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Aussies urged to reassess their work from home set-up as chiropractors see rise in pain cases

- **Working from home here to stay:** *The COVID-19 pandemic is sparking a more lasting shift in the nature of our work, and new employment patterns are expected to become the 'new normal'.¹*
- **1 in 3 Australians could find themselves needing a permanent work from home set-up:** *About 30% of Australian jobs can be performed from home, that's 4 million Australians who could find themselves needing a more permanent work from home arrangement.¹*
- **Make-shift 'work from home' arrangements could pose risk to Australians physical health:** *From ironing boards to the kitchen bench, sitting or standing for prolonged periods of time with bad posture can result in back and neck pain and, if left untreated, lead to problems including chronic back pain, diabetes, heart disease and obesity.²*
- **Impact of poor posture can extend far beyond the immediate aches and pains:** *Spinal problems have the potential to affect your mental and physical wellbeing, beyond just neck and back pain.³*
- **Having a safe and appropriate work from home set-up a must to reduce risk of spinal stress:** *Experts say four easy steps could help Australian's ensure their work from home set-up is comfortable, safe and reduces the risk of injury to their spine.*

As Australia verges on more than two months in lockdown and the nation-wide shift to working from home expected to become the 'new normal', experts are urging Australians to pay attention to their 'at home office' set up after experiencing an increase in cases of back and neck pain.

Dr Anthony Coxon, leading chiropractor and President of the Australian Chiropractors Association says: "Myself and other chiropractors across Australia have already seen an increase in patients who are reporting spinal and neck pains and injuries due to peering at a tiny laptop screen all day.

This increase is largely the result of the number of people having to 'make-do' with what's available to them at home to ensure they are able to work during the lockdown restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic."

According to research approximately 30% of jobs in Australia can be performed from home, which means four million Australians could find themselves working from make-shift 'work from home' arrangements if the COVID-19 pandemic sparks a more long-lasting shift in the way we work.¹

"We can't assume that everyone who is forced to work from home has an appropriate and safe set up. This is also a particular challenge for those who need to combine their job with family care responsibilities, and for people living in space-constrained living conditions," says Dr Coxon.

"One of the most common injuries from working from home is neck pain and it is caused by working at a laptop all day. Typically, individuals slant their neck forward and hunch their shoulders which increases the stress placed on the cervical spine (aka the neck).

As a general rule, every 2.5cm that the head is held forward in poor posture, an additional 4-5kg of weight is felt on the neck – almost doubling the weight of the head," explains Dr Anthony Coxon.

According to Dr Coxon the impact of additional strain placed upon the body from sitting or standing with poor posture for longer periods of time extends beyond just back and neck pain.

"The complications of poor posture can include spinal dysfunction, joint degeneration, rounded shoulders, a potbelly and lead to serious chronic health conditions if left untreated."

The inadequate 'work from home' arrangements are just one component worrying experts, with the mental health impacts of the pandemic also playing a role in the physical presentations Dr Coxon and his colleagues are seeing in clinic.





"Interestingly, there is a relationship between physical and mental health – indirectly, stress is one of the main reasons Australians visit chiropractors. When you're stressed and anxious you naturally hold tension in your body and often skew your head position forwards. Your nervous system is in a hyper-vigilant flight/fight state. Similarly, a depressed state is often associated with a slumped over posture" says Dr Anthony Coxon. "Both of which can cause physical pain to the body, particularly the neck and spine."



The increase of individuals experiencing pain will further exacerbate the pain epidemic that Australia currently faces. One in five individuals over the age of 45 reportedly live with a chronic pain⁴ and 4 million Australians suffer from back pain,⁵ however pain also weighs heavy on a sufferer's mental health – with people living in pain reporting a lower quality of life as they are five times as likely to be unable to carry out day to day activities.⁴

With such focus on mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is vital that individuals recognise the ways in which this can also harm their body physically. “It is normal to feel stress, anxious or depressed in this uncertain time and not everyone has the luxury of home offices but we must remember to look after ourselves both physically and mentally – chiropractic practices remain open across the country to help you alleviate pain”.

To help Australians ensure their at-home workstation is comfortable, safe and most importantly reduces risk of injury, Dr Coxon recommends following the simple ‘STAR’ four steps:

S 	<p>Set up your workstation: get the ergonomics right Sit with your feet flat on the ground with your hips slightly higher than knees. Your arms should be relaxed and by your side with your elbows at 100 – 120 degrees.</p>
T 	<p>Tidy your desk: separate your keyboard and mouse from your screen It's simply impossible to have good posture while working at laptop. Either use a desktop or add a separate keyboard and mouse to your laptop so you can elevate the screen while keeping the keyboard and mouse at hand level.</p>
A 	<p>Assess yourself A common and simple exercise to assess whether you are experiencing increased spinal or neck pain is to turn your head 90 degrees to the left and 90 degrees to the right. If you notice pain, please do reach out to your local chiropractor – our practices remain open.</p>
R 	<p>Rest: Take regular breaks In a typical work environment, people will get out of the chair often during the day to talk to a colleague. Depending on your home environment, you may not necessarily have these cues to move. Commit yourself to getting out of your chair at least every 30 minutes to move and do a few stretches. The Straighten Up App is a great guide for some useful exercises.</p>

– ENDS –

To find your closest chiropractor visit: findachiro.org.au

About ACA: The Australian Chiropractors Association (ACA) is the leading voice for chiropractors in Australia, actively working to further the profession of chiropractic through improving the health of all Australians. This media release has been distributed by opr Agency on behalf of Australian Chiropractors Association.

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