

A student's guide to the safe use of portable computers

Health and Safety Directorate



Laptop and Tablet Computers are useful tools if attention is given to their proper use. This factsheet outlines some key considerations in the safe use of these devices.

Recommended practices for safe use

Work area

Don't place your device on your lap for use. It will become uncomfortable and is potentially dangerous to your health.

Create a surface that allows for the following body positioning while using your device:

- Shoulders relaxed, not elevated or forward
- Upper arms hanging by sides with a right angle at the elbow
- Forearms, wrists and hands in alignment – no bent wrists
- Fingers resting lightly on keys. Ensure adequate space is available and items regularly required are within reach.

When available, the use of a monitor with an external keyboard and mouse is encouraged particularly for longer periods of use or when working from a desk.

Using this set up allows for the most ergonomic set up of a workstation. If a monitor is not available, then a laptop stand can be utilised in conjunction with an external keyboard and mouse.

A document holder, placed adjacent to the screen can also prevent neck and eye strain.

Chair

Adjust the height of your chair to use the keyboard and mouse. After making this adjustment, if your feet cannot be placed flat on the floor, use a footrest. This encourages good posture, enables proper sitting height, avoids pressure placed on the back of the thigh and promotes circulation.

Mouse / Pointing Device

Place the pointing device in the hand that is most comfortable. This places the arms in a neutral and

relaxed position, preventing overreaching and twisting of your limbs.

Keyboard

Position the keyboard so that your forearms are parallel to your thighs when your feet are flat on the floor. This helps maintain blood flow in the hands and arms and decreases muscle strain and tension.

Monitor / Screen

Centre the monitor / screen in front of you at a comfortable distance from yourself with the top of the monitor/screen at eye level. This places the body in a neutral position.

Position the screen to minimise reflective glare from overhead, windows or surrounding light sources.

Clean the monitor/screen regularly; dust on the monitor / screen can make it difficult to read and increase eye strain.

Taking breaks

Change position occasionally; sitting in one position for an extended period of time can interfere with circulation

Incorporate breaks every 20-30 minutes to rest eyes, stretch hands, muscles and joints; and to break up repetition and static postures.

Transporting the device

When carrying a portable computer:

- A backpack carried over both shoulders is the best choice as they ensure the weight is evenly distributed. The bags waist strap, when secured, will help to keep the load in place
- Only carry essential items; Pack your backpack so that the heavier objects are placed nearer to your back, with the lighter objects towards the outside
- When lifting your backpack, face it, bend at the knees and lift the pack with both hands while straightening your legs. Place the straps over your shoulders one at a time.

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- When placing a load down anywhere, set the weight down close to the body.

Tablets and Smartphones

It is not recommended that smartphones and tablets are used for prolonged periods or general computer based work.

Whenever possible, use a separate keyboard and stand for extensive text entry. If available, sync the device with a television or monitor to increase screen size.

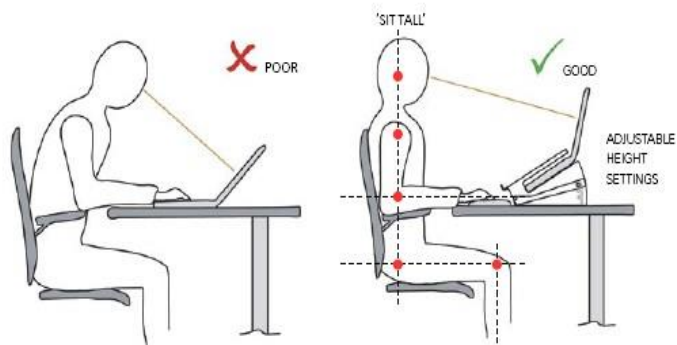
Alternate hands and fingers regularly when typing or holding a device and reduce keystrokes with the use of shortcuts.

Spinal health

Avoid over-extending and reaching across areas. If you sit for long periods of time, ensure that your bottom touches the back of the seat.

Take regular breaks, briefly move around and / or stretch every hour or so.

Regular fitness activities are essential in reducing the incidence of injury.



Tablet Stand and Keyboard

Further Information

[Spinal health and young people](#)

[Your HS team](#)

