

MEDICAL BREAKTHROUGHS **RESEARCH SUMMARY**

TOPIC: WORKING FROM HOME ... BAD BACK EPIDEMIC?
REPORT: MB #4834

BACKGROUND: In March when the Centers for Disease Control declared COVID-19 a pandemic, many Americans began to shelter in place and work from home. Work from home is an efficient way to keep businesses running while staying socially distant. At its peak, 62 percent of Americans were working from home and many say they will not return to the office even when it becomes safe to do so. Gallup Panel data showed that, "Three in five U.S. workers who have been doing their jobs from home during the coronavirus pandemic would prefer to continue to work remotely as much as possible, once public health restrictions are lifted. In contrast, 41% would prefer to return to their workplace or office to work, as they did before the crisis."

(Source: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/306695/workers-discovering-affinity-remote-work.aspx>)

EFFECTS: Work from home helps containing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, but it has other health risks that come with it. Ergonomics refers to the study of people's efficiency in the workplace and how work can be tailored to limit risk of injury or discomfort to the worker. Doctors saw an increase in patients coming to see them for shoulder, back and neck pain during the COVID rise. Patients would complain of pain in the anterior superior shoulder, express that it was worse with activity and reaching out. This could be directly correlated with working in non-office environments such as kitchen tables, couches, and beds. Use of laptops on a person's actual lap is another major issue that involves hunching over and can pinch the rotator cuff over time.

(Source: Grant Garrigues, MD, shoulder surgeon, Midwest Orthopaedics at Rush)

REMEDIES: To prevent injuries to the shoulder, neck and back while working from home, don't work on your bed or couch. You are more likely to slouch from your neck and shoulders in this position, flexing your entire spine. Work with your computer and chair at an appropriate height. You want your elbow to naturally meet the top of the table and permit neutral wrist flexion. Your computer should be at eye level to limit the strain on your neck from looking down. Have your feet flat on the floor to lessen the pressure on your joints. Additionally, a stool can be used to prop up your legs to a 90-degree angle. It's also important to take frequent breaks about every 20 minutes to keep blood flowing and open up your neck and back muscles and reduce the strain from looking at your computer monitor.

(Source: <https://rhfamilychiro.com/2020/05/16/work-from-home-ergonomics/>)

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If this story or any other Ivanhoe story has impacted your life or prompted you or someone you know to seek or change treatments, please let us know by contacting Marjorie Bekaert Thomas at mthomas@ivanhoe.com