

Top tips for preventing MSK injury whilst working from home

1. Create a daily routine.
2. Look after your sleep hygiene.
3. Look after your physical health.
4. Be aware of any impact of home working on your mental health.
5. Seek help when needed.
6. Try some regular mobility exercises to help you keep moving.

Daily routine:

- Where possible, have a clear start and end time. Otherwise, you may feel as if you are working 24/7, which may lead to increased stress.
- When you need to be more agile with your work hours, avoid 'work creep.' Put your laptop away when not working. Have structured time for family, especially when the family is also at home.
- Keep to your existing routine. Get up on time, get dressed, eat breakfast; do anything you would usually do. Keep boundaries between your work and home life.
- Don't undertake big chores such as cooking or DIY during the workday. Schedule these chores outside your working hours or in the time you would normally spend commuting. Small bits of housework such as loading the dishwasher will help you to vary your posture. However, be careful not to lose sight of your work tasks and focus.

What does my routine look like?

- If possible, choose a specific room or environment as your workspace and stick to this for most of your work.
- Sometimes, you may find that working from a different work area enables you to vary your posture. This is only advised if you have the space and can keep work-focused.
- Remember to schedule a time for breaks. Little and often is ideal: five minutes of every hour away from desk. Go for a short walk at lunchtime.
- Wind down at the end of your work day. Taking time to 'decompress' is instrumental for stress relief. Reading, meditating, exercise? Do what it takes to work for you.

Good sleep hygiene:

- Get up at the same time each day (bedtime is then dictated by your level of tiredness).
- Avoid phones, tablets and computers for at least one hour before sleep.
- Exercise outside each day.
- Keep your bedroom well ventilated and do not over-heat at night.

Look after your physical health:

- Eat and drink healthily. You may have full access to the kitchen, so try to avoid high sugar snacks. You have more time instead to prepare a proper healthy meal or snack. Make sure you drink enough fluids. Getting up to prepare a hot drink is also a good moment for exercise.
- Ensure your workstation is set up correctly.
- Ensure you are taking regular micro-breaks. Five minutes of every hour should be away from your workstation.

Exercise:

- It is recommended to be active every day or at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise five times per week.
- Start with five to ten minutes and build gradually if you are currently inactive.
- Do something you enjoy - you are more likely to stick at it.
- Find ways to be more active throughout the day.

Aches and pains

- Seek early, professional support to avoid niggles/ injuries getting worse if things are not improving.
- It's easier to treat things when addressed early.
- Physiotherapy can do an assessment and advise as appropriate.
- Occupational health can recommend specialist equipment or role modifications if there is a medical need/ health condition.



Setting up your workstation

Look **straight ahead**, monitor at eye level or just below and an arm's length away. If using multiple monitors, angle them inwards to reduce neck rotation

Give eyes a break. Every 20 minutes, look 20 feet away for 20 seconds. 20-20-20.

Elbows and forearms level with the desk surface, shoulders are down and relaxed. Adjust chair height or prop yourself up with additional cushions.

Feet planted on the floor. A footrest is ideal or use a box.



Keyboard and mouse positioned close to the edge of the desk to avoid unnecessary stretching. Don't shrug **shoulders** when typing and mousing. Lower the work surface or adjust chair height to avoid this.

Sit **back** taking full backrest support. Adjustable chairs are ideal. For more lumbar support, place a cushion or rolled up towel behind you.

Keep **thighs** parallel to floor.

Regular movement is key. Get up from chair 2-3X an hour for 30-60 seconds or 5-10 mins every hour. Add dynamic stretches to daily routines as well as walking.

Mental health:

- **Poor mental health** can impact on physical health and vice versa.
- **Stay social** – regular communications over telephone or networking sites such as MS Teams, Zoom, Skype help to alleviate feelings of isolation.
- Use of **video conferencing** really supports human interactivity and should be supported. Managers should be encouraged to set up regular team communications, ideally at a set time each day, to enable personal interaction and support.
- **Don't spend all your time** checking your phone, watching, reading or listening to news for updates; that simply generates anxiety and worry.
- Try to **limit yourself** to seeking updates at planned times, once or twice a day.
- **Stay on top of any difficult feelings.** It is quite normal to feel anxious during a crisis, when your life has been turned upside down. Focus on any positive outcomes and talk to trusted family and friends about your feelings.
- **Allow yourself breaks** and make sure to give yourself 'rewards' after working hard.
- **Take time to unwind:** do whatever helps you to 'chill out' and relax/ If you find you have more time than usual, use it for things you find meaningful. Perhaps read that book or watch that film you wanted to get into.
- **Support your colleagues:** in particular, consider calling your extrovert colleagues more often, as they may feel particularly lonely.
- **Have some background noise:** studies have shown that listening to soft, classical music or having the radio on, whilst you work, can help improve focus.
- Use available **online resources** such as Employee Assistance Programmes, or remote support from occupational health if required.

Seek help where needed:

- If you are struggling with either your physical or mental health ensure you reach out for professional help.
- You may wish to discuss this with your line manager, as they can often help and refer you to occupational health.
- The sooner you ask for support the easier it is to help resolve your health issue.

Exercises to do at your desk

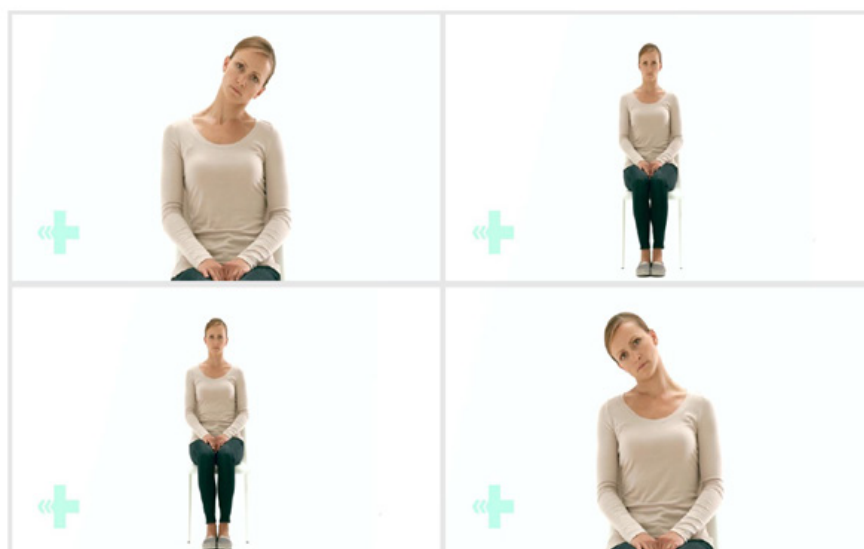
Neck mobility:

- Sit up straight and pull your chin slightly inward.
- Turn your head slowly to the left, as far as you can go.
- Hold for three seconds.
- Turn your head back.
- Repeat to the right.



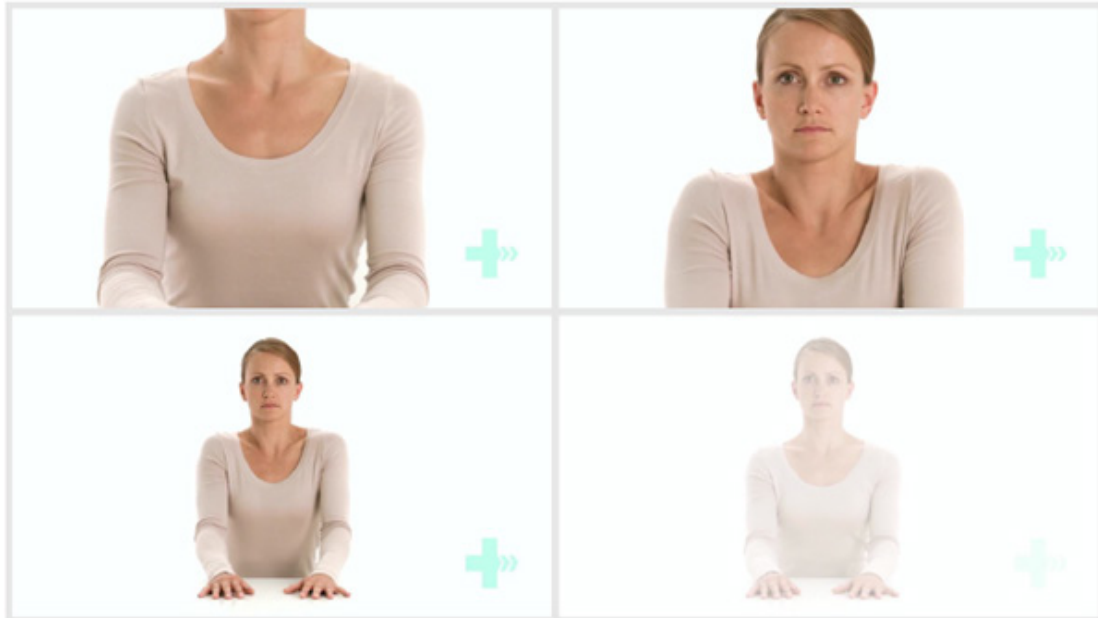
Neck mobility:

- Tuck your chin in.
- Tilt your neck and move your right ear slowly to your shoulder.
- Hold for three seconds.
- Move your head back to neutral position.
- Repeat to the left.



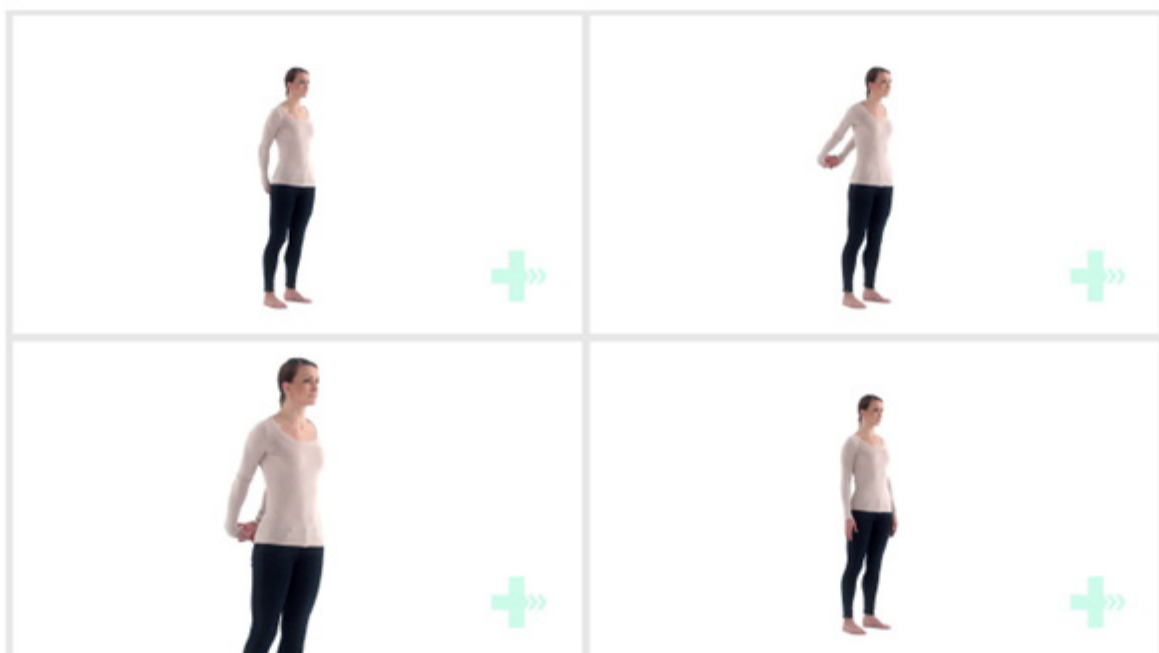
Shoulder shrugs:

- Relax your arms by your side or on a table.
- Shrug your shoulders up to your ears.
- Hold this position, before you completely relax your shoulders down and back.



Chest and upper back stretch:

- Start in a standing position.
- Move your arms behind you and interlock your fingers and move your arms slowly upwards.
- As you lift your arms upwards you will feel a stretch in your chest and shoulders.
- Hold this position, then breathe out and relax.



Lower back stretch:

- Sit up straight with your feet flat on the floor.
- Place your arms on the table.
- Push out your lower back and sit slouched.
- NOTE: Do not slip your buttocks forward.
- Pull in your lower back and sit upright exaggeratedly.



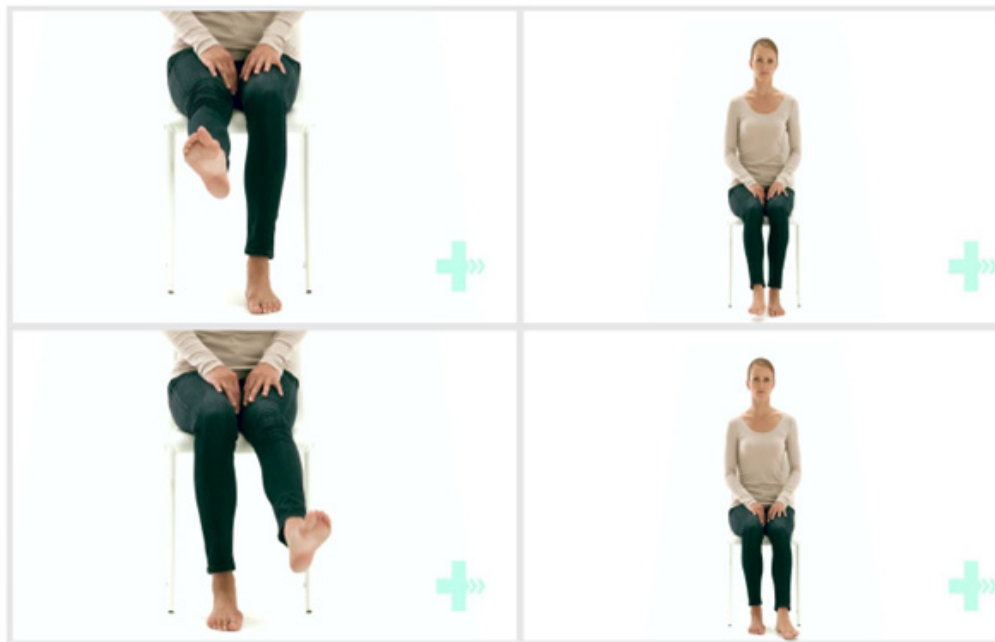
Sitting spinal twist:

- Start in a seated position.
- Keeping your knees in line, place one hand on the opposite knee, and move the other arm behind your back.
- Twist your entire upper body around to the same side as both hands, looking over this shoulder.
- Hold and return to the starting position, and repeat for the opposite side.



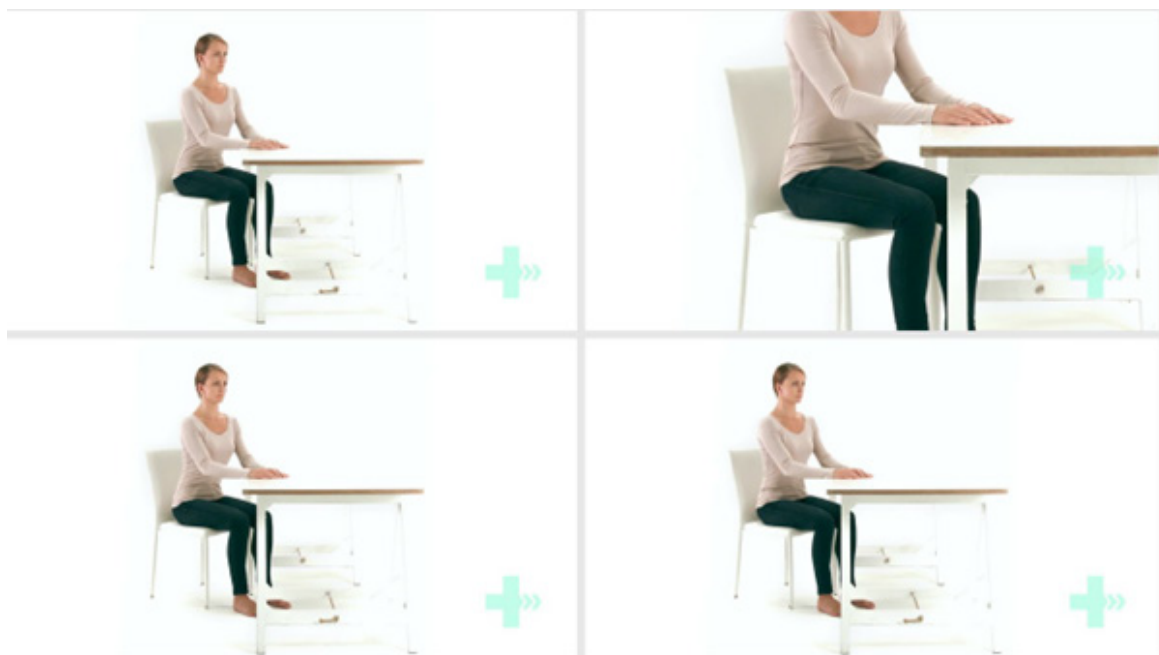
Leg circles:

- Sit up straight with your feet flat on the ground.
- Extend your right leg as far forward as possible.
- Draw circles with your extended leg.
- Hold your leg as high as possible.
- Repeat with left leg.
- You can vary this exercise by writing the numbers 1-10 with your extended leg.



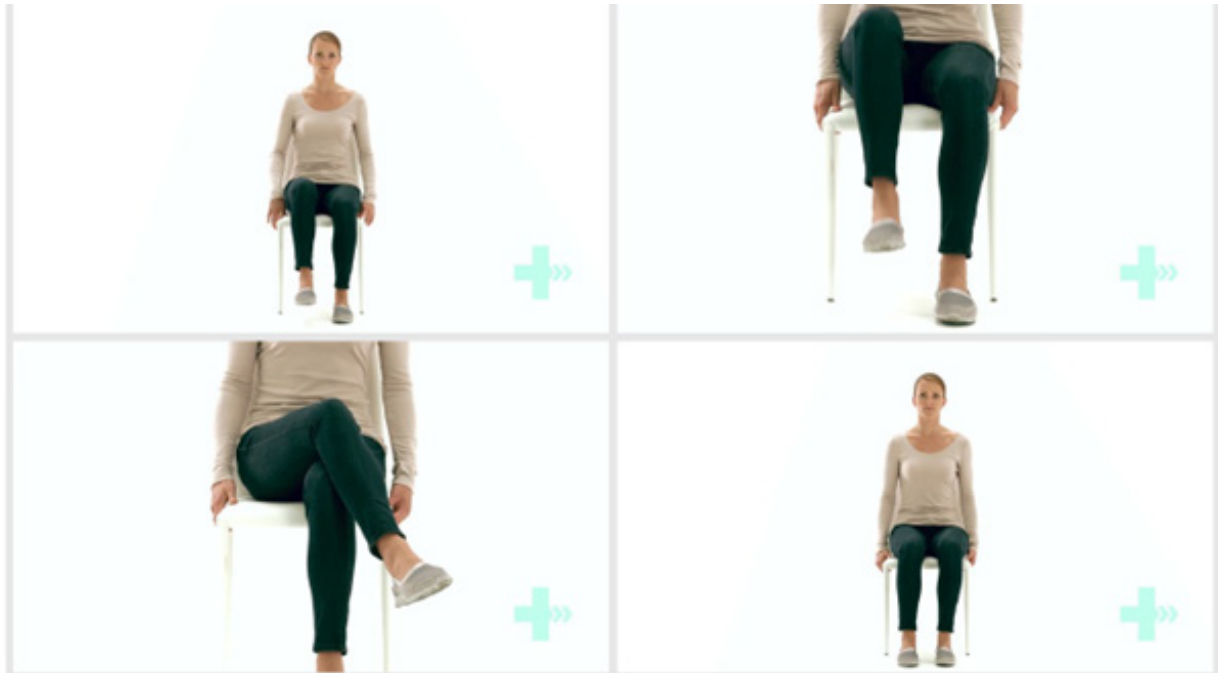
Hip hitching:

- Sit up straight.
- Lift your right buttock by tensing your abdominal muscles on the same side.
- Keep your upper body straight as you do this.
- Lower your buttock back down and repeat on the other side.



Knee lifts:

- Sit up straight with your feet flat on the floor.
- Move your knee as far up as you can and lift your foot off the floor.
- Lower your foot back down.
- Repeat this movement on the other side.
- VARIATION;- Stomp on the floor with your feet.
- Cross your legs and place them back on the floor.



Heel raises:

- Sit upright on a chair with your feet flat on the floor.
- Slowly raise your heels up keeping your toes in contact with the floor.
- Continue on for the required duration.



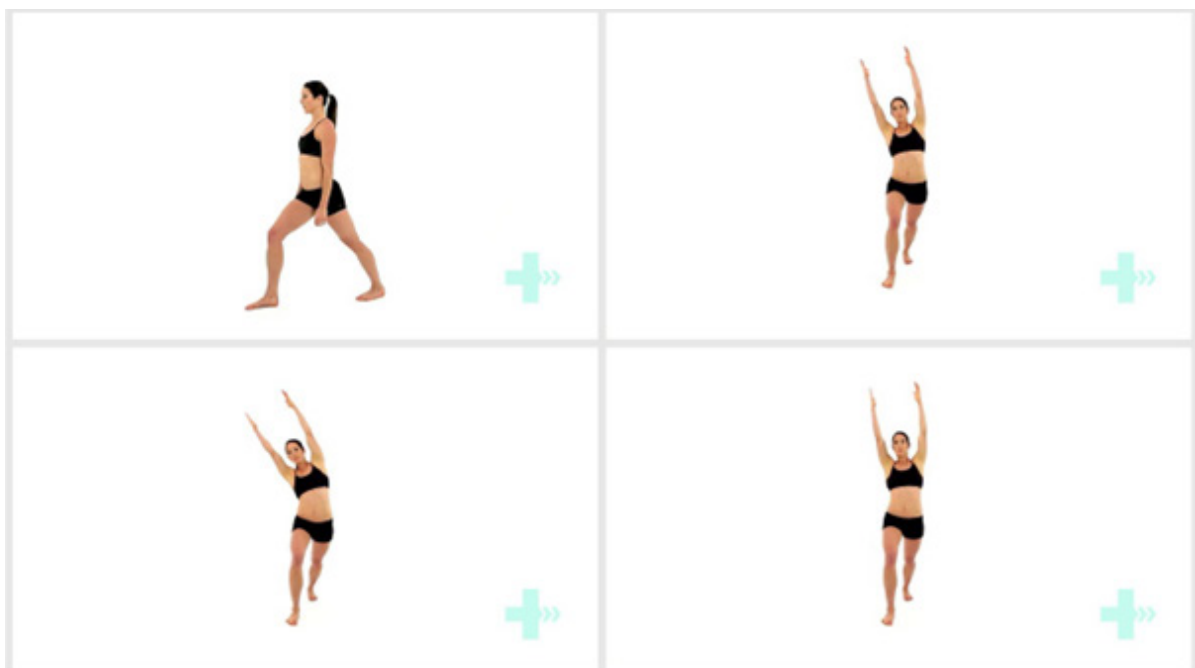
Overhead reach:

- Start in a seated position and interlock your fingers.
- Raise your arms above your head and rotate your hands so they are facing palm up.
- Push your arms upwards, feeling the stretch through your sides and shoulders.
- Hold this position before you relax and repeat the movement again.



Hip flexor stretch:

- Step forward into a lunge position, leaving the leg to be stretched behind.
- Make sure all of your toes are pointing straight forward.
- Lean forwards onto the front leg, driving your hips forwards and keeping your chest up.
- Lift your arms up close to your ears, and lean towards the side of the front leg. You will feel the stretch in the front of the hip.



Wrist stretches:

- Extend your arm straight in front of you and extend your wrist back towards your body.
- With your other hand, apply gentle pressure and hold for a few seconds.
- Next bring your wrist back so fingers pointing towards the ceiling and apply pressure with your other hand.



Staying fit for manual work

The idea that manual handling or repetitive movement is 'bad for you' is a myth. Active work is good for you and can have a positive impact on your physical and mental wellbeing.

However, it is true that active work, if approached incorrectly, can sometimes contribute to health conditions like musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), e.g. lower back pain, joint injuries and repetitive strain injury (RSI). RSI is a commonly used umbrella term for some types of pain felt in the fingers, wrists, forearms, neck and shoulders.

Physical benefits: if your job involves a regular amount of activity like bending, lifting, stretching and pushing, the good news is that it affords you an excellent chance to take charge of your physical health. Frequent physical activity improves your overall health and fitness and will help you get the most from work and your life in general.

Your job alone can help you fulfil, or could put you well on the way to meeting, your weekly quota of exercise. Physiotherapists suggest you do at least 30 minutes of physical activity at least five days out of seven.

Top tips for healthy manual work:

- Use good technique. Request tailored training for the tasks you do and follow the advice you're given.
- Use any tools provided to help you do your job correctly. Think about top athletes. If a tennis player held her racquet wrongly or a golfer didn't swing his club properly, they would soon develop aches and pains.
- Warm up a little, to prepare your body for heavy or repetitive work.
- Adopt good work postures.
- Report any symptoms to your employer promptly.
- Follow your employer's health and safety procedures – they are there for a good reason.
- Eat well and drink enough fluids.

What employers can do: remember also, that all employers have strong moral and legal obligations to provide safe and healthy workplaces for active workers. They should provide:

- Information and training about safe ways to work
- Risk assessments conducted by trained assessors to minimise hazards
- Changes to work environment and work style where necessary
- Safe equipment to assist you in your duties
- Encouragement for staff to take allocated breaks and leave work on time.

Mental wellbeing: active employment can also benefit your mental wellbeing. Being physically active causes your body to release chemicals, which help lift your mood and encourage you to feel more relaxed. These simple suggestions can help you keep your stress levels in check:

- Breathe properly. If you feel stressed or anxious, take several deep breaths and fill your lungs. You'll feel calmer and more in control.
- Consider your work environment. Suggest your employer provides better lighting or a refreshing coat of paint if the atmosphere makes you feel gloomy.
- Use your breaks to get away from your work area. Enjoy some fresh air and a change of scene.
- Try to keep challenging situations in perspective. Learn to celebrate where you've been successful, rather than give yourself a hard time about what you haven't achieved.
- Make getting a good night's sleep a priority. If you're not doing shift work, aim to go to bed and get up at the same time on most days.
- Use your holiday allowance. It will help you unwind and recharge.

Looking after yourself: there is much you can do to look after yourself in the course of your active work. Physiotherapists recommend you think carefully about the movements your job requires you to carry out regularly.

You should try and eliminate movements that are not benefiting your health and might be limiting your productivity. Movements you should look to avoid include:

- Awkward or uncomfortable positions
- Using too much force
- Placing too much strain on one side of your body.

You can achieve this through developing better working postures.

Good posture: correct posture is really important for good health and it's something physiotherapists can work with you on to help you achieve.

If you adopt the correct postures for the tasks you do at work and at home, your back, neck and other joints will remain healthy and strong, you'll breathe freely and your internal organs will be able to work more efficiently.

Poor posture is often the result of bad habits developed over a lifetime, such as slouching, but can also result from:

- Obesity
- Stress and anxiety
- Fatigue
- Poor lifting and handling technique.

In a good posture, your spine, shoulder and hip joints will all be in correct alignment. Viewed from the back, your spine would appear straight. From the side, it would have three natural curves, similar to the letter 'S'.

Whether you are standing, sitting or leaning you should aim to avoid undue stress and strain on your joints.

This will help you feel:

- Stronger
- Less tired
- Fewer aches and pains.

