

The Pain Of Working From Home

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When COVID-19 arrived in early 2020, many workers packed up their laptops and other supplies and headed home to work. For many, they left behind ergonomically-correct desks and chairs, opting instead to sit hunched over at the kitchen table, cuddled under a blanket on the couch with their laptop, or worse, slouched over on the floor.

These less-than-ideal working conditions not only lead to poor posture, but they're driving many at-home workers straight to physical therapy. Across the country, physical therapists are seeing an increase in patients dealing with pandemic-related problems.

"Working from home so we are seeing more overuse injuries and more postural injuries because people are slouched over kitchen tables, which in turn leads to pain and discomfort," said Robyn Johnson, Physical Therapist, OSF HealthCare. "And if you are experiencing that and it's not going away, that's not a normal thing. You should reach out to your physical therapist or primary care physician for a referral to therapy so we can work to get you back to where you want to be."

Physical therapists are seeing a variety of ailments due to postural problems as patients are slumped over their computers for hours at a time, often without a break.

“Poor posture can give you a variety of issues,” said Robyn Johnson, Physical Therapist, OSF HealthCare. “It can lead to headaches, neck pain, upper back pain, it can even lead to carpal tunnel, lower back pain, pain down our legs. It all just depends on the position that you’re in.”

To avoid needing medical attention, Johnson offers several recommendations while working from home.

- Avoid sitting or lying on your couch or bed with your computer
- Sit at a desk or table, if possible
- Use a comfortable chair that allows for good posture
- Keep feet flat on the ground or footstool
- Keep your computer eye level
- Avoid sitting for long periods of time. Get up at least every 30-40 minutes

“Anytime we’re in a prolonged, poor posture it changes the curvature of our spine, which in turn puts forces in our ligaments and our joints and leads to pain and soreness and discomfort because we’re not working the way we’re designed to work,” said Robyn Johnson, Physical Therapist, OSF HealthCare.

If your problems continue to persist, Johnson says it’s time to seek help. After an initial evaluation, a good physical therapy program will help patients make appropriate adjustments, strengthen their core, and become more aware of their posture. A therapist may also recommend an exercise program that includes a good dose of chin tucks, plank poses and stretching.

The goal, Johnson says, is to get patients back on their feet again or at least sitting upright at the kitchen table.

For more information on physical therapy, visit [OSF Healthcare](#).