

Working From Home #1

HAVE YOU GOT THE RIGHT TECH?

tuanz

With having to face a long stint of being physically isolated, you need to ensure that your remote working or learning set up enables you to be not only productive but works for you. This tip sheet is the first in series and covers the question around the tech you need.

With the current COVID-19 pandemic and New Zealand being at Level 4, we recognise that not every recommendation in this sheet is able to be actioned. We're going to assume you have a computer and the ability to make some of the changes that we recommend in this sheet. Once everything is back to some form of normal, then you can look to making changes over time.

Obviously you need a computer...

While this seems obvious it is wise to think about your options, though times when you work for a larger corporate, this choice will have already been made for you.

Desktops

Desktops come in all sizes and shapes, including all-in-ones such as Apple's iMac that include a screen. Desktop computers have a few advantages, with one big downside: you can't easily move them.

The upsides are they are typically cheaper, and will likely age better than laptops. Most modern desktops will be able to handle everything you need.

You should look for a ninth or 10th-generation Intel i5 or i7, AMD's Ryzen 5 2500 or Intel's i3 at the lowest end, with 8GB minimum RAM. Make sure you have storage of no less than 256 GB and look for a discrete graphics card made by Nvidia or AMD if you work in a creative content industry, such as photo or video editing.

Laptops

Laptops are extremely popular being portable but if you aren't careful about how you work then their one big downside can kick in: terrible ergonomics making you hunch over which is bad for your back, shoulders and wrists. If you are going to work exclusively on a laptop then consider varying your working position and height during the day, from sitting at a desk or dining table to standing at a kitchen bench.

Broadly speaking traditional laptops will be cheaper than the more tablet-like ones. You should look for specifications similar to that of a desktop although we'd recommend you don't buy a laptop that only has a traditional hard drive, and nothing below 128GB.

You can use a riser or a pile of books to bring laptops up to eye-level if you don't have an external screen but you have a keyboard and mouse you can connect. But if you will be working at home for some time, you should consider setting it up with a screen, keyboard and mouse.



Monitor

You might be looking for a slightly less ambitious set up for your home office than a designer who has multiple screens, but picking a good monitor can make all the difference. Our advice is to get the best you can afford but up to 24in Full HD, 1080p or similar resolution is standard recommendation, although higher definition (eg Quad HD or 1440p) will look crisper. Larger monitors benefit greatly from increased resolution.

Look for a monitor with height adjustment, and position the top of the screen at eye level. If your monitor doesn't offer height adjustment look for a stand or carefully propping it up on a riser or stack of books.



Keyboard & Mouse

A good external keyboard will help keep your home set up more ergonomic over the long haul. Again invest in the best you can afford especially if you type for a living then it's worth investing in a good keyboard. They come in USB or wireless versions, which now typically connect via the Bluetooth or with those silly dongles. Do make sure you have plenty of batteries in the house though.

Don't forget a mouse too. Avoid fancy-looking flat ones and consider a more ergonomically shaped one or a vertical mouse to help with wrist pain.



Noise-cancelling headphones

These will fast become your new best friend - noise-cancelling headphones help block out distractions and signify that you're at work and not to be disturbed. They're also useful for video conferencing or phone calls, as most have built-in microphones.



Webcams

Webcams are built into most laptops and tablets, but if you have an external monitor, or you want a better quality then look at getting an external USB webcam.



Electric Jug

Ok, technically this isn't computer hardware, but it is vital for when you need coffee or tea for a break.

