Laptop User Guide

Laptop and Portable Computers

Nowadays, literally tens of thousands of people routinely use a laptop or portable computer for a large part of their working day whether "on the road" or in the office. The Display Screen Equipment Regulations cover visual display units, including laptop computers. Considering the extent of laptop usage, apart from the legislation, common sense dictates that all employers and employees should follow guidelines to ensure that injuries and ill-health conditions do not affect people using laptop and portable computers.
This information is intended to provide some suggestions as to how to best use laptop computers in the context of avoiding injury.

The effects of working with Laptops

In today's business environment laptops have given us the flexibility to travel and work almost anywhere and we are therefore able to send and receive information worldwide. However, the convenience of laptops does cause concern to our health, safety and comfort that can be divided into two areas.

Firstly, the design of laptops is for mobility, which means screens are fixed to the machine, keyboards are smaller and the screen definition is not as good. This can create difficulties to achieve a comfortable and healthy working posture.

Secondly, the environments in which laptops are used, such as working at home, in a car, on a plane, hotels etc., are unlike modern offices. It can therefore be difficult to adopt good working practices that ensure correct posture and a comfortable working position.

Working with a Laptop

Laptop computers were designed for temporary or mobile working, and not for fixed or prolonged DSE work.

Where a member of staff is provided with a laptop computer, it is intended that it is to be used stand-alone for mobile/transient work only (e.g. periods of half an hour or less).

In any other situation e.g. prolonged office or home use, a docking station and separate monitor, or laptop raiser blocks (see picture below), separate keyboard and mouse must be provided for the member of staff.

Example 1: Good office-based laptop set-up   **Example 2**: Poor office-based laptop set-up

In some cases it may be necessary to replace the laptop with a stand-alone PC. This need should be identified through the process of risk assessment.

Temporary/Transient Office Use

Whenever working with Display Screen Equipment (DSE), particularly when it is a laptop, the important factor is to avoid poor posture. When using a laptop as a 'stand alone' piece of equipment, some points to remember in order to achieve best practice in the office include:

<u>Sitting</u>

- Use a five-castor DSE chair.
- Adopt a good sitting position in order to avoid bending or straining your wrists.
- Adjust the seat height to make sure your forearms are horizontal when your hands are on the keyboard, in order to allow your wrists to be horizontal when typing.
- Try not to slouch. Do not sit forward and crouch over the laptop.
- Do not place the laptop at the edge of the desk as looking down at this angle will create a potentially harmful posture for your head and neck resulting in aches and pains.
- Push the laptop towards the middle of the desk. This will allow your arms to rest on the desktop in order to keep your wrists relaxed.
- Do not lean or bend to one side to read your screen.
- Sit directly in front of your display screen and remove anything in the way.

- When reading from a hard copy, keep it as close to the laptop as possible. If possible, use a copyholder.
- Take regular breaks to reduce the risk of injury.

Correct Mouse Usage

- Do not clench your fingers or raise them up in the air.
- Keep your hands flat and fingers relaxed if using a glide pad or trackball.
- Relying on the use of an integral trackpoint ("nipple") device should be discouraged due to possible harmful physical effects from continuous use. A separate mouse should be provided and used.

Reading the Screen

- Avoid glare. Glare and reflected light can affect screen clarity when using laptops.
- Sit with the laptop screen directly in front of you. Do not work with the screen at any angle other than at right angles to your line of sight.
- If glare occurs, adjust your screen - either by means of programme menu controls or to another position within the room – in order to reduce reflections.
- Do not sit with your back facing a window.
- Regularly clean your screen.
- Adjust screen brightness to suit surrounding light levels.
- Place the keyboard in a position so that a comfortable viewing distance can be achieved.

Example 3: Good laptop stand-alone positioning and posture (provided working for half an hour or less).

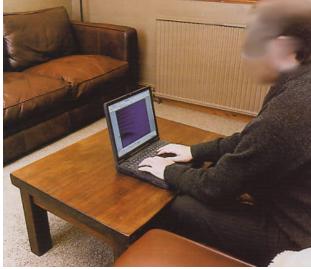**Example 4**: Poor laptop stand-alone positioning and posture.

Working Away from the Office

Working with a Laptop at Home/ in an Hotel

- Many hotels now provide suitable designated areas for laptop use. These will include conference rooms, public area laptop points, and facilities within bedroom accommodation. Always use these facilities where possible.

- If these facilities are not available, try to compromise by using an appropriate chair that gives posture support.
- Do not use a laptop whilst sitting on a sofa or easy chair.
- Do not work with the laptop on your lap.
- Do not use a laptop when lying on the bed. This causes strain to the neck and back.
- Use a suitable non-reflective work surface if possible.

Example 5: Good home laptop set-up and posture   **Example 6**: Poor home/hotel laptop set-up and posture

Working with a Laptop in Cars

Laptops should not be used in cars. However, on occasions this may be unavoidable in which case:
- Never use your laptop when driving.
- Do not use a laptop whilst sitting in the drivers seat with it on your lap or sited on the passenger seat.
- Sit in the passenger seat if you have to use the laptop. Adjust the seat to provide plenty of legroom, and if you have a briefcase put it under the laptop to raise it slightly. This will improve posture for your neck and wrists.
- Limit the time you use the laptop to a maximum of 30 minutes.

Working with a Laptop on Planes & Trains

- Avoid using a laptop on a plane.
- Reclining seats limit space and will therefore inhibit a beneficial posture.
- If you do need to use your laptop on a plane, request a bulkhead (compartment wall) seat with additional space that will provide a little more room to achieve a comfortable working position.
- When on a train, avoid working in seats with tables attached to the rear of seats in front of you.
- Try to use the more spacious communal tables. Place the laptop away from the edge of the table in order to achieve a more comfortable position.

Personal Safety

Always be conscious of your personal safety when carrying or using your laptop. Take sensible precautions such as:-

- Plan your tasks to avoid situations where you are likely to be a lone worker in circumstances where theft is likely.
- Take extra care in public places, or in other situations (or at times) where the risk of theft may be greater.
- Do not carry the laptop in luggage with a computer manufacturer's branding.
- Always be conscious of vehicle security when transporting your laptop between venues e.g. never leave it on view in an unattended vehicle; never leave it overnight in an unattended vehicle.

Manual Handling

- Always try to reduce the amount of weight in your laptop case.
- Do not carry equipment or papers unless they are really likely to be needed.
- Minimise the hard copy documents you take. Store them electronically on the laptop or on a disk, or consider sending them in advance (by post or e-mail) to your destination.

- Consider using a backpack/rucksack to cut down strain on arms and distribute loads evenly across the body. This is also less conspicuous for personal safety reasons. Alternatively, use wheeled luggage where possible and appropriate.
- Always check your batteries and follow the recharging instructions in order to avoid carrying extra batteries (e.g. most laptop batteries will only last for approx. 3 hours).

Other Useful General Guidance

- Use the mains power point to extend the life of your batteries.
- Always make sure you have sufficient cable length when using telephone sockets (approx. 20 feet long).
- Utilise dual telephone socket jack for transition from telephoning to telecomputing.

Further Information

➢ HSE Website: http://www.hse.gov.uk