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UNIVERSITI
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Faculty of Business
and Management

UiTM *di hatiku*

VOLUME 5
2022

eISSN 2716-599X



772716 599000
e-ISSN 2716-599X

FBM INSIGHTS

Faculty of Business and Management

Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah

e-ISSN 2716-599X

The editorial board would like to express their heartfelt appreciation for the contributions made by the authors, co-authors and all who were involved in the publication of this bulletin.

Published by : Faculty of Business and Management,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah

Published date : 27 April 2022

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ERGONOMICS WORKSTATION FOR HOME OFFICE

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INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 outbreak caused by the novel coronavirus, working from home became the new way of working. The pandemic has changed the way we work and transformed the workplace culture with more people working remotely. A survey conducted by human resources solutions agency, Randstad released the result of their H1 2021 Workmonitor survey in Malaysia found that 69% of Malaysians want to continue to work from home until the COVID-19 vaccine has been widely distributed (Randstad, 2021).

THE PROBLEM

The challenges of working from home is lacking designated home office spaces in which countless individuals had to create improvised work setups in living rooms, kitchens, bedrooms — wherever there is space (Barrios & Pitt, 2021). Many of the workers do not realize that poor ergonomics design in home office spaces can result in serious health problems. These include discomfort in the back and arm issues, neck and shoulders, hands and wrists, migraine, headaches and eye pain.

Most employees working from home use computers and laptops that can cause health problems and musculoskeletal injuries (Seva et al., 2021). The computer users always carping of having musculoskeletal symptoms such as pain in the neck, shoulders, arms, wrists, and lower back region (P. Vinothini et al., 2018). A study by Jian and Poh (2021) found that mental workload and stress levels are the major underlying factors leading to poor ergonomics issues, followed by workstation chair height. Therefore, in designing home office workstation, it is important for the worker to choose an ergonomic chair due to health concerns.

THE SOLUTION

The Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia has provided guidelines to explain how suitable seating contributes to the safety and health of people at work, for example by helping to prevent back pain. This guideline layouts advices on the design and selection of seating and some examples of seating arrangements for different kinds of work (Department of Occupational Safety and Health, 2002). It can be applied in designing home office workstation. Sitting in an unsuitable chair can result in tiredness and discomfort especially when you seat for long periods of time. Therefore, it is important to have an ergonomic chair that can improve back pain and support the natural 'S' shape of the spine. In a well-designed workstation, the worker should be at a comfortable height and position in relation to the work. All equipment that is frequently used should be kept within easy reach to eliminate repeated twisting or stretching movements (Department of Occupational Safety and Health, 2002).

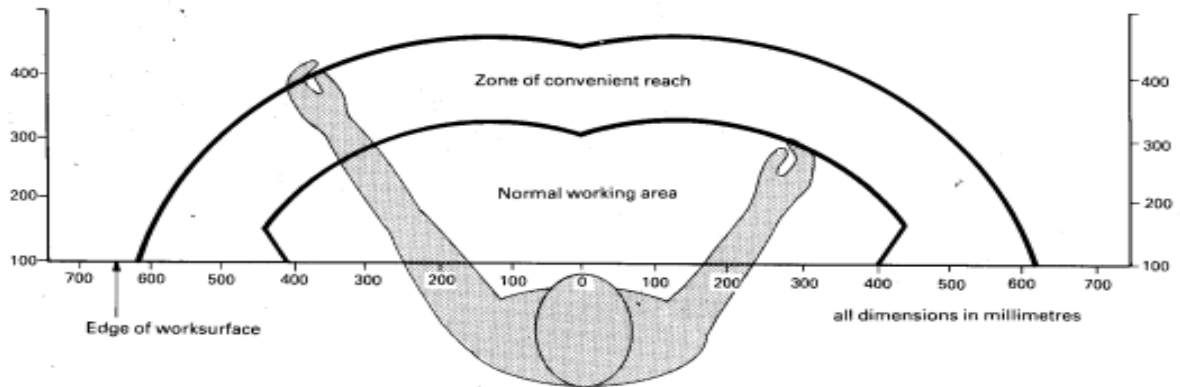


Figure 1: Reach in the horizontal plane. (The distances shown can be reached by 95% of women).

Another important aspect to put extra concern when working from home is overusing the computer. Working from home requires workers to spend a lot of time working on a computer especially to those who work in the IT industry or academicians where a computer is a primary tool in teaching and learning. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) United States Department of Labor provides a Computer Workstations eTool that illustrates simple, inexpensive principles that will help workers create a safe and comfortable computer workstation.



Figure 2: Computer workstations e-Tool.

Source: Occupational Safety and Health Administration (n.d)

These eTool suggest ways to minimize or eliminate identified problems and allow you to create your own "custom-fit" computer workstation as shown in figure 2 (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, n.d.)

1. Top of monitor at or just below eye level
2. Head and neck balanced and in-line with torso
3. Shoulders relaxed

4. Elbows close to body and support
5. Lower back supported
6. Wrists and hands in-line with forearms
7. Adequate room for keyboard and mouse
8. Feet flat on the floor

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is important for us to consider an ergonomics workspace in any situation even if we are working from home. Ergonomics workspace will somehow contribute to the job efficiency and productivity. A healthy workplace will reduce the risk of developing repetitive stress injuries and keeping employee morale high.

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