

## GEAR &amp; GADGETS

THAT'S DEBATABLE

## Does a Dedicated Workspace Make Remote Toil Better?



AS CORONAVIRUS began its insidious spread across the U.S., many of us were forced to jury-rig a “home office” in some empty corner or to colonize the dining-room table. We rushed to buy cheap at-home office gear on Amazon, Target and other online marketplaces to get through what we thought would be a short ordeal. Six months in—with more than 60% of employed adults currently working from home, according to a Gallup poll—some experts argue it’s high time to properly invest in your WFH setup.

That means a dedicated workspace, whether it’s contained in its own room or not. When that dining-room table must keep morphing from eating to office surface and back again, it can inhibit productivity, according to research published in “Strategic HR Review.” And poor setups can contribute to a number of health issues, said Kermit Davis, Ph.D., an expert in office ergonomics at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. A few strategic changes can save you lasting discomfort.

In a recent survey by Mr. Davis, 75% of at-home workers reported hunching over laptops, which can add up to 10 pounds of pressure on your neck and upper back for every inch you dip forward. However, linking your laptop to an external monitor rather than stacking it atop a few leather-bound volumes “allows you to adjust your screen to a proper height,” he explained—3 to 4 inches below your sight line, and about 2 feet from your face. One good option, LG’s UltraFine Display Ergo Monitor (\$700, [lg.com](#)), rotates to keep you from twisting your neck and spine.

An external mouse can help you stop relying on a laptop, but one made for a single

hand may strain your shoulders and back. The RollerMouse (\$265, [contourdesign.com](#)) sits centered in front of a keyboard, letting you work ambidextrously while giving your upper body and your forearms a break.

If you’re leaning into a table from your kitchen chair, the table’s hard edges can dig into your forearms, exacerbating symptoms of carpal tunnel, said Mr. Davis. And that’s hardly an ideal posture. To help you sit up straight, invest in a proper office chair with armrests and built-in lumbar support, like the Herman Miller Aeron Ergonomic Chair (\$1,069, [hermanmiller.com](#)).

According to the American Medical Association, more than a quarter of working adults admit to sitting at least 8 hours per day, which has been linked to cardiovascular disease, diabetes and premature death. The answer is not buying a static standing desk, said Mr. Davis, but rather “making changes in posture throughout your day.” The adjustable WFH desk by Work From Home Desks (\$449, [workfromhomedesks.com](#)) lets workers quickly transition from sitting to standing throughout the day and, at only 35 inches wide, can turn any available nook into a primary workspace.

Creating a dedicated office space isn’t merely about ergonomics; it’s also about the mind-set of “going to work,” with all the trappings and supplies that help streamline your tasks including, importantly, a document station. HP’s cord-free Tango X (\$200, [hp.com](#)), an all-in-one solution, uses a cloud-based connection to let you print from a laptop or phone, as well as scan, copy and email paperwork. You’re an adult. You shouldn’t have to drive to FedEx to print out a spreadsheet.

ANOTHER SCHOOL of thought, however, maintains that a dedicated workspace to which you’re handcuffed on weekdays and pass by on weekends can make you feel like you’re living at work rather than working from home. Just the sight of office equipment outside of office hours can compromise mental health, said Anita Williams Woolley, associate professor of organizational behavior and theory at Carnegie Mellon’s Tepper School of Business.

As long as you’re stuck at home, this theory holds, you might as well seek out a more comfortable setup than what you’re subjected to at the office, be it on the couch or easy chair, at the counter or lying in bed. “Certain people, especially those who are highly extroverted and creative, prefer that variety,” said Ms. Williams Woolley. And, she added, associating different tasks with different areas within your home can actually help you be more productive.

“Sometimes I want to set up closer to the A/C when the afternoon sun roasts my living room,” said Courtney Ridgway, a communications professional living in Brooklyn. “Other times, it’s nice to set up at the kitchen island on days when I want to cook between calls.”

Flitting around can be done efficiently with multitasking gear that doesn’t overtake any part of your living space and can easily be tucked away at the end of the day.

If you gravitate toward the bed or couch, Offi’s walnut Overlap Tray (\$199, [designpublic.com](#)) helps raise your eye line, straighten your seated posture and caters to all your work tools—laptop, pens and notepads, coffee mug, etc. If your best option is a kitchen or

card table, Fully’s Cora Standing Desk Converter (\$149, [fully.com](#)) lets you turn any table or surface into an upright workstation.

If you aim to offset the fatigue that comes from hours of staring at screens regardless of where you post up, Ocushield’s blue light-blocking desk lamp (about \$160, [ocushield.com](#)) is easily portable. Tote it from the counter to the coffee table to lessen the eye-strain brought on by endless spreadsheets.

Meanwhile, if your kitchen has become ground zero for endless Zoom calls, placing Purple’s unobtrusive Double Seat Cushion on your chair or bar stool (\$99, [purple.com](#)) offers a more comfortable, ergonomic posture while you listen to co-workers drone on. When it’s your turn to speak up, an adjustable ring light (\$160, [neewer.com](#)) bathes you in a more flattering glow than whatever’s overhead, and can easily be stashed in a closet or cabinet when you’re not using it.

Whether you’re working from your dining table or even the floor, a bit of organization can boost productivity. Grovemade’s portable cork tray (\$90, [grovemade.com](#)) keeps all your pens and pencils, notepads and chargers easily within reach—and can slide right into a drawer when your workday is over.

Even if you don’t create a dedicated workspace, “it is important to create separation between work and home and maintain those boundaries,” said Ms. Williams Woolley. Do this by setting firm work hours and sticking to them. “It’s not just about your emotional health, but about your productivity: With problem solving and creative work, you need breaks with complete psychological separation from your work.” —Ashley Mateo

YES

NO

## For a Proper ‘Home Office’ Setup



1. RollerMouse trackpad, \$265, [contourdesign.com](#); 2. Herman Miller Aeron Ergonomic Chair, \$1,069, [hermanmiller.com](#); 3. WFH Desk, \$449, [workfromhomedesks.com](#); 4. HP Tango X wireless printer, \$200, [hp.com](#); 5. LG UltraFine Display Ergo Monitor, \$700, [lg.com](#)

## For Setting Up on a Sofa, Bed, Wherever



1. Purple Double Seat Cushion, \$99, [purple.com](#); 2. Ocushield portable desk lamp, about \$160, [ocushield.com](#); 3. Offi Overlap Tray, \$199, [designpublic.com](#); 4. Neewer Pro 18” LED Ring Light Kit, \$160, [neewer.com](#); 5. Grovemade Desk Tray, \$90, [grovemade.com](#)