are on file and agree a means of contact;
- arrange regular updates via phone, web or email;
- schedule time for informal conversation at the beginning and end of video conference meetings;
- provide employees with emergency contact numbers;
- arrange IT support in the event of technical problems where relevant;
- provide employees with information detailing when it is important for them to contact their employer;
- make sure work is organised in such a way that the employees take regular breaks and can separate their work life and home life;
- provide employees with regular feedback on their work; and
- encourage employees to maintain contact with co-workers for example virtual coffee breaks.

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Home office environment

a. Lighting

Lighting is a factor that needs to be considered in the work environment. When setting up a homeworking space the employee should consider whether:

- sufficient natural light is available along with artificial light to enable viewing and reading of documents; and
- the location of a laptop/monitor is placed to reduce glare which can change throughout the day due to external factors and from the use of indoor lighting.

b. Housekeeping

Keeping a home office organised and tidy will help in managing your day-to-day activities. Employees should consider some of the following items:

- wipe down your desk surface, keyboard, mouse, desk lamp, and any other high-touch hotspots frequently;
- manage your cables and route them away from any areas where there is frequent footfall;
- look at dedicated storage solutions and organise your desk top; and

- dispose of rubbish regularly and ensure sensitive work material is disposed of in line with company policies.

c. Temperature

Temperature is very important to workplace productivity. Working conditions that are too hot or too cold have been shown to have an effect on concentration and work performance. Unlike working in a shared office, home workers have the option to regulate the temperature that best suits them. Employees should consider some of the following when regulating the temperature of their home office:

- the best temperature for an office and will vary depending on many factors such as age, sex, clothing, season and humidity. It is suggested that for most people an acceptable temperature for office work lies within the range of 18°C to 23°C. Find the right setting that suits your needs and comfort and adjust accordingly;
- if you decide to use temporary heaters, care needs to be taken so as to prevent burns from contact with hot surfaces or fire. It is the employee's responsibility to ensure that portable heating

equipment that is used is in good condition and suitable for the purpose; and

- use natural ventilation for example opening a window to regulate temperature.

d. Electrical safety

Electrical equipment in the home/home office should be maintained in good working order and be free of any obvious damage. In general, such equipment can be broken into two categories:

Category A – Employers' responsibilities

Electrical equipment provided by the employer for example computer, monitor and printer:

- should be suitable for the job and checked regularly if it is going to be subject to significant wear and tear and replaced or repaired by a suitably trained person if damaged;
- should be taken out of use immediately if an electrical appliance shows any scorching or significant damage. Damaged equipment should be reported to your employer and either repaired by a suitably qualified person or replaced; and
- phones or laptops should not be left unattended and charging for long periods for example overnight due to a possible risk of fire.

Category B – Employees' responsibilities:

Household electrical supply and equipment provided by the employee for example sockets, lighting, heaters not provided by the employer should also be checked by the employee on a regular basis to ensure that:

- all circuits supplying socket outlets are protected by an RCD (Residual Current Device). A RCD protects you against serious electric shock if there is an electrical fault in your home; and
- the operation of the RCD is checked and tested regularly. (See Section 12 for further information).

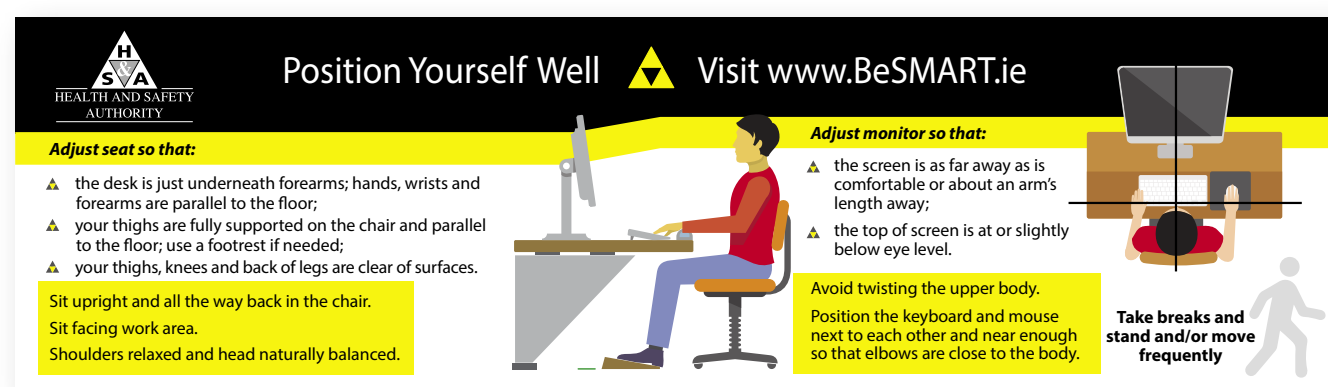
Note: If you have any concerns about the electrical installation in the home you should immediately contact a registered electrical contractor to ensure the safety of the installation.

e. Fire

Minimising the risk of fire in the home or home office, should be managed as part of the day-to-day running of any home. Fitting equipment like smoke and carbon dioxide alarms will give advance warning of potential issues. Ensuring that suitable firefighting equipment is available for example fire blankets and extinguishers should be available and suitable for fighting a range of different fire types that could occur in the household.

a. [Display Screen Equipment Guidance – Position Yourself Well](#)

This handy ruler reminds the employee how to position themselves well at their work station.



b. [Display Screen Equipment Guidance](#)

c. [Work Related Stress A Guide for Employers](#)

d. [Work Related Stress Information Sheet for Employees](#)

e. [Further information on Sensitive Risk Groups](#)

f. [Fire Extinguisher Safety Checks information sheet](#)

g. [Practical information on managing electricity](#)

Note: Appendix 1 Homeworking risk assessment/checklist is available to download separately .

Homeworking risk assessment/checklist

Employee Name:

Address:

Work Activity:

Role:

Assessor Name:

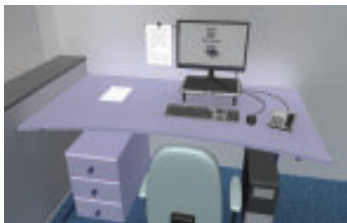

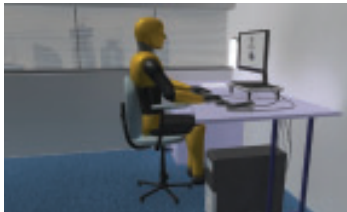
Manager Name:

Step 1 – Equipment/resources required




Dedicated Room	Keyboard	Wrist Rest
Workstation	Mouse	Broadband
Chair	Task Lighting	Mobile Phone
Laptop	Docking Station	Printer
Desktop Computer	Document Holder	Headset
Monitor	Foot Rest	

Further information:




Step 2 – Homeworking risk assessment/checklist

Control	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/ follow up actions
1. Workstation				
 <p>The workstation has adequate space for equipment including mouse, keyboard, laptop, laptop stand, monitor and allows the employee to find a comfortable position.</p>				
Is there a dedicated work space that can be set up in the home that is safe, suitable and free from distractions?				
Is there enough knee clearance underneath the workstation?				
Is there enough space to allow the employee to change position and vary movements?				
Is the area clutter free so that the employee can focus easily on the task?				
 <p>Is a document holder required to read documents?</p>				
2. Chair				
 <p>Is the chair provided stable, adjustable in height, allows freedom of movement and provides lower back support?</p>				
 <p>Is the chair set up so that the forearms are level with the desk?</p>				


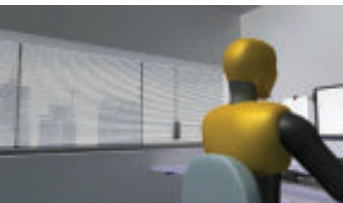
Step 2 – Homeworking risk assessment/checklist

Control	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/ follow up actions
2. Chair (cont'd)				
The chair has a back rest which is adjustable in height and the employee has been advised to sit back in their seat in order to get good lumbar support?				
Is the chair provided adjustable to allow feet to rest flat on the floor or is a footrest supplied?				
 <p>Is a footrest required?</p>				
3. Screen				
Is the screen positioned to avoid glare and reflection (for example sit at 90 degrees to a window to avoid glare)?				
 <p>Can the screen swivel and tilt easily?</p>				
 <p>Is the screen positioned so that the top of the screen is at eye level or slightly below and avoids sustained bending of the neck?</p>				
Is the screen free of reflective glare and are reflections liable to cause discomfort?				
Is the screen set up at a comfortable distance (for example arm length away)?				


Step 2 – Homeworking risk assessment/checklist

Control	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/ follow up actions
3. Screen (cont'd)				
 <p>Is the image on the screen stable with no flickering?</p>				
 <p>Are the characters on the display screen well defined, clearly formed of adequate size and with adequate spacing?</p>				
Has the employee been informed that they should relax their shoulders when viewing the screen?				
4. Communications				
Is a headset/speaker or microphone provided for communication?				
Are arrangements in place to consult with employees and for them to report issues for example accidents, health related issues, workload, faulty equipment, working hours?				
5. Keyboard/mouse				
Is the laptop/PC connected to an external keyboard and mouse?				
Is a neutral wrist posture maintained when typing (for example no bending of the wrist)				
 <p>Slope angle of the keyboard can be adjusted so as to allow the employee to find a comfortable position.</p>				

Step 2 – Homeworking risk assessment/checklist

Control	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/ follow up actions
5. Keyboard/mouse (cont'd)				
 <p>Are the mouse and keyboard within easy reach with space provided in front of the keyboard?</p>				
Are wrist rests required?				
6. Lighting				
 <p>Employee checks suitable lighting (for example natural, task lighting) is available to take account of the type of work being carried out and their vision.</p>				
Is task lighting available if required?				
7. Health				
Are eye and eyesight tests provided as needed?				
Is the employee required to carry out manual handling (If the employee has to carry out manual handling activities make sure that employee is trained)				
Has the employee been advised to report any musculoskeletal discomfort?				
Has the employee been advised to change posture frequently and to stand/move at least every 30 minutes?				
Has the employee been advised to avoid back-to-back video calls/online meetings so that they do not sit for long periods of time?				

Step 2 – Homeworking risk assessment/checklist

Control	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/ follow up actions
7. Health (cont'd)				
Are work days planned so that work can be varied if possible (for example write up notes, take a call away from desk)?				
Are there arrangements in place for monitoring and keeping in contact with the home worker?				
8. Heating/ventilation				
 Employee checks the room is warm enough and has adequate ventilation.				
9. Electricity				
Household electrical supply and equipment for example sockets, lighting, RCD, heaters that are not provided by the employer are checked by the employee on a regular basis.				
Is the area around the workstation kept clear of trailing cables and trip hazards?				
Is there an adequate number of sockets available?				
Is portable electrical equipment provided by the employer checked regularly and is unsafe equipment taken out of use (check for frayed wires, signs of burns or melting)?				
10. Fire				
Homeowner checks firefighting and detection equipment regularly and emergency plan is in place in case of fire (Fire detection and firefighting equipment is the responsibility of the homeowner).				

Step 2 – Homeworking risk assessment/checklist

11. Additional information

Findings:

Employee name:		Signature:		Date:	
Assessor name:		Signature:		Date:	
Review date:					

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