



# Display Screen Equipment (Working with Computers and Laptops)

## Introduction

This information sheet gives employers and employees practical advice on Display Screen Equipment use and how to identify and minimise risk.

In most workplaces there are staff that spend a significant amount of time at a computer workstation. The workstation includes the screen, keyboard, mouse, desk or work surface, chair and surrounding work area. Such staff may be exposed to risks that could give rise to difficulties such as temporary eye strain, tiredness or pain in the hands, arms or back.

It is important to be aware of what practical steps you can take to address these potential risks. Taking such action can reduce staff sick days and enable staff to do their work better as they will be less likely to have symptoms such as tiredness and pain.

## When are staff covered by this regulation?

The Display Screen Equipment Regulations are applicable:

- If the member of staff has no choice but to work at a computer workstation
- If the member of staff normally uses the computer workstation for continuous periods of more than one hour
- If the computer workstation is generally used by the member of staff

## Do I need to conduct a computer workstation risk assessment?

Yes, computer workstations must be assessed to evaluate possible risk that may give rise to eyesight problems or physical difficulties.



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## Computer Workstation Case Study

As a first step you should consult with the employee at the workstation in order to collect information on the main tasks completed at the workstation. It is important to let the employee comment during the course of the assessment.

Figure 1 below shows an example of a poor computer workstation set-up.



Figure 1

A list of the issues to be addressed should be recorded. Figure 2 provides examples of issues that might need to be addressed.



Figure 2

Figure 3 shows a computer workstation that has been assessed and has had improvements put in place, including adjustment of monitor to the correct height, improved lighting and provision of a document holder, footrest and an adjustable seat.



Figure 3

You will need to revisit the workstation if there were issues to be addressed. You should consult with the employee and observe whether the issues highlighted in the risk assessment form have been addressed. When everything is satisfactory, you and the employee should sign off on the risk assessment form.

## Is it acceptable to allow staff to assess their own workstation?

No, the employer and not the employees have to carry out the risk assessment. Employees can be involved in the risk assessment of their own workstations, but it is not sufficient to have employees use a self-appraisal worksheet or a software package to assess their own workstations. As an employer, you must be actively engaged in completing a physical risk assessment of individual workstations.

## Do I need to provide an eye and eyesight test?

You must inform employees that they are entitled to be provided with an appropriate eye and eyesight test, which must be made available and paid for by you, the employer. The eyesight test should be carried out by a doctor, an optometrist or a person trained to use a vision-screening machine. Where eye tests carried out reveal that a particular lens is required for working at a computer workstation, you must pay for the minimum requirement frames and lenses. Employees have the right to an eye and eyesight test before taking up work at a computer workstation as well as at regular intervals. Although there is no specified interval set down in legislation, it would seem reasonable that an eye and eyesight test should be made available to employees every three years.

## Do the Display Screen Equipment Regulations apply to laptops?

No, under these regulations the keyboard must be tiltable and separate from the screen so as to allow staff to find a comfortable working position that avoids fatigue in the arms or hands. A laptop does not have a separate keyboard and staff should not work at a laptop directly for long periods of time.

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## What is recommended for laptops?

It is recommended that a laptop should be connected to a separate monitor and keyboard. The workstation can then be assessed to record whether it meets the requirements detailed in the Display Screen Equipment Regulations.

Other temporary laptop workstation set-ups should be assessed to determine the usage of the laptop and to identify potential risks, however, the user should not work off the laptop directly for long periods of time.

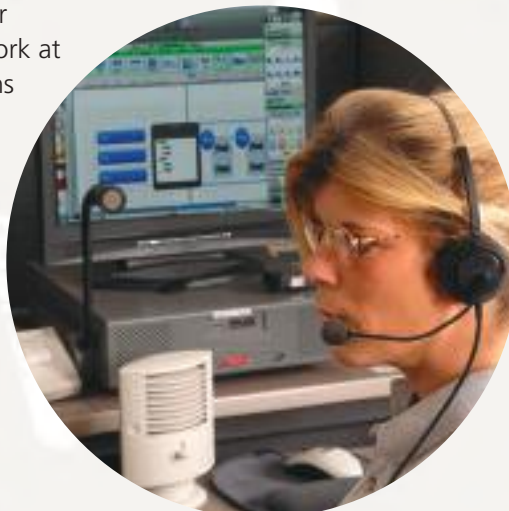
## How often should employees take a break from working at a computer workstation?

Daily work at computer workstations should be interrupted periodically by breaks or changes in activity to reduce the work at the screen. Although the regulations do not set out the frequency of breaks, it is advisable that a single continuous period of work at a screen should not exceed one hour.

The flow of work should be designed to allow natural breaks to occur.

It is important to note:

- Rest breaks or changes in the pattern of work, where they are necessary, should be taken before fatigue sets in
- The employee should not sit in the same position for long periods and should make sure to change posture as often as practicable
- Short, frequent rest breaks are more satisfactory than longer breaks taken occasionally





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