

A Home Office That Works

Adjustability and function are the keys to designing a successful home office. By Nadria Tucker

Whether you're a freelance designer, a small business owner or even a student, you probably want your home office to be comfortable, functional and attractive. To many, "comfortable" means a soft, plush couch or a day spent writing in bed. But sitting for hours slumped over a laptop isn't ideal for your body, and working in awkward positions can cause severe back, neck and wrist pain.

Jonathan Johnson, account development representative for Humanscale, knows a thing or two about ergonomics. His company specializes in office furniture designed to adjust to your body's needs. According to Johnson, in an ideal world, you'd equip your home office with an ergonomic office chair that adjusts up and down and supports your back, a desk, a keyboard tray, a monitor arm and sufficient task lighting. Your feet should touch the ground, you should sit back in your chair—not hunched forward—and your wrists should be flat, not straining to reach the keyboard or mouse. Your monitor should be centered in front of you, at eye level, about an arm's length away,

SIT RIGHT

An ergonomically correct chair will support your back, and a keyboard shelf will ensure your wrists are flat, minimizing pain from typing. The home office pictured below employs many ergonomically correct principles.



and you'd have enough light but no glare on your computer screen.

But if you work from home with a laptop, there is hope. Johnson's advice is to invest in a separate keyboard and keyboard platform that keep your wrists in a neutral position. Use your laptop as a monitor by placing it into a laptop holder that raises it up to eye level. "This will allow you to relax your shoulders and neck," he says, "while putting your back in a more natural, supported position."

So, you've set up an adjustable office chair, a laptop holder and a keyboard tray. Your home office is healthy, comfortable and adjustable, but is it attractive? Interior designer Caron Stallings recommends designing with, not around, office furniture. "Keep it simple, and let functional objects shine," she says. "Try to select timeless, well-designed, artistic products—even with smaller items such as tape dispensers and paper clip holders—that provide interest while fulfilling a functional need." Stallings' home office design essential? "Easy. An entire wall of floor-to-ceiling shelves with modular components such as doors and drawers to provide storage for all of my books, supplies,

a printer, a scanner—everything I need all in one location."

Both Stallings and Johnson encourage home office workers to get up and move around. "Micro-breaks are crucial," Johnson says. "Consider standing and moving around for a few minutes every half hour." Stallings wants to take things outside. "My dream home studio would have an adjacent exterior space where I could relocate on warm, sunny days to get a bit of fresh air and work in the sunshine." ●



Photos courtesy of Jonathan Johnson, Caron Stallings and Humanscale