



Healthy Workplaces Campaign 2020-22

LIGHTEN THE LOAD

Musculoskeletal disorders related to telework – Tips for employers



Overview

- **Introduction: MSDs related to teleworking**
- **Risk assessment**
- **Main work-related MSD risk factors related to telework**
- **Preventive / protective approaches to address MSD risk factors related to telework**
- **Recommendations for the employers**



Introduction - Home-based telework

- **Telework is defined as the use of information and communication technologies (such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktop computers connected to the Internet) for work that is performed outside the employer's premises**
- **This PPT focuses on working from home (home-based telework)**
 - Links to practical resources are included in the “Notes page”
 - Practical tools and guidance related to teleworking are also available [here](#)

Introduction - Home-based telework and MSDs

- **Teleworking has gained importance in recent years especially as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the preventive measures implemented in most countries.**
- **Although home-based teleworking has potential advantages, it could also be detrimental to teleworkers' health and contribute to the development or exacerbation of Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs).**

Risk assessment

- **A risk assessment (RA) of the home workplace should be the first step** in addressing MSDs risk factors related to telework.
- **Telework must be included in the employer's mandatory RA**
- **Workers' and management's participation in the RA is important**
 - Apart from providing information key to taking the next steps towards an action plan, it creates awareness among teleworkers and managers

Risk Assessment 2

- **Interactive body mapping and hazard mapping methods, combined with online tools or checklists, are a good way to identify and understand teleworkers' home-based workplace and related MSD risks.**



Risk Assessment 3

Issues to be clarified (based on legal provisions / good practice):

- **Who (when / how) assesses the risks;**
- **Risks are assessed by the employer based on information provided by the worker;**
- **Individual RA for each teleworker (self-assessment based on the tool / guide / checklist provided by the employer);**
- **The employer / prevention specialist may visit the home with the worker's permission. If permission is not granted, RA should be carried out on the basis of the information collected from the teleworker.**

Main work-related MSD risk factors related to telework

1. Workstation ergonomic and related body postures
2. Work environment factors
3. Sedentary behaviour and physical (in)activity
4. Work organisation factors
5. Psychosocial risk factors
6. Individual factors

Check this [PPT](#) for a presentation of the risk factors

Preventive / protective approaches to address MSD risk factors related to telework at home

1. **Workplace design and ergonomics**
2. **Work environment**
3. **Sedentary behaviour**
4. **Work organisation**
5. **Psychosocial factors**

Check this [PPT](#) for a presentation of preventive measures

Recommendations for the employers

- **Training**
- **Tips for line managers / supervisors**
- **Telework policy**



Recommendations – Training

- **Suitable, ergonomic equipment and adjustable furniture does not necessarily guarantee adequate use.**
- **It is equally important to provide technical assistance and training to help teleworkers to make optimal use of dynamic workstations and stay active throughout the workday.**
- **Teleworkers must be made aware of the value and possibilities of the workplace before they are prepared to make optimum use of it.**

Recommendations – Training 2

- **Training on healthy (dis)connecting, merit of a healthy work environment and regularly moving and changing posture during the workday is key.**
- **Education and training play an important role in the prevention and management of MSDs, but only when it is part of a general prevention strategy focused on the reduction of health-related risks at the workplace.**

Recommendations – Tips for line managers / supervisors 1

Some practical advice to support teleworkers in preventing MSDs:

- **Provide ergonomic equipment (such as laptops, external mice, keyboards, screens, etc).**
- **Provide technical support and guidance on how to set up an effective home workstation.**
- **Promote regular physical exercise by encouraging employees to take part in active breaks and short workouts during online meetings.**

Recommendations – Tips for line managers / supervisors 2

▪ **Stay connected:**

- Regular individual contacts allow supervisors to be informed about teleworkers' workload, needs and concerns and their work progress, etc.
- Regular team meetings help to ensure uniform information flows to all employees.

▪ **Provide teleworking buddies to allow employees to share their concerns, which will detect potential difficulties more quickly**

Recommendations – Tips for line managers / supervisors 3

- **Make, in consultation with the employees, clear agreements about the results that they are expected to achieve, hours of accessibility, how to monitor progress and report results, etc.**

- **Engage in dialogue with employees on healthy (dis)connection.**
 - What are their needs?
 - What do they expect?
 - What do you expect?
 - Tell also what you do not expect.
 - Explain the right to disconnect (e.g. taking breaks, working in low-stimulus environment, switch off mailbox after working hours, ...).

Recommendations – Telework policy

- **Make use of a clear telework policy with necessary attention to the physical, ergonomic and psychosocial aspects and risk factors of teleworking.**
- **The telework policy includes (among other) agreements / clear provision on:**
 - risk assessment
 - accessibility / the virtual work environment;
 - ergonomic equipment;
 - healthy (dis)connecting (right to disconnect);
 - expected output and results;
 - informing and supporting employees;
 - ...



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