



Wellbeing toolkit

Back care

We believe in **well beings**
westfieldhealth.com/business

**Westfield**
Health

Back care

Due to the current restrictions to reduce the spread of coronavirus, we're spending more time at home.

Between working remotely and watching a few extra series on Netflix, it can add up to a lot of time sitting down, taking its toll on our back and overall health.

Whether it's a dull ache or sharp twinges, back problems can really affect your quality of life and wellbeing.

In this factsheet, we'll look at why sitting too much is such a risk, things to consider when it comes to making your home workspace back friendly and ways to improve your posture to protect your spine health in the long term.



In this factsheet

- The impact of sitting
- Working from home
- Improving your posture

The impact of sitting

Now that many of us are working from home, it's easy for the amount of time we spend sitting down to creep up.

But too much time spent sitting down can really have a negative impact on our backs.

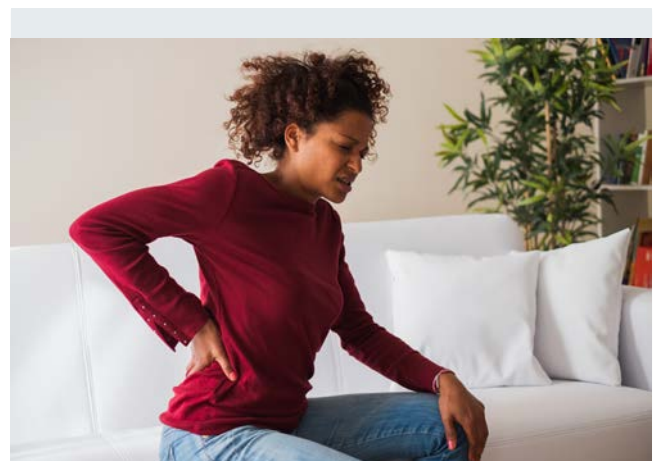
Why sitting takes its toll

The spine has a natural curve in the small of the back when we are standing. When we sit down and lean forward this curve reverses, more than doubling the usual pressure on the lower portion of the spine which can lead to back pain.

The longer we sit, the more likely we are to develop diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Studies have found that even when exercising daily, we're still at risk of developing diabetes and other chronic conditions if we regularly sit for more than 6 hours a day.

Safe sitting

- Avoid chairs and sofas which are too low, deep or soft.
- Avoid long periods of sitting – a walk round the room every so often will ease muscles and joints which are becoming stiff and sore.
- Vary your position every 20 to 30 minutes.
- Good seating should have an adjustable height, back rest and lumbar support.
- Ideally a chair should also have arms to help you get up, and rotate so you don't twist to reach things behind you.



Healthy back basics

- Never bend and twist at the same time
- Turn your feet to change direction
- Keep the muscles in your lower back, abdomen, hips and legs strong and flexible so they can support the curve of your spine
- Avoid slumping and arching your back as these postures can take your body out of good alignment
- Try not to sit or stand in one position for long periods and take regular breaks

Working from home

When we're at work, our workstation is likely to be well set up, with our desk and chair configured to suit our needs.

As the number of us currently working from home has increased significantly, this may now be a different story.

Like many people at the moment, you may find yourself working at your kitchen table, standing at a counter top or from the sofa.

It can greatly improve your productivity and general wellbeing if you're able to create a designated workspace area that includes a desk and upright chair.

Wherever you're working, try to become more aware of your posture.

Use a well-constructed chair that:

- Has a good backrest that provides lumbar support
- Ideally can recline – sitting upright at 90 degrees is actually not good for your spine - a 100 to 110 degree angle is better
- Is not too high – your feet should be flat on the floor
- Can rotate or swivel so that you can easily switch from task to task



wrong sitting position

MONITOR

Adjust distance and height: top of the monitor at eye-level and slightly tilted.

ARMS

Relax shoulders, forearms parallel to the floor. Minimal bend at the wrist.

CHAIR

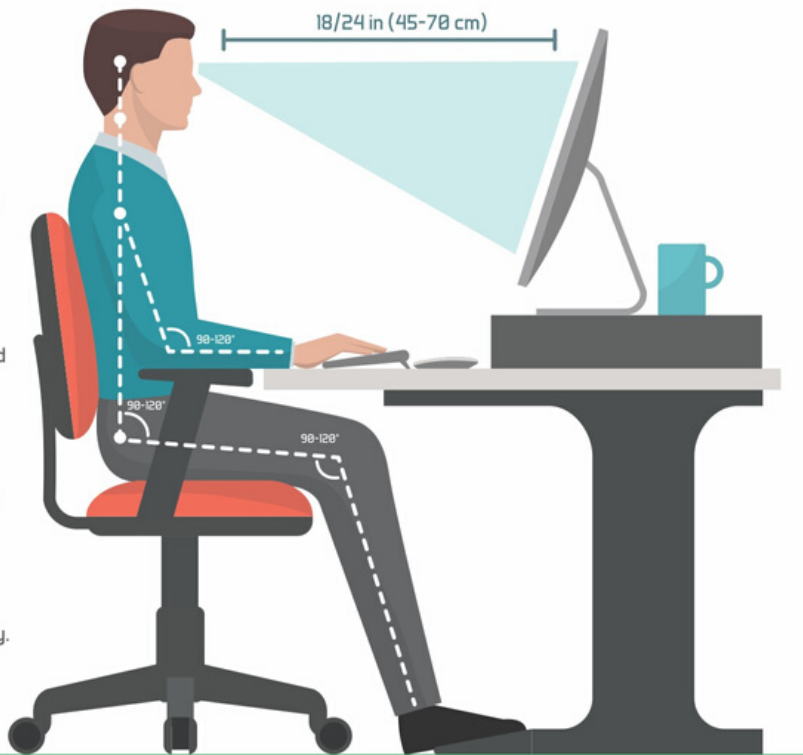
Should have a backrest and armrests, adjust height.

LEGS

Thighs parallel to the floor.

FEET

Parallel to the floor, use a footrest if necessary.



- Sit upright with your back and shoulders against the back of the chair
- Avoid holding your phone between your head and shoulder
- Don't slouch
- Your arms should rest lightly on the armrests to avoid circulatory problems or nerve pressure
- Keep your feet flat on the floor – don't cross your legs
- Relax your shoulders while working on your keyboard
- Take regular breaks to keep muscles and joints moving



correct sitting position

Improving your posture

If you are experiencing any discomfort from sitting, try the exercises below to strengthen your back and help align your spine.

Improving your posture can help to alleviate any tension that has developed. Developing good posture may feel a bit odd at first but with practice will become second nature.



Bridges

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and heels close to your bottom
- Your feet should be shoulder-width apart and flat on the floor
- Raise your hips to create a straight line from your knees to your shoulders
- As you come up, tighten your abs and buttocks
- Lower yourself gently to the starting position
- Repeat 8 to 10 times

Standing thigh stretch

- Grab the top of your left foot behind you and gently pull your heel towards your left buttock to stretch the front of the thigh, keeping the knees touching.
- Hold for 15 seconds
- Avoid leaning forwards or to the side
- Repeat with the other leg



Plank

- Lie on your front propped up on your forearms and toes
- Keep your legs straight and hips raised to create a straight and rigid line from head to toe
- Your shoulders should be directly above your elbows
- Focus on keeping your abs contracted during the exercise
- Hold this position for 5 to 10 seconds and repeat 8 to 10 times

Side-lying leg raises

- Lie on your right-hand side with your right knee bent at 90 degrees, and your left leg straight and in line with your back
- Press your left fingers into the top of your buttock to keep your left hip slightly tilting forward
- Raise your left leg as far as you can without letting your hips tilt back
- Slowly lower to the starting position
- Perform 8 to 10 times and repeat on the other side



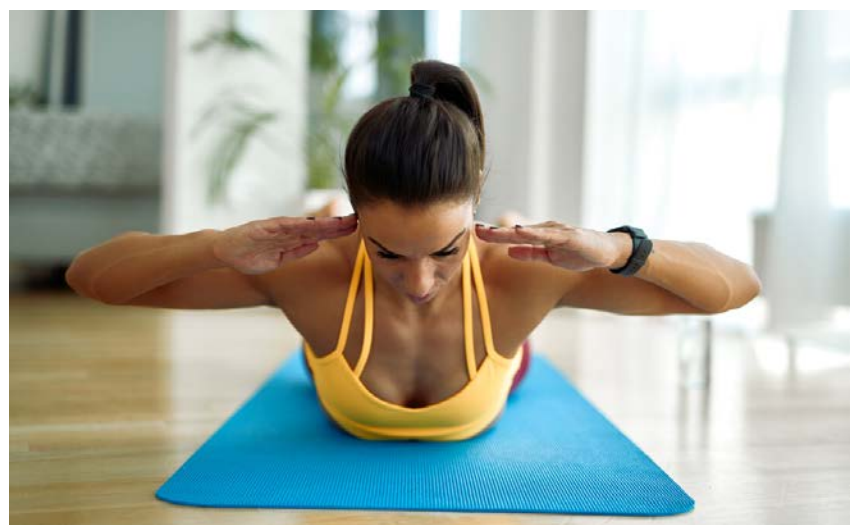


Hip-flexor stretches

- Step your left leg forward, keeping both feet pointing straight ahead
- Keeping your back leg straight and avoiding sticking your buttock out and arching your back, slowly bend your front leg and push your right buttock forward until you feel a stretch across the front of your right hip joint
- Repeat with the other leg

Back extensions

- Lie on your front and rest on your forearms, with your elbows bent at your sides
- Look towards the floor and keep your neck straight
- Keeping your neck straight, arch your back up by pushing down on your hands
- You should feel a gentle stretch in the stomach muscles
- Breathe and hold for 5 to 10 seconds
- Return to the starting position
- Repeat 8 to 10 times



Wellbeing toolkit

This factsheet is part of our Wellbeing Toolkit aimed at helping teams stay well during the coronavirus outbreak.

Each week, a new pair of factsheets covering mental and physical wellbeing is released.

Take a look at westfieldhealth.com/covid-19 for access to all resources.