WORKING WITH COMPUTERS

HOW TO ENSURE PROPER SET-UP AND VARIED POSTURES WHEN WORKING WITH COMPUTERS

BARKontor

a healthy and safe office working environment

CONTENTS

"Working with computers" is aimed at employees, managers, employers and working environment organisations in office and administrative companies.

This sector guide describes the working environment conditions for computer monitor workstations and provides advice on how to incorporate variation into the workday.

"Working with computers" also provides helpful advice on buying new furniture and other equipment to avoid wrong investments and to ensure that the computer monitor workstation is set up properly. Finally, the guide contains a checklist that can be used together with the guide when conducting H&S risk assessments (in Danish APVs).

The instructions in this guide apply to computer monitor work of a duration of two hours or more per day. For this type of work, there are certain regulations that apply to how the work is organised, eye exams for employees, and the set-up of the computer monitor workstation.

This guide has been reviewed and approved by the Danish Working Environment Authority (WEA) pursuant to the Danish Working Environment Act. Only the contents of the guide have been assessed by the WEA, not whether the guide covers every relevant topic within the area.

WORKING ENVIRONMENT CONDITIONS AT WORKSTATIONS

The working environment surrounding a computer monitor workstation is primarily an interaction between:

· **The intensity of the computer work**
· **The duration of the time spent working at the computer**
· **How the employee works with the computer's tools**
· **The positioning of the monitor**
· **The programs used**

In general, the aim is to break up the monotony and intensity of the work and introduce variation and movement. This is done by using different tools, changing your sitting posture in front of the computer and alternating between tasks.

It is also important to incorporate variation into your workday. Finally, it is crucial that the management, working environment organisation and employees make every effort to ensure that the work is organised appropriately and that the computer workstation has a sensible set-up. That is what this sector guide is about.

VARIATION – EVERY DAY!

The computer monitor workstation's hardware, software and furnishings normally provide many opportunities for variation. It is important to make use of these opportunities throughout the work-day. It may be necessary to draw up plans for the day's work tasks to ensure variation between working at the monitor and working away from the monitor, as well as any necessary breaks.

Variation with other work or breaks should be adapted to the requirements for aspects such as vision and attention span, as well as according to how intensive the computer monitor work is.

It is the employer's responsibility to organise the work so that it is sufficiently varied. This should be done in cooperation with the employees.

VARY YOUR WORKING POSTURE
Habits can be hard to break. Once you have adopted a favourite working posture – for instance always sitting with your legs crossed – it can be difficult to get out of the habit and sit in other ways. When working on something interesting, you can also easily end up sitting in the same position for an extended period of time.

If you sit in the same position every day over long periods, you may be putting unnecessary strain on your body. And ergonomically correct office furniture and equipment can't fix that. Variation is therefore vital.

See these variation tips for inspiration:

· Vary your sitting posture

· Stand up once in a while – move around a little, for instance when talking on the phone or tidying your desk

· If you have a height-adjustable desk, make sure you stand up once in a while

· Do stretches – see the last page of this guide for examples

Variation gets the blood flowing and brings oxygen and energy to your muscles. It prevents strain effects such as soreness in the neck and shoulders.

TAKE BREAKS FROM THE COMPUTER

Many types of office jobs provide possibilities for varying computer monitor work with other types of work. So, think about any tasks you can do away from the computer.

Follow these tips:

· Try as much as possible to vary between computer work and other work, such as photo-copying, reading etc.

· Avoid sitting still – move about often and do stretches

· Print your documents and read them away from the computer

· Give your colleague a message in person instead of sending an email

· Place the wastepaper bin further away so you have to stand up to throw out your rubbish

· Take the stairs instead of the lift

· Take turns going to the post office, picking up supplies for meetings etc.

· Take breaks

If you regularly spend a significant amount of your time working at a computer and if it is not possible to find tasks that can be done away from the computer, then you need to make sure to take breaks.

When working intensively with a mouse or other pointing device (e.g. drawing, construction or layout work) you need to take extra care to incorporate variation and breaks as you otherwise run the risk of discomfort and pain.

SET UP YOUR OFFICE WORKSTATION

Sitting well requires proper set-up of your office workstation. It is important that you know and use the adjustment options on your office furniture and other equipment. Make sure you adjust and vary them to suit your needs.

Your employer must ensure that you receive proper instruction on use of the office workstation's equipment, and as an employee you must follow these instructions. Read the instructions from the supplier or ask for help from the company's procurement officer or someone from your working environment team if you are uncertain about how to use the furniture and equipment in your office.

DESK CHAIR

Adjust your chair to suit you.

How to adjust your chair:

· Sit back in your chair so that 2/3 of your thighs are supported by the seat. You should be able to fit your fist between the backs of your knees and the front edge of the seat

· Adjust the back rest to support your lower back

· Adjust the height of the chair so that you have both feet flat on the floor, and your thighs feel slightly supported by the seat. If it is possible to tilt the seat, this is a good idea, but it is important to note that when the seat is tilted the height of the desk needs to be increased depending on how much you adjust the seat. You therefore need to adjust the seat before finding the right height for your desk

Ideally, the seat should be tiltable and the whole chair should have a dynamic pivot function, where the resistance can be adjusted to the user's weight. Chairs with arm rests are often inappropriate when working with computers because the chair cannot slide under the desk completely. You should request a foot rest if needed.

There are many chairs to choose from on the market which provide all kinds of options for changing your sitting posture. Test several chairs before buying one. Find your "personal chair" – one which perfectly suits you and your work tasks. Regardless of which chair you have, it is important that you sit properly and that you regularly change your working posture. It may help to change the chair's adjustments once in a while to ensure variation.

Requirements for a good desk chair

✓ *A desk chair should be stable. Chairs with 5 wheels are often the most stable.*
✓ *It should be possible to adjust the height of the seat.*
✓ *It should be possible to adjust the height and slant of the backrest.*
✓ *It is best if the fabric on the chair has a rough surface so that you don't slide forward on the seat – wool or cotton fabrics are often the most suitable.*

DESK

It is important to vary your working posture throughout the day. The workstation should therefore be of a size and have a set-up that provides sufficient room for changing positions and moving about. When working with a computer, it is important that the desk suits the individual employee.

How to adjust your desk:

· First adjust your chair according to the instructions on page 9 of this guide

· Then sit in your chair and let your arms hang at your side in a relaxed position – your shoulders should not be raised

· Bend your elbows and move your arms over the desk. If the desk is adjusted at the right height, is should now support your forearms

It can be difficult to sense whether you are sitting correctly – you can always enlist the help of a colleague.

It should be possible to adjust the desk so that the sitting and working height suit the person working at the desk as well as suiting the tasks being carried out. However this does not necessarily mean that the desk must be height-adjustable, although this is often the best solution for ensuring variation.

When several employees use the same desk, the desk should be easy to adjust to suit the individual employee. This is possible with height-adjustable desks with built-in electric, gas cartridge, crank handle or other adjustment mechanisms.
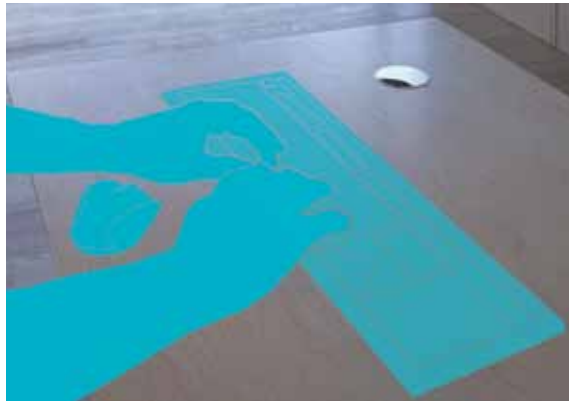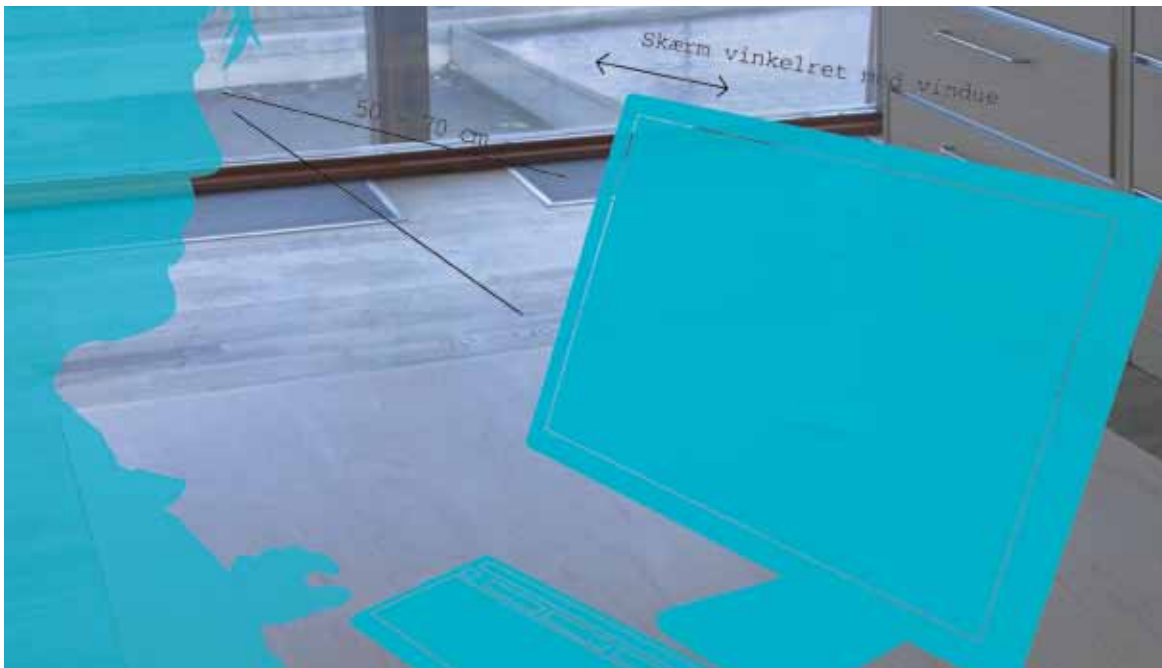
MONITOR POSITIONING AND ADJUSTMENT

In order to sit well at a monitor, it must be positioned and adjusted to suit you. This applies to both the positioning of the workstation in the room and to the positioning of the monitor on your desk. The quality and positioning of the computer monitor combined with the lighting conditions around the monitor workstation have an influence on the overall visual experience.

Working at a monitor can cause the eyes to feel "tired" and "gritty" and can also cause headaches if you work intensively or over a long period of time. It can help to blink often so that your eyes do not become dry. It can also help to look away from the monitor once in a while and focus on something far away. With intensive computer monitor work, the eye muscles work statically over an extended period of time – and they need variation too. However, the most important thing is to avoid working intensively at the computer.

Requirements for a good monitor

✓ *The surface and frame of the monitor should be matte to avoid reflections.*
✓ *It should be possible to turn and tilt the monitor without difficulty. Most monitors have a base that makes this possible.*
✓ *The brightness and contrast should be easy to adjust and adapt to the conditions in the office.*
✓ *The picture should be stable, without flickering and should not show any instability whatsoever.*
✓ *A traditional (picture tube) monitor should have a refresh frequency of 85Hz to ensure a picture that does not flicker. For flat screens, the technology is different, and the refresh frequency is not as important.*

It is important to position the monitor so that you sit comfortably and avoid reflections and glare. Follow these tips when positioning and adjusting your monitor.

How to positioning your monitor in the room:

· Position it away from the window to avoid glare

· It is best if it can be positioned so that the light comes in from the side

How to position the monitor on the desk:

· Position the monitor so that your viewing direction is parallel to the window to avoid glare (desk and monitor should be perpendicular to the window)

· Position the monitor so as to avoid reflections from, e.g. ceiling lighting, in either the monitor or on other shiny surfaces

· Position the monitor on the desk at a viewing distance of 50-70cm, corresponding to the length of your arm

· Adjust the height of the monitor so that you view it looking down slightly. This minimises strain on your neck. A rule of thumb is that a horizontally outstretched arm should point directly at the top menu line (or line of text). It may therefore be necessary to place the monitor directly on the desk as opposed to on top of the computer itself

· The monitor should be tilted so that the surface of the screen is perpendicular to the line of vision. This ensures a uniform reading distance from top to bottom, thus minimising strain on the eye muscles

· The monitor and the keyboard should be positioned to allow you to sit directly in front of them without having to twist your body, arms or hands in incorrect positions

· Place your desk lamp so that the light comes in from the side below eye level to avoid reflections on the monitor or on other shiny surfaces

Regardless of which monitor you use, the most important thing is to adjust it correctly. You must be able to see the text on the screen clearly – including around the edges of the screen.

Characters (letters, numbers etc.) must be well defined and perfectly clear.

How to adjust the settings on your screen:

· Adjust the settings so that capital letters appear to be at least 4mm in height at a reading distance of approx. 50-70cm

· Set the line spacing so that the lines are easy to distinguish from each other

· Work with dark text against a light back-ground so the text stands out clearly

· Wipe the screen clean of dust and the like

If the picture flickers or is in any way unclear, the settings might be wrong. You should check the screen's resolution, contrast between text and background and other settings. Ask for help from someone who is good with computers, perhaps someone in the IT department, if you are uncertain about how to adjust your screen settings.
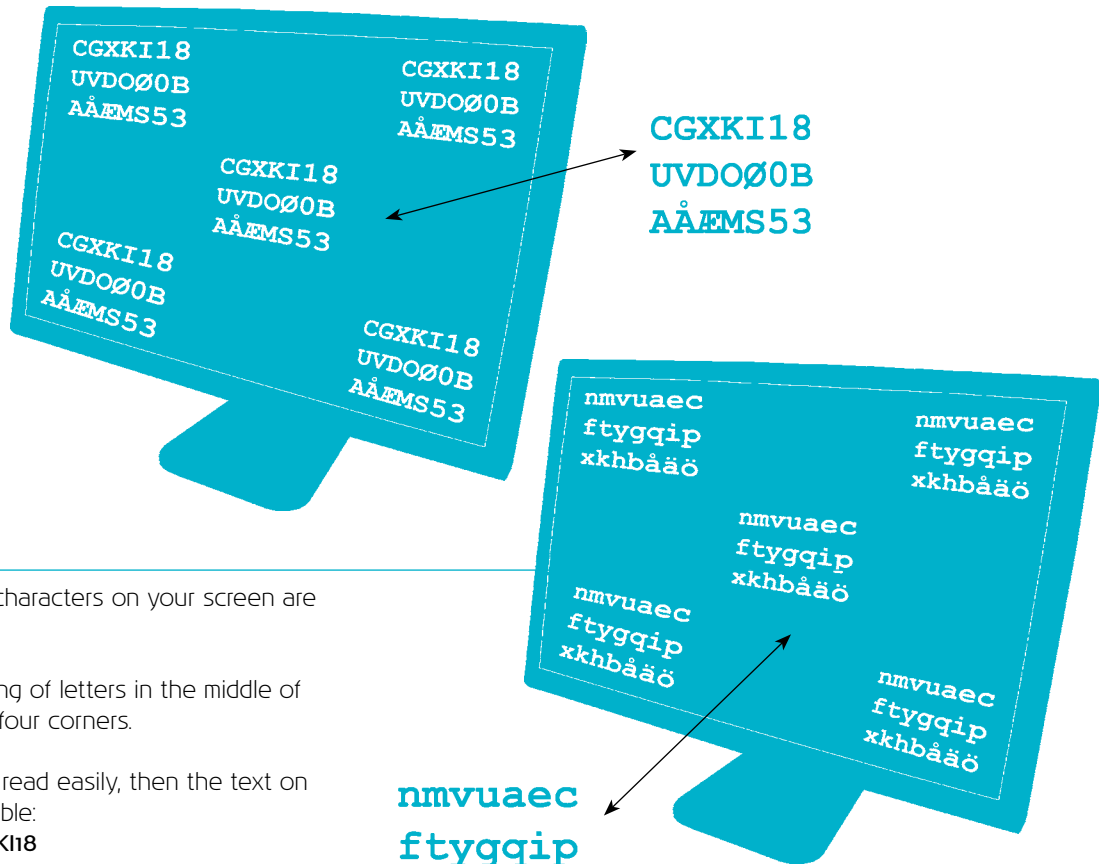
SELF-TEST

Find out whether the characters on your screen are in focus:

Type the following string of letters in the middle of the screen and in the four corners.

If these letters can be read easily, then the text on your screen is acceptable:
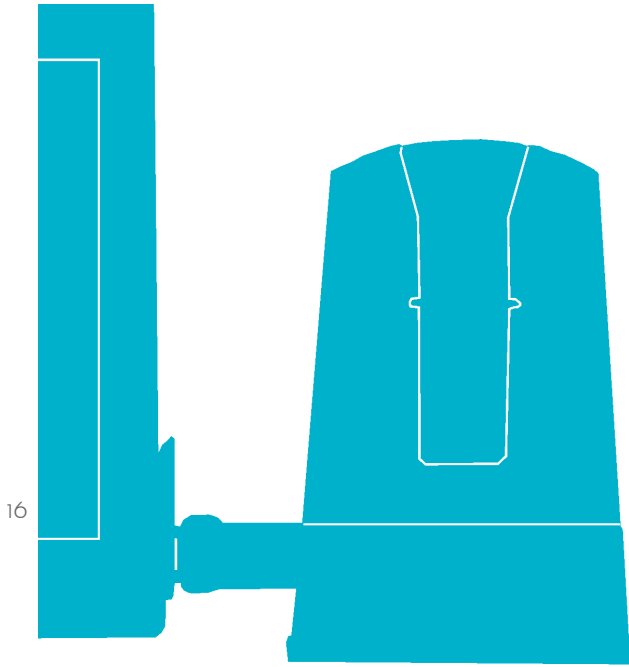
> CGXKI18
> UVDOØoB
> AÅÆMS53

Find out whether the lines can be easily distinguished from each other:

Type the following string of letters. If you can clearly see all the letters on the top and on the bottom, then the line spacing is acceptable:

> nmvuaec
> ftygqjp
> xkhbåäö

DOCUMENT HOLDER

If you need a document holder, you should position it in such a way that you have to turn your head and eyes as little as possible. The best position is between the keyboard and the monitor so you don't have to turn your head at all. However, the holder can also be positioned at the side of the monitor to ensure there is enough room for you to rest your arms on the desk.

The document holder should be sturdy and adjustable in relevant directions. Make sure there is enough light on the document holder.

Ta' genvejen.. Åbne dokument

Ta' genvejen.. Udskrive dokument

Ta' genvejen.. Oprette nyt dokument

Ta' genvejen.. Gemme dokument

KEYBOARD

In order to vary your working posture and movements it is a good idea to change the settings and positioning of your keyboard once in a while. There should be enough room in front of the keyboard to allow you to rest your hands and arms on the desktop. However, do not place the keyboard so far away from the edge of the desk that you end up sitting in an awkward and locked position.

How to sit properly at the keyboard:

· Let your upper arms hang down along your body

· Make sure your shoulders are relaxed

· Position the keyboard away from the edge of the desk so that you can rest your upper arms on the desktop

The keyboard should be separate from the monitor and it should be set at a slant so that you can place it in the position that suits you best – and vary the positions. The keyboard should have a matte surface to avoid reflections.

A palm support can help minimise the bend of your wrist and how high you have to lift your fingers. In order for a palm support to work properly, it should be used to support the heel of your palm and not the wrist. If the palm support is under the wrist,

problems can develop as a result of pressure on nerves and vessels.

Keyboards are available in a variety of designs, but regardless of which type of keyboard you use, it is important that you follow the tips below. If you use the number keypad to the right of the keyboard a great deal, there are keyboards that come with a separate number keypad. That way you can move the number keypad around to make it easier to vary your working posture.

How to work properly at a keyboard:

· Vary the settings and positioning of your keyboard

· Keep your hands in a good position so they can move freely

· Avoid bending too much at the wrists – bent wrists cut off the blood circulation. The keyboard's height adjustment options should therefore only be used for variation

· Raise your fingers as little as possible – avoid sitting with your fingers ready on the keyboard when you are not typing

· Stretch, bend and shake your hands and arms once in a while

· Use the keyboard's built-in shortcuts

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MOUSE AND OTHER POINTING DEVICES

When working with the computer, it is important to alternate between using the mouse and the keyboard's shortcuts to avoid straining your hands, arms and shoulders. Variation is the best way to prevent discomfort and pain when working with a mouse.

How to sit properly with a mouse and other pointing devices:

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· Your forearm should be supported

· Let your upper arm hang down along your body

· Relax your shoulder while you work

Try different types of mice and pointing devices – the best device varies from person to person. Mice come in many designs and there are various types of pointing devices, such as trackballs, mousetrappers and pens. They vary in how the hand and fingers are used. The hand works best in the traditional writing posture. But regardless of the type of pointing device you use, the following tips are important.

How to sit properly when using a mouse:

· Place the mouse in the middle between the keyboard and the edge of the desk, not next to the keyboard. This reduces twisting in the shoulder and elbow

· Avoid bending the wrist too much – a bent wrist cuts off blood flow

· Relax your fingers when they are not clicking. Avoid sitting with your fingers in the "ready position"

· Move your hand away from the mouse when it is not in use

· Switch the mouse to your other hand once in a while

· Stretch, bend and shake your hands and arms once in a while

· Limit the use of double clicks as this places a great deal of strain on the forearm. You can adjust the buttons on the mouse to automatically double click when you single click

· Make sure that the mouse works properly – clean it and change the batteries

· Use the keyboard shortcuts to reduce use of the mouse/pointing device

SOFTWARE

When designing, choosing, purchasing or changing software, the employer should ensure that the systems and programs suit the work carried out at the company.

The software must never be used to monitor the user without his or her knowledge.

Requirements for software

✓ *Programs must be adapted to the work that is carried out*
✓ *Programs must be easy to use and, if necessary, adapted to the user's level of skills and experience*
✓ *Ergonomic principles must be employed, including the use of shortcuts as much as possible, and the program must not place unnecessary strain on the eyes*
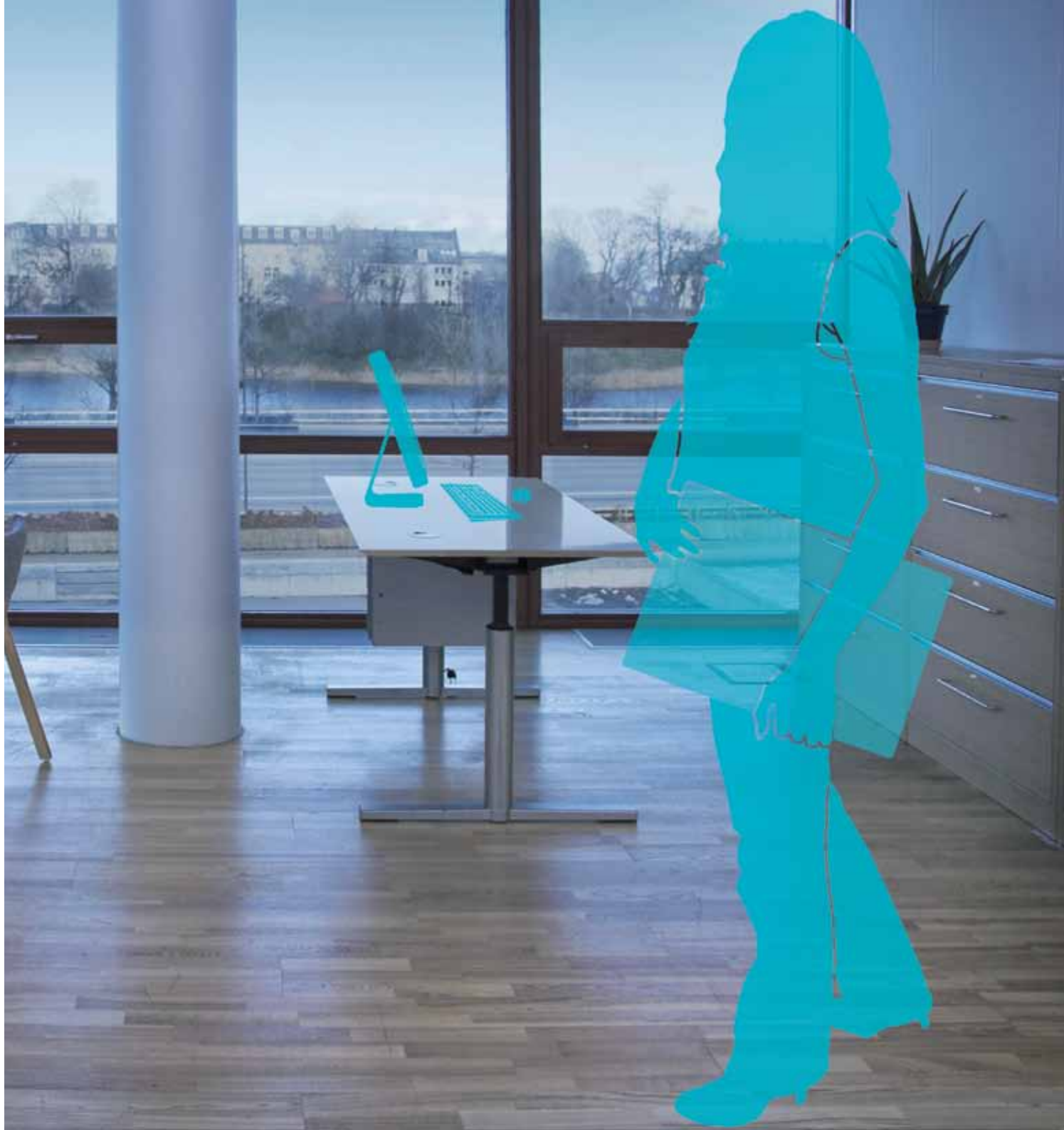
LAPTOP COMPUTER

A laptop or other portable computer is primarily for use on the move or away from the office. It often leads to poor working posture and can be bad for the eyes because there is a fixed mouse and keyboard and because the screen is too small.

If you use a laptop for more than 2 hours on almost a daily basis at your permanent workstation, the laptop must meet the same requirements for positioning and adjustment as a stationary computer. A laptop is not appropriate as a permanent tool in the office. However, it can be used if a separate mouse and keyboard are attached. The same recommendations for screen positioning and adjustment apply as for stationary computers.

Another option is to place the laptop in a docking station which is attached to a monitor, keyboard and mouse so that it works like a stationary computer

COMPUTER EYEWEAR

You have the option of having your eyesight checked by an optician if you work at a computer screen regularly or if you develop eyesight/eye problems due to working at a computer screen. First, find out whether the problems are the result of incorrect ergonomic conditions or poor lighting of the workstation.

You can have special glasses – computer glasses – made if the eye exam shows that you need them and if your own glasses can't be used for that purpose. Computer glasses are specially designed eyewear for working with computers.

The employer has to pay for the eye exam and computer glasses with standard frames and lenses.

AVOID INVESTING IN THE WRONG EQUIPMENT

It is important to be acquainted with the requirements stipulated in the working environment legislation regarding computer monitor workstations before buying furniture and other equipment – both to prevent working environment-related problems, but also for financial reasons.

It is the employer's responsibility to ensure healthy and safe working conditions. It is important to choose the right working environment-related solutions from the outset. This is the best way to ensure a good working environment and to avoid costly mistakes.

GET THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT ORGANISATION INVOLVED

The working environment organisation must be involved and must participate in the planning of the purchasing and installation of technical aids in the workplace. The working environment organisation and other resource personnel can contribute their knowledge about the working environment. This ensures a sound basis for decision-making to avoid investing in the wrong equipment as well as to avoid working environment-related problems.

SUPPLIER REQUIREMENTS

When buying furniture and other equipment, they must come with a set of instructions for use. The instructions must be in Danish or another appropriate language and must contain information on how to use the furniture or equipment properly and safely.

At the same time, it is good to arrange with the supplier to provide a spoken explanation of how to use the furniture/equipment. Some suppliers also offer to visit the workplace after six months in order to adjust the furniture and follow-up on the spoken instructions.

Many suppliers offer the option to test, e.g., different chairs before making a final decision about which one to buy. This helps ensure the right purchase. When choosing a supplier, it is important to make sure that it is possible to buy furniture/equipment for people who, for various reasons, may need something other than the standard equipment, such as very tall/short people or left-handed people.

With regard to software suppliers, the same advice applies. It is also important to ensure that the supplier can develop and supply computer programs that are appropriate for the work that is carried out at the company. The software must be user-friendly and it must be possible to use shortcuts.

CHECKLIST FOR CONDITIONS RELATING TO WORKING WITH COMPUTERS

This checklist provides an overview of the working environment associated with computer monitor workstations. It is a supplement to the checklist in the sector guide: "It's H&S risk assessment time!", and it can be helpful when conducting the H&S risk assessment.

VARIATION	NOT RELEVANT	ACCEPTABLE	NEEDS IMPROVE-MENT	DESCRIBE CAUSE	PROPOSE SOLUTION
Do you vary your working posture enough?					
Do you know any stretches – and do you do them?					
Are you able to perform tasks away from the computer monitor or to take breaks?					

DESK CHAIR	NOT RELEVANT	ACCEPTABLE	NEEDS IMPROVE-MENT	DESCRIBE CAUSE	PROPOSE SOLUTION
Do you know about the options for adjusting your chair – and do you use them?					
Can you adjust the height of your chair's seat and backrest?					
Can your chair's backrest be tilted?					

THE DESK	NOT RELEVANT	ACCEPTABLE	NEEDS IMPROVE-MENT	DESCRIBE CAUSE	PROPOSE SOLUTION
Are your desk and chair adjusted in relation to each other so that your desk is positioned directly under your elbows?					
Is there room for the monitor, keyboard, mouse/pointing device, documents and/or document holder on your desk?					

POSITION OF MONITOR	NOT RELEVANT	ACCEPTABLE	NEEDS IMPROVE-MENT	DESCRIBE CAUSE	PROPOSE SOLUTION
Is your monitor placed at a height such that when you stretch your arm out horizontally it points directly at the top menu line?					
Is your monitor placed at a viewing distance of 50-70cm?					
Can you tilt and turn your monitor?					

DOCUMENT HOLDER	NOT RELEVANT	ACCEPTABLE	NEEDS IMPROVE-MENT	DESCRIBE CAUSE	PROPOSE SOLUTION
Is your document holder placed so as to minimise head and eye movements as much as possible?					
Is your document holder stable?					
Can your document holder be adjusted in the relevant directions?					

KEYBOARD	NOT RELEVANT	ACCEPTABLE	NEEDS IMPROVE-MENT	DESCRIBE CAUSE	PROPOSE SOLUTION
Is it possible to rest your forearms in front of your keyboard?					
Do you vary the settings and positioning of your keyboard?					
Can you avoid bending your wrists when using your keyboard?					

MOUSE AND OTHER POINTING DEVICES	NOT RELEVANT	ACCEPTABLE	NEEDS IMPROVE-MENT	DESCRIBE CAUSE	PROPOSE SOLUTION
Is your forearm supported when you use your mouse?					
Do you vary between using the mouse and using shortcuts?					
Can you avoid bending your wrist when using your mouse?					

VISUAL AND LIGHTING CONDITIONS AROUND YOUR MONITOR	NOT RELEVANT	ACCEPTABLE	NEEDS IMPROVE-MENT	DESCRIBE CAUSE	PROPOSE SOLUTION
Does your screen flicker?					
Does the text on your screen appear perfectly clear?					
Is your monitor positioned so that your viewing direction is parallel to the window?					
Is your monitor positioned away from the window?					
Does the light from your desk lamp come in from the side just below eye level?					
Have you been offered an eye exam and computer eyewear if needed?					

BUYING FURNITURE AND OTHER EQUIPMENT	NOT RELEVANT	ACCEPTABLE	NEEDS IMPROVE-MENT	DESCRIBE CAUSE	PROPOSE SOLUTION
Are members of the working environment organisation or are other people who know about the working environment involved in the purchasing of furniture and other equipment?					
Are there instructions for use in Danish or another appropriate language?					
Are the computer programs user friendly?					

OTHER	NOT RELEVANT	ACCEPTABLE	NEEDS IMPROVE-MENT	DESCRIBE CAUSE	PROPOSE SOLUTION
Have you received instructions on how to use the furniture and other equipment?					
Have you been given instructions on how to use the computer programs?					

WHO IS BAR KONTOR?

In the Danish working environment legislation, 11 sector working environment councils have been established – including a sector working environment council for private office and administrative workplaces (BAR Kontor).

BAR Kontor covers private office workplaces, determined based on so-called sector codes. This group includes, e.g., IT companies, attorney and accounting firms, temp agencies, consultancies, travel agencies, architects and other office workplaces. However, because office work takes place in one form or another in the majority of businesses, BAR Kontor's material can be used by most companies.

The objective of BAR Kontor is to help solve health and safety issues and thereby support working environment efforts at companies in the area of private office and administrative workplaces.

BAR Kontor provides specific guidelines on relevant working environment issues within the sector in the form of sector guides, campaign material, tools, hosting of theme days and other activities.
BAR Kontor comprises representatives of employer, manager and employee organisations within the area of private office and administrative workplaces.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT WORKING WITH COMPUTERS HERE

BAR Kontor

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· It's H&S risk assessment time!
· Good lighting in the office
· Working with the computer's mouse
· Office machines and the working environment

National Working Environment Authority

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Tel. +45 7012 1288 – www.at.dk

· Executive Order on the Use of Work Equipment, no. 1109 of 15 December 1992
· Executive Order on the Performance of Work, no. 559 of 17 June 2004
· Executive Order on the Conditions at Permanent Places of Work, no. 96 of 13 February 2001 + subsequent amendment no. 721 of 22 June 2006
· WEA Guideline – D.2.3 June 2009, Skærmarbejde (Working with computer monitors)
· WEA Guideline: A. 1.15, November 2008, Arbejdspladsens indretning og inventar (Design and fitting out of the workstation)

The organisations behind BAR Kontor

Danish Chamber of Commerce – www.danskerhverv.dk
Confederation of Danish Industry (DI) – www.di.dk
Danish Association of Managers and Executives – www.lederne.dk
HK/Privat – www.hkprivat.dk – www.arbejdsmiljoportalen.dk
HK/Handel – www.hkhandel.dk – www.arbejdsmiljoportalen.dk
PROSA – www.prosa.dk

Other

Arbejdsmiljøbutikken (The Working Environment Shop) – www.arbejdsmiljobutikken.dk
Videncenter for Arbejdsmiljø (Working environment knowledge centre) – www.arbejdsmiljoviden.dk
National Research Centre for the Working Environment – www.arbejdsmiljoforskning.dk
Web portal for the sector working environment councils – www.bar-web.dk
Grafisk BAR – www.synsergonomi.dk

Stretch out and move your muscles

Check out the exercises on the inside cover
– stretch out and move your muscles throughout the day.

Pull out the exercises and post them in a visible place
in your office.

EXERCISES

FROM THE SECTOR GUIDE ON WORKING WITH COMPUTERS IN OFFICE WORKPLACES

FOR ARMS AND HANDS

Alternately make a fist and stretch your fingers

Stretches the top and bottom of your hand and forearm

FOR SHOULDERS

Make circles with your elbows

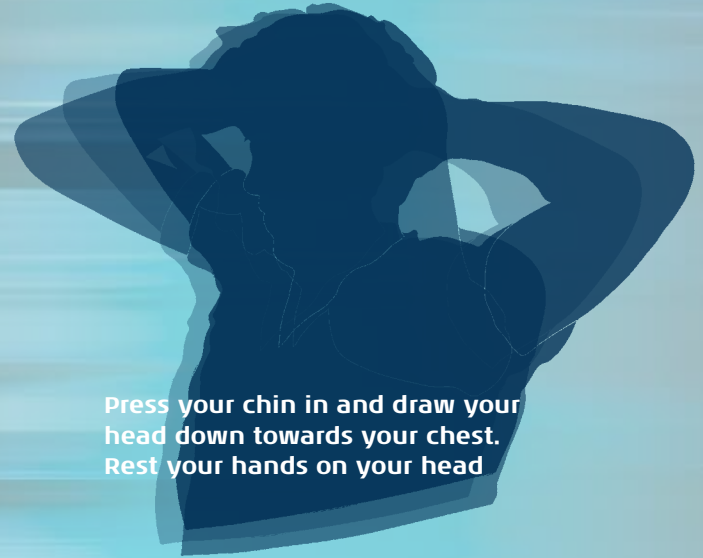**Alternately raise and lower your shoulders**

FOR THE UPPER BODY

Bring your arms together behind your back, stretch your arms and lift them up behind you as high as possible

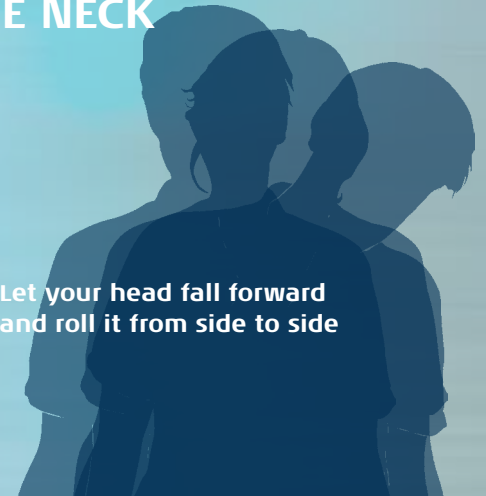Press your chin in and draw your head down towards your chest. Rest your hands on your head

FOR THE NECK

Hold onto the seat of your chair with one hand. Bend your head to the opposite side until you feel a stretch in your neck and shoulder

Let your head fall forward and roll it from side to side

BARKontor
a healthy and safe office working environment

"Working with computers" is a guide for office workplaces on the importance of variation in working posture and properly setting up the workplace in order to achieve and maintain a healthy working environment when working with computers.

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BAR Kontor is a collaboration between labour and management to ensure healthy working environments in private office workplaces. BAR Kontor comprises representatives from the Danish Chamber of Commerce, Confederation of Danish Industries, Danish Association of Managers and Executives, HK/Privat, HK/Handel and Prosa.

This guide can be downloaded at BAR Kontor's website: www.barkontor.dk