

- Telecommuting

WFH can be a pain in the neck (or back)

New Straits Times · 10 Mar 2023 · 14 · *The writer is a consultant orthopaedic, spine and trauma surgeon at Alty Orthopaedic Hospital.

WORK from home (WFH) has its benefits, but it also limits physical movement and takes a toll on posture. We are generally more active in the office than at home.



A rising number of young Malaysian adults now have neck and back pain, especially those who WFH or spend long hours on their devices.

We must pay attention to the warning signs so we can lower the risk of developing serious spinal conditions.

Back and neck problems, particularly lower back problems, have been growing in the past few years. There are several factors that cause back pain. Increased sedentariness and poor posture seem to promote the onset of musculoskeletal disorders, particularly lower back pain and neck pain.

When working from home, the following things can help alleviate back and neck pain.

• A GOOD WORK SPACE

The back and neck are exceptionally delicate. A life with less backache and pain can be achieved with simple and effective care.

Invest in a proper desk and chair to straighten the neck and back. Make sure they are comfortable, supportive, adjustable, and ergonomically sound.

Opt for a desk with an optimal height so the neck, shoulders and arms remain at a neutral position.

• WORK ON POSTURE

While working, we often slump in our seats or lean forward periodically, hunching over the computer. By doing so, we are putting pressure on the neck and spine. A good standing or sitting posture is the body being symmetrical, with weight evenly distributed and well aligned so it does not strain the neck and back muscles.

A desktop as your primary working station instead of a laptop would help improve your posture. Otherwise, use a laptop stand to raise your laptop to eye level.

Placing a small pillow behind your lower back can also help maintain an arch to lean back in the chair and relieve back muscles. Try keeping your forearms and hands levelled and straight by having the keyboard and mouse close to your computer.

• RELAX MUSCLES

The issue isn't about sitting or remaining still while working. It's about being stuck in one place for too long.

To keep the mind and, by extension, the body healthy, you can combine basic stretches with breathing exercises and other relaxation techniques while you work.

Stretches, short walks, or even small bursts of exercise are great ways to keep muscles active and engaged throughout the day. One

of the simplest ways to integrate exercise in between work is to set an alarm or other reminders throughout the day for you to get up and stretch.

A 30-second "microbreak" is enough to change your posture briefly, take the pressure off and relax.