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## SAFETY IN THE HOME WORKPLACE: THE BEST ENVIRONMENT

One of the most ignored aspects of working at home is safety. Business offices go to all sorts of lengths to avoid any injury or harm to their workers (they don't want to get sued, after all). Meanwhile, you might not even know that it's possible to injure yourself with nothing more than office equipment. If you're going to avoid a lot of pain in your future, you need to read up on home office safety now.

### Your Chair.

The chances are that you're going to be sitting on your chair for quite a long time each day. If you have a bad chair, or you haven't adjusted it properly, you could give yourself a back injury -- and they're painful, not to mention expensive to treat.

When you're choosing your chair, make sure you sit on it for a while in the shop, giving yourself a chance to get used to the way it feels, and be prepared to walk away if it starts to get uncomfortable quickly. Don't pay a ridiculous amount, but don't get the cheapest and worst thing in the shop, either.

### Your Mouse and Keyboard.

If you're using a computer mouse a lot for your work or doing a lot of typing, you can give yourself some pretty nasty injuries. This is because doing the same thing over and over again can give you a repetitive strain injury (RSI), such as carpal tunnel syndrome or tendonitis. This is one of the most common problems amongst office workers, home workers included.

You might have an RSI if you notice pain, weakness and fatigue in your muscles. One of the most common symptoms is pain when you're lying in bed. People tend to think that they must just be sleeping in an awkward position, or that they need a better bed or pillow, not realising that their office equipment is to blame. If you think you might be an RSI sufferer, go and see your doctor. Massages tend to be the most effective treatment, when given by a trained therapist.

To protect yourself against RSI, there are a number of things you can do. You should take regular breaks from using your computer, and stop immediately if you start to feel any kind of pain. You may also wish to invest in an ergonomic keyboard and mouse, which are laid out differently to normal keyboards and mice in an effort to make them more comfortable and less dangerous to use.

### Clean and Tidy.

Silly as it might sound, the second most common problem amongst home office workers is that they make a mess. Your home office might become cluttered with wires, open drawers, and various objects all over the floor. It's quite possible to trip and fall over all of these things, and if you walk around enough in a confined space then eventually you will. Do as much as you can to keep your home office uncluttered: always close drawers, keep wires in one corner of the room and don't put anything on the floor.

### Strangers in Your Home.

An aspect of safety that many people don't think of is the fact that you could be letting strangers into their home when you agree to meet clients there, and this can be risky for you and your family. You might be especially worried if there will be children at home with you while you're working.

The simple answer, of course, is to always meet new customers in a public place, until you know and trust them. Coffee places are good for this. As a bonus, you'll inevitably look more professional if they don't realise that you're a home business, and having a coffee each gives you something to do during any lulls in conversation other than just sitting there and looking awkward.

### First Aid Kits.

Finally, one last note if you're doing manual work: you really ought to have a first aid kit in your workshop, as well as one that you carry around with you. You really shouldn't be doing anything physical as a business unless you've taken a first aid course -- they're quick, easy and inexpensive, so there's no excuse. It could save your life someday, after all.