

September 2019

# WORKING SAFELY WITH DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT (DSE)

## DESKTOP GENERAL GUIDANCE

Occupational Health and Safety Service  
HSD116P (rev 2)



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

## INTRODUCTION

Working with portable computers and other types of display screen equipment (DSE) can cause both physical and mental fatigue.

Some users may get aches and pains in their back, shoulders, neck, arms, wrists, hands or fingers. These upper limb disorders (ULDs) are often referred to as a repetitive strain injury (RSI), or more generally a musculo-skeletal disorder (MSD).

Temporary visual fatigue, with symptoms such as blurred vision, sore eyes and headaches, can also occur. There is, however, no evidence that DSE can cause disease or permanent damage to the eyes.

The risk of developing these health problems is generally low, but increases if good practice is not followed when setting-up and using your computer.

## RISK ASSESSMENT

The Display Screen Equipment Regulations (amended 2002) require **all** workstations to meet minimum requirements and for risk assessments to be undertaken for all workstations that are regularly used.

Please see for University DSE policy and guidance:  
<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/cam-only/offices/safety/publications/hsd005p/hsd005p.pdf>

A risk assessment must also be completed for regular use of portable DSE.

**To reduce your risk of developing health problems, follow these simple tips:**

### Seating and Posture

- Completely relax your shoulders, keep your upper arms by your sides and your forearms horizontal.
- Raise or lower your chair so this position can be maintained whilst you use your keyboard with straight (neutral) wrists.
- If your feet do not touch the floor or there is excess pressure on the backs of your legs, you may require a footrest.
- Sit right back into your chair, adjust the height and tilt of the chair back to obtain support and make use of the lumbar support area.
- Chair arms may need removing to ensure that it tucks under the desk.



### The Screen

- Adjust screen height and tilt to allow a comfortable straight neck position.
- Your screen should be straight in front of you, at about arm's length away and with your eyes level with the top of the screen.
- If you do not touch-type the screen may be more comfortable in a lower position.
- Position your screen to avoid any glare and reflections. Blinds on windows may need adjusting.
- Adjust the brightness, contrast and text size so comfortable.

### The Keyboard

- This should allow enough space in front of you to support your wrists/forearms when not typing.
- Use a soft light touch when typing.

### The Mouse

- Keep the mouse as close to your body as possible and your arm relaxed.
- Do not overstretch or bend your wrists awkwardly when using the mouse.
- Alternate the mouse between your left and right hand if possible.
- Use keyboard shortcuts.
- Consider software to reduce the amount of clicking.

### Rest Breaks (MOST IMPORTANT)

- Short frequent breaks are better than occasional longer breaks.  
Aim for at least 5-10 minutes break following 50-60 minutes continuous computer work.
- Consider break monitoring software.
- Alternate tasks for natural breaks.
- Gentle exercises and stretches during breaks will help relieve muscle tension.
- If using your computer all day, take a break away from it for at least twenty minutes at lunchtime. Go out for a walk if possible.

### Other

- Document holders placed at screen height or between the screen and keyboard, are useful if typing from hardcopy documents.
- Headsets are vital if you regularly type whilst talking on the telephone.
- Consider software training and learning to touch type to improve your speed and keyboard skills.
- Have enough space both on and under your desk.
- Keep all your computer equipment clean.

### **Read the University Policy on Working with Display Screen equipment:**

<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/cam-only/offices/safety/publications/hsd005p/index.html>

**Complete the self-assessment checklist in the appendix of the DSE policy, with help from your safety officer if necessary.**

### **Having problems?**

If you need advice regarding your DSE or workstation set-up and equipment, or you begin to experience any health problems that you think may be associated with DSE use, please seek advice from one or all of the following:

- **your Supervisor**
- **your Departmental Safety Officer**
- **Occupational Health Tel: 36594**
- **Assistive Technology via UIS/DRC**

**Delay in obtaining help/advice could lead to more severe or chronic health problems.**

### **Re: Portable DSE**

**See Portable DSE Leaflet HSD161P**

### **Useful Web Sites**

<http://www.workrave.org/>  
<http://www.posturite.co.uk/>  
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/>  
<http://www.backcare.org.uk/>  
<http://www.rsiaction.org.uk/>  
<https://www.abilitynet.org.uk/advice-information>

### **SD116P (rev2)**

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[www.safety.admin.cam.ac.uk/](http://www.safety.admin.cam.ac.uk/)**

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## WORKING SAFELY WITH DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT (DSE)

### Portable DSE

Occupational Health and Safety Service  
HSD161P (rev 2)



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

## INTRODUCTION

Working with portable computers such as laptops and other types of display screen equipment (DSE) can cause both physical and mental fatigue.

Some users may get aches and pains in their back, shoulders, neck, arms, wrists, hands or fingers. These upper limb disorders (ULDs) are often referred to as a repetitive strain injury (RSI), or more generally a musculo-skeletal disorder (MSD).

Temporary visual fatigue, with symptoms such as blurred vision, sore eyes and headaches, can also occur. There is, however, no evidence that DSE can cause disease or permanent damage to the eyes.

The risk of developing these health problems is generally low, but increases if good practice is not followed when setting-up and using your computer.

## RISK ASSESSMENT

The Display Screen Equipment Regulations (amended 2002) require **all** workstations to meet minimum requirements and for risk assessments to be undertaken for all workstations that are regularly used.

Please see for University DSE policy and guidance:  
<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/cam-only/offices/safety/publications/hsd005p/hsd005p.pdf>

A risk assessment must also be completed for regular use of portable DSE.

The DSE Legislation covers the prolonged use of portable computer equipment.

In addition to general guidance for DSE work (see Desktop/General Guidance Leaflet) prolonged or intensive use of a laptop, if not set up correctly, can lead to

- increased risks of poor posture
- the need for more frequent breaks or planning of tasks to provide activity change
- manual handling risks
- use in unsuitable environments
- a risk of theft and assault

**To reduce your risk of developing health problems, follow these simple tips:**

### When choosing your portable DSE

#### Choose:

- a light weight computer and accessories (3kg or less)
- a large screen (14 inch/35cm diagonal or more) and key size
- a tilt adjustable keyboard if possible
- a detachable or height adjustable screen if possible
- a touch pad or alternative input device/ external mouse rather than track point 'nipple'/pointing stick
- a long battery life
- use a backpack or a lightweight non-branded carrying case to evenly distribute weight

#### Ensure:

- there is a wrist rest area between the keyboard and edge of the laptop
- there is facility to attach a separate mouse and keyboard - very important
- there are friction pads to prevent movement of the laptop
- there is sufficient memory and speed for the work undertaken
- appropriate software to improve usability and reduce the time spent on the computer

**Using your portable DSE (please also refer to leaflet HSD116P for guidance on reducing your risk of developing health problems)**

Where possible use a docking station (additional keyboard and mouse) or laptop stand and raise the screen to a comfortable height:



- use the portable equipment on a desk, not on your lap
- use correct posture by relaxing your shoulders, keeping upper arms by your sides and wrists straight (neutral in line with forearms)
- use a suitable chair for back support
- avoid leaning down to the screen and keyboard
- align the laptop centrally with your body to avoid twisting
- take short frequent breaks e.g. one minute every 10-15 minutes as opposed to longer infrequent breaks
- consider break monitoring software
- rest eyes by looking into the distance periodically
- vary your tasks to reduce long periods of use
- avoid unsafe areas and the risk of theft

**Read the University Policy on Working with Display Screen equipment:**

<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/cam-only/offices/safety/publications/hsd005p/index.html>

**Complete the self-assessment checklist in the appendix of the DSE policy, with help from your safety officer if necessary.**

**Having problems?**

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