

ANDRE OLIVEIRA & EMILY TIMS

WORKING FROM HOME

How to live Back Pain Free through Covid 19



THE BACK PAIN SERIES

INTRODUCTION

The Director of **ALO Physiotherapy Clinic** & renowned Chartered Physiotherapist with over 20 years experience, **Andre Oliveira** has co-written a series of eBooks on back pain alongside Chartered Physiotherapist **Emily Tims**.

As one of the most common problems we treat in our Harley Street clinic Andre wants to pass on some useful information to help prevent back related issues or manage them currently.

THE THREE LAWS OF ROBOTIC

1. A robot may not injure a human being, or through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm
2. A robot must obey orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law

Handbook of Robotics, 56th
Edition 2058 A.D. Isaac Asimov
- I, Robot

TECHNOLOGY IS HERE TO HELP!

IT FACILITATES OUR EXISTENCE. WE
ARE ONLY AT THE BEGINNING. IT
CHALLENGES OUR THOUGHTS INTO
THE REALMS OF POSSIBILITIES. IT
INTEGRATES WILL AND ACTION WITH
THE PRESS OF A BUTTON.

IT ENTERTAINS US IN SUCH A WAY THAT
WE CAN HARDLY MOVE WHEN FACING A
COMPUTER OR PLAYING WITH A VIDEO
GAME.



PROLONGED SITTING

ARE YOU AWARE YOU HAVEN'T
MOVED IN HOURS, SAT FACING
YOUR SCREEN?

At work for instance, we can sit for hours facing our computers before realising the time has just passed and it left behind a twinge of headache, wrist pain or back pain. If only we were aware that we have to get up more often or just move more... Perhaps we are aware but why can't we do it?

OUR EYES GLUED TO THE SCREEN

ARE YOU DEVELOPING BAD POSTURE?

Our eyes, glued up on the screen, our minds aware of the deadline we have to reach and our minds completely inundated by the natural stress and demands of modern life. Our posture adapting to the gadgets and computers but perhaps the gadgets and computer should be adapted to us?

Nevertheless we love it! After all, we are excited with gadgets and technology.





WHAT PRICE ARE WE PAYING?

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF
THIS ON OUR BODY,
POSTURE, BRAIN AND
BEHAVIOUR?

Are we changing as species? Is the
environment and the societal
pressures changing our behaviour?



ARE THE ROBOTS WE ARE CREATING REALLY WORKING FOR OUR BENEFIT?

Not mentioning the lack of human contact. We now can stay in a queue to be served by a machine in a supermarket. What are the benefits of this? And what are the negatives? It feels we need to make some tweaks.



EPIGENETICS

There is a relatively new concept in genetics called: Epigenetics. The environment has the power to change the expression of our genes.

How can we be a force of change, a force for good in this matter and moment of transition? How can we make technology work for us and have a less negative impact on our bodies and mind? How can we walk side by side with technology and the fast pace of life and still integrate, elegantly, with our way of being?

I have also noted, that there has been an increase in the number of people walking on the streets whilst texting or even when driving.



THE TRANSITIONAL PHASE

It seems we are in a phase of transition. We do not quite know how to use technology to our own benefit as yet; without creating a disruption to our physiology, biomechanics, postural structure, brain and behaviour as yet; otherwise it wouldn't be an issue. Long hours sitting without adequate awareness/education can make us more prone to diabetes, cardiovascular disease, weight gain, strained eyes, lower moods and increased pain in our joints.

THE GOOD NEWS?

WE HAVE A CHOICE!!!

What if we start to look at ergonomics, nutrition, postural education, exercises, movement and the power of meditation and laughter? What if we are looking at these disciplines but nevertheless we still are not integrating this into our behaviour? Why is it so difficult to change a behaviour?





THE BAD NEWS

EARLY DEATH, INCREASE IN SICK LEAVE....

Those who sit most have a 40% higher risk of early death. On any one day 1% of the working population are on sick leave due to a back problem. Presenteeism can cut 1/3 of individual productivity by far more than absenteeism. So what are we going to do about it? What's the solution?



WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

Changing any of our behaviour can be hugely challenging. In 2005, Alan Deutschman famously used the phrase “Change or Die”, referring to the fact that following heart bypass surgery, 90% of people do not make significant potentially life-saving changes to their lifestyle. Thankfully, since then there has been a wealth of breakthroughs in behavioural science research which can enable us to make it easier to make healthier choices, which we will be covering in our series of e-books.



HOME WORKING

In this series, we will go into depth in all of these areas but here we will focus on home working. Let's be honest, we've all seen the image of the person sitting at their perfect-looking desk in perfect-looking posture. Has anyone ever seen anyone working like that for a sustained period of time? It is absolutely not necessary to maintain perfect posture for long periods, and actually can be harmful if there is no movement. The best posture is a moving posture.

We have somehow compartmentalised the spine for study reasons - which is fair ; nevertheless not ideal if we think that in reality, the spine is only one. Through poor posture if any part of the spine is compromised it will have a side effect on the other spinal segments. Most people get back pain from time to time, and most back pain is preventable. This booklet provides you with some simple tips for how to work best in your home environment.



GET THE MOST FROM YOUR DESK SPACE

It may just need some small tweaks. You don't need much equipment, but you need to avoid sitting in a hunched position, or poking your head forwards so your nose is close to the screen. If you are working from home for long periods, it's certainly worth getting an ergonomic chair with some basic functions (up and down, wheels and removable handles so it can fit under the desk).

Ensure the top of your screen is roughly eye level. If you are using a laptop, this means putting your screen on a laptop stand or some books and using a separate keyboard.

USE A MOUSE NOT A TRACKPAD

UKeep your hips above or level with your knees. This may mean raising your chair up or sitting on a cushion. There would be more pressure on the base of the spine if you are sited below level of your knees.

Trying to hold the perfect posture may create more tension. Keep your posture relaxed and upright. A nice verbal queue would be: keep your back fully supported to the back of your chair and imagine there is a line that connects your chest to the sky in a diagonal way.

When seated your feet should be on the floor and your weight must be distributed evenly between both buttocks. Do not favour or lean to one side or the other. Pose and elegance is part of the game



KEEPING YOUR POSTURE UPRIGHT,

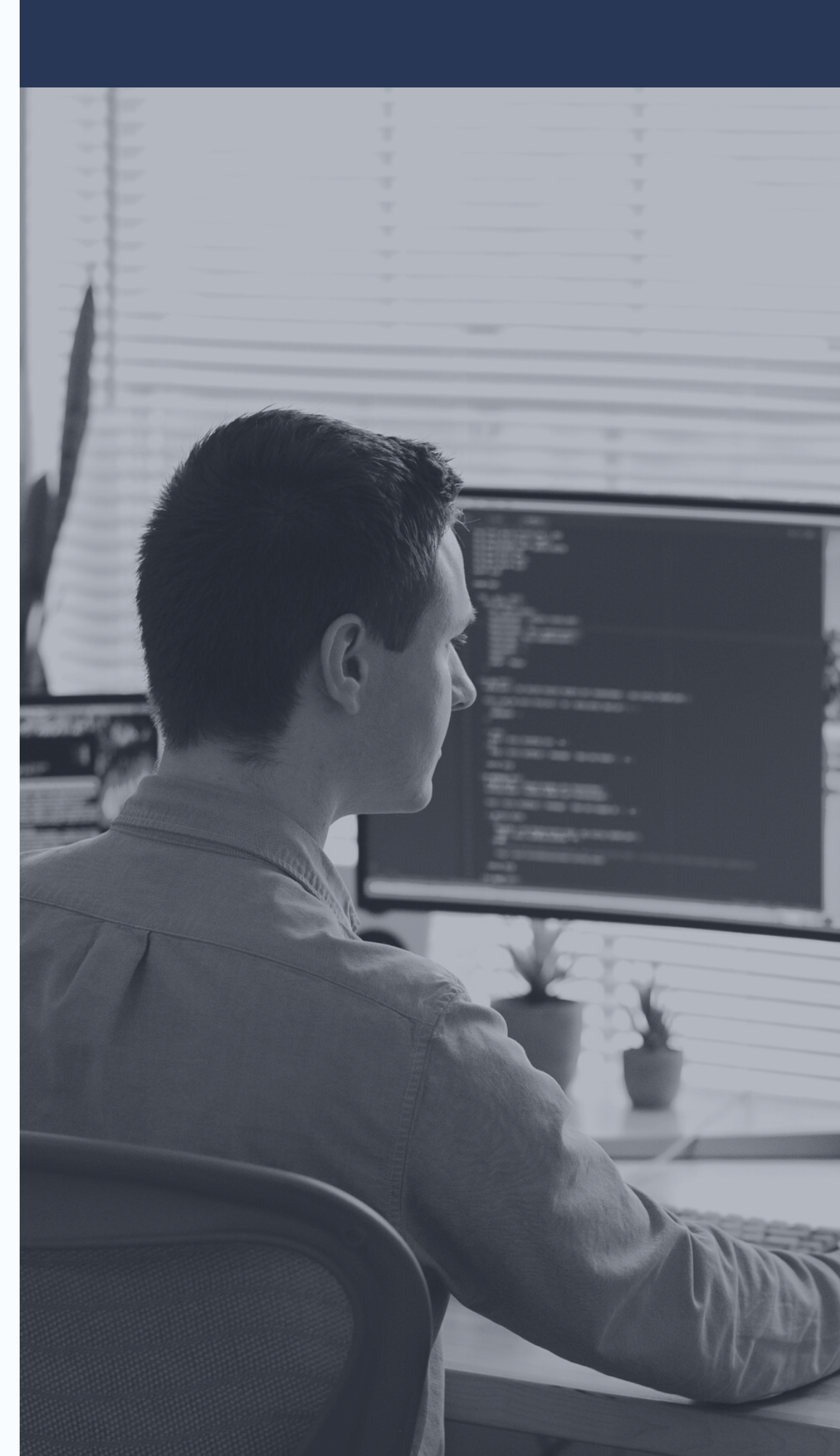
RELAXED AND OPEN IMPACTS ON HOW WE THINK AND BEHAVE

We communicate more confidently when upright with the shoulders wide. This also means our diaphragm can do its job and we breathe more efficiently.

The two videos below will give you few ideas about the right way to adapt your posture when working. After all, we are all individuals and in reality, we work in different ways as we have our own and “old ways”. However, awareness can change behaviour. Or better put: if you don't love through love you will learn through pain.

https://youtu.be/8Bp_Ury-PA4

<https://youtu.be/PZWSc5EWDoA>





CHANGE YOUR POSTURE

DON'T AIM FOR IT TO BE PERFECT

Lots of different working positions are absolutely fine. If you change your working position, this will reduce sustained load on the same bodily structures. It will prevent excessive compression and squashing of blood vessels which supply oxygen and nutrients to joints and muscles.

Think about all the typical activities you do in your working day. Are there any which you could do in different positions, for example a phone call whilst standing or walking, sitting in a different chair to do some reading.



GET UP & MOVE EVERY 30 - 60 MINS

This will reduce stress and strain on the structures around your spine. It expands your lungs and makes you feel more alert and boost your mood. It helps you to concentrate better after the break.



GO OUTSIDE AT LEAST ONCE A DAY

Exposing yourself to daylight has many benefits, including improving your sleep quality, which helps prevent aches and pains. The movement will help the health of your spine and joints by boosting circulation and nutrition to these areas. Exposing large areas of your skin to vitamin D for short periods will help immune function.



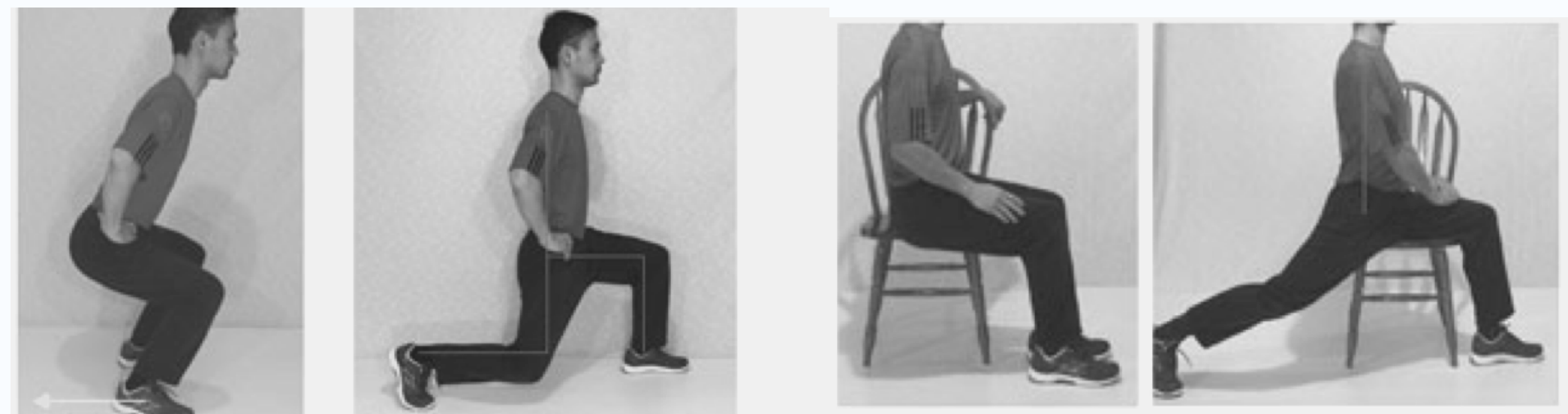
EXERCISE FOR 150 MINUTES A WEEK

Exercise is the best medicine for the majority of health conditions and the same is true for back pain. It is the treatment that currently has the best evidence for reducing back pain. Doing at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise (being able to talk but not sing whilst exercising is moderate) or 30 minutes a week. Higher intensity exercise is also an option. If you can't find a form of exercise that you can do without provoking the pain, you need to see a health professional to support you with this.



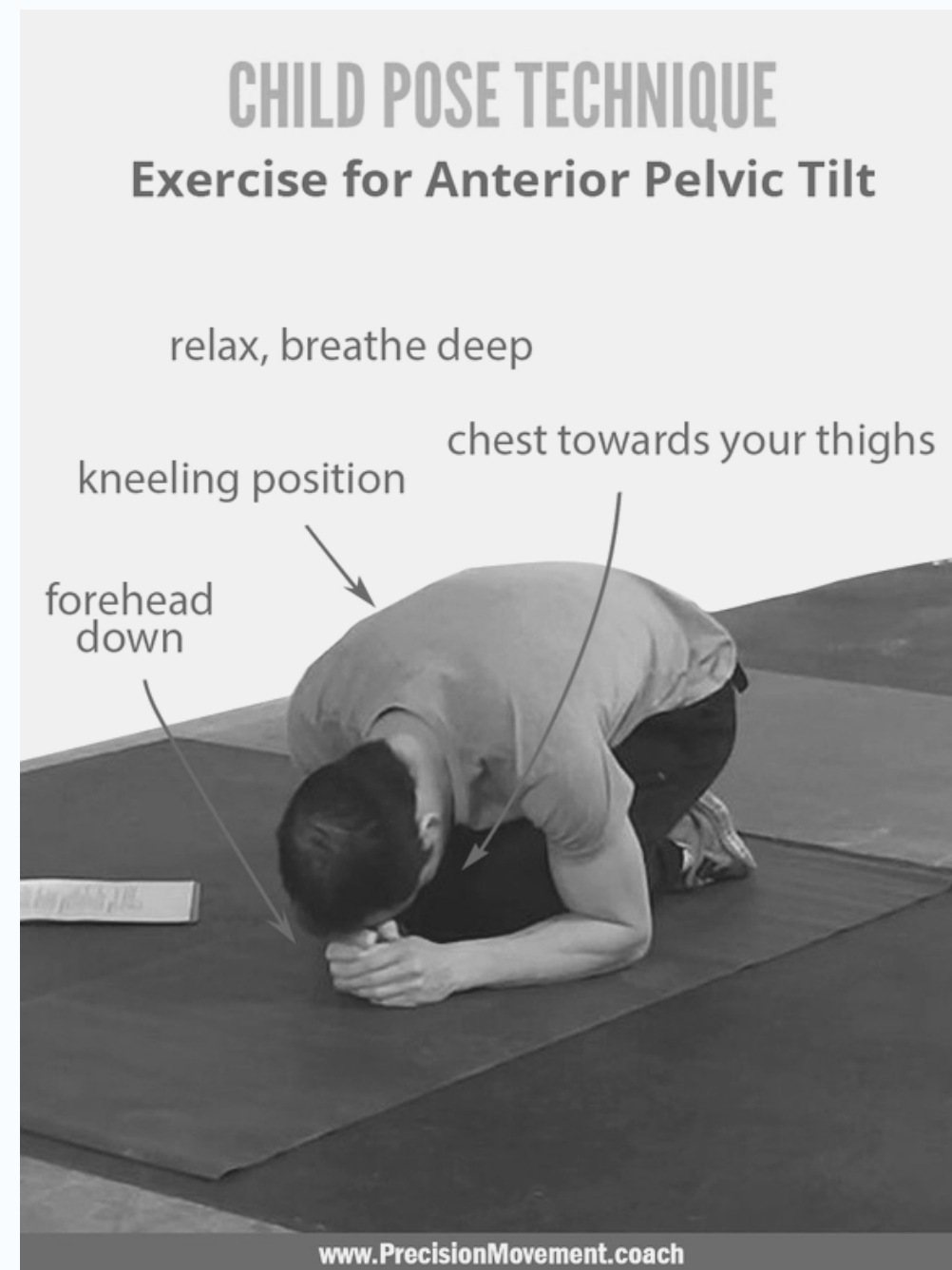
DO EXERCISES SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED TO HELP YOUR SPINE

If you are in pain or any of these exercises are uncomfortable we recommend getting some guidance from a health professional before starting. The more tailor made the exercises the more effective they can be.



GENTLE CORE EXERCISES

There are thousands of exercises out there for back pain. The ones I listed above are standard ones; however the more tailor made they are the more effective it can be.





LEARN TO BREATHE

Dysfunctional breathing patterns are hugely common and can make back pain worse. It can cause hyperventilation which can cause physical symptoms such as tingling, aching, dizziness and tension. Using the diaphragm effectively to breathe will improve how efficiently the lungs absorb oxygen. This means that the breathing rate slows down, which immediately has a relaxing effect and can reduce muscle tension.

[How to assess your breathing. The good breathing guide](#)



TAKE TIME OUT FROM WORK & TECH

There are many different ways to do this. This could mean switching activities, to have a cup of tea whilst listening to music, lying down to do some relaxation or meditation, going out for a stroll, having a dance. There are huge benefits to the brain in having ‘down-time’ from screens and work. During this non-productive time, this activates resting state networks in the brain which are important for cognitive functions such as concentration and memory. So this makes it easier to work after having down-time. The crucial thing here which many of us find difficult is to not look at a phone/screen during down time. There is a wealth of evidence for the benefits of meditation for treating chronic pain, and improving relaxation, mood, concentration.



HAVE BOUNDARIES FOR WORK & TIME OFF

Whilst working from home it is easy to slip into habits of being available at any time of day for work, meetings or emails. Encouraging longer periods of time at the screen will make back pain more likely and will impact on sleep quality, which in turn can increase aches and pains. If you notice that you are working for long periods of the day, plan a routine where you have time off from work and tech and let the people you live and work with know you are doing this, so they know what to expect.



HOW TO MAKE THE CHANGES YOU NEED TO MAKE!

How to make the changes you need to make! You may already be well aware of and doing many of the above suggestions. Or you may not be doing any of this and be a bit overwhelmed with the prospect of making any changes in your already busy life. Here are a few tips, based on Behavioural change 'Nudge' Theory, for how to make it easier for you to make a change.



MAKE IT:

EASY - for example, choose one change at a time. Start one new thing every couple of days and start with the one which is easiest.

ATTRACTIVE - for example, if you plan to start going outside more, choose places to go to that are attractive to you. Or, if you need to take some down-time or meditate, create a beautiful place to go to.

SOCIAL - starting something new, is much easier if you do it with someone else, so you can both encourage each other. For example, go for a walk with a friend or family member, create boundaries for tech with your family so they are all aware. Tell other people about your commitments to your health and you are more likely to stick to them.

TIMELY - for example, if you are starting some new exercises, do them at a regular time when you are more likely to succeed, such as first thing in the morning or after doing something you already do regularly, like going to the loo.

BOOK YOUR AT HOME DESK ASSESSMENT TODAY

At ALO Physiotherapy Clinic we offer a comprehensive desk assessment to individuals and organisations. It is recommended for anyone who feels that their current workstation setup may be contributing to pain and discomfort in the lower back, neck or wrist. A desk assessment considers your ergonomic setup and organisation of work tasks to provide practical recommendations to improve comfort.

To book yours call us on: 0207 636 8845

Or visit: <https://alo-physiotherapy.co.uk/ergonomics-for-your-home-office/>

