



Homeworker's Handbook on Occupational Health & Safety



Table of Contents



1. Work dangers are worse at home.....	1
2. Fires.....	2
3. Chemicals.....	5
4. Dust.....	6
5. Strain and overuse.....	7
6. Cuts and other injuries.....	8
7. Stress.....	9
8. Balanced diet is key for overall health and wellbeing.....	10
9. Find support with other homeworkers.....	11

Work dangers are worse at home



Homework is different from factory work, but yet not free of health and safety hazards. Homes as workplaces are characterized by:

- Small spaces doubling as homes and workstations
- Unsafe storage of materials and chemicals
- Lack of ventilation, lighting and safe electric wiring
- Long hours in uncomfortable positions



Here, we try to explain and discuss some easy prevention measures against common occupational health risks at home...

1.Fire



Homes often catch fire more easily than factories, and even a small fire can spread quickly. These are some ways to prevent a fire at home:

❖ Storing machines and materials



Keep away from heat, flames, and electricity sources



Keep machines unplugged when not in use
Keep electrical wires away from moisture



Keep chemical containers closed tightly and in ventilated spaces

❖ Keeping homes safe



No smoking inside the house or combustible material



Turn off the gas cylinder when not in use



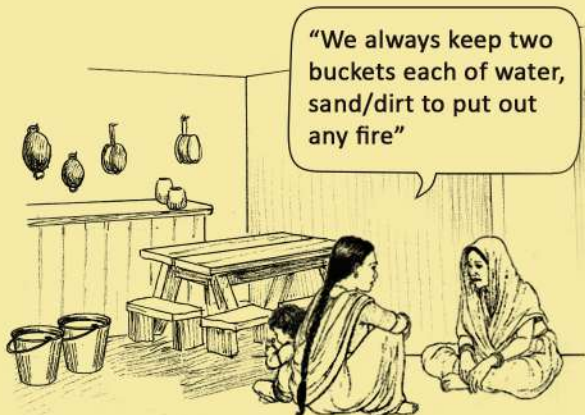
Keep windows and doors open for ventilation, and use fans



Make sure there is a clear exit path out of the house

❖ If a fire does start in your home, these are some ways to put it out...

- ❖ In case of small fires, remove the supply of air. For e.g. if a cooking pot catches fire, cover it with a lid to stop its air supply
- ❖ Always keep sand/dirt and water ready in a container by your work area
- ❖ For electrical or chemical fires, use sand or dirt to put it out, and not water
- ❖ For cloth fires, use a water or fire extinguisher



❖ Protect yourself



Stay between the fire and the door so you can escape anytime



Cover your nose and mouth to keep smoke out of your lungs.

❖ Prepare your family and community



Practice escaping from the house with your family



Write down the phone numbers of fire stations in your community

❖ First aid for burns -----



For all minor burns, burns from hot water or oil and blister causing burns:

- take off clothing and jewellery near the burnt skin
- put under cool (not iced) water for at least 30 minutes.



For blisters:

- Wash with mild soap or water
- Protect from dust and flies with antibiotic or honey, bandages/gauze
- Seek medical help if skin stays red/swollen/infected.



Do not:

- Use disinfectant or iodine
- Use ink,grease, animal fat, herbs or coffee on a burn or blister

❖ Go to a health center immediately for: -----



Large or deep burns: Burns that cover a large area of the body or expose raw or charred flesh

Burns that cover a joint, the face, or the genitals: These can lead to disability

Burns combined with other injuries

Burns on children

2. Chemicals

Chemicals used at home may get in your food, water, and air. Commonly used cleaners (solvents), glues, wax, and dyes used on shoe-uppers can cause both short- and long-term health problems, including dizziness, breathing problems, skin and eye irritation, cancer, and even death.

❖ Ways to handle chemicals safely: =====



Always wear face mask

Use protective covers like gloves

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap after completing your work

Clean up the work areas, and afterwards do not use those cleaning cloths or water for anything else

❖ Storage =====

Do not use household containers to store chemicals.

If you do, remove all labels and write the chemical name on the container along with labels like 'DANGER' or 'DO NOT TOUCH'.

Never use a container that held a chemical for another purpose. Even if you wash it really well, the container can still have chemicals

Keep chemicals covered and inside shallow containers to avoid spills and leaks, away from children, inside locked cabinet

Do not smoke, eat, drink, or cook near chemicals.



3. Dust



Small threads or dust from garments or leather can cause difficulty breathing, allergies, coughing, dry & itchy nose, mucus the same colour as the fabric, and skin rashes. Sometimes dust is too small to be seen

❖ Ways to protect from dust?



Sit and work in a well ventilated place



Use a face mask to cover your mouth and nose



Dust buildup on exposed wires can catch fire. Hence keep electric boxes closed



Stop smoking and try not to be around people who are smoking



Home remedies including physical exercise, breathing exercises, and inhaling steam can help, but will not cure it

If you face issues such as difficulty in breathing or wheezing please take medical help

4. Strain and overuse

Prolonged sitting or standing and doing repetitive motions may lead to wear and tear of muscles and joints

❖ Some ways to reduce injury and pain: =====

- ◆ Place tools and materials you need close by your workspace. Reaching repeatedly for them can hurt your body

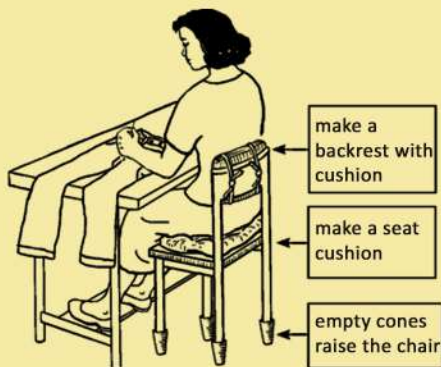


Bending to reach the bin puts strain on the back and shoulders.



Bins are easier to reach if they are beside you at waist height or close to your elbow

- ◆ Support your wrists, elbows, back, legs, and feet while you work. If a part of your body hurts while working or after, try a different position
- ◆ Take breaks. Look away from your work to let your eyes rest, and move and stretch your body



- ◆ Get a comfortable chair with back support

5.Cuts and other injuries

Homeworkers working in the garment and leather sectors, sometimes use materials such as needles, tough threads that may cause cut injuries

❖ Ways to prevent these injuries

- ◆ Use gloves if you are using tough threads for stitching shoe-uppers or other articles. You may also use the gloves for the fingers



- ◆ Before beginning any procedure using needles, plan for safe handling and proper disposal



- ◆ Dispose of used needles in appropriate sharps disposal containers

- ◆ Do not keep children nearby when you are stitching



6. Stress

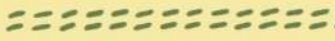


It is normal to feel stressed, anxious, or sad when you are overtired and overwhelmed from pressure at work and at home.

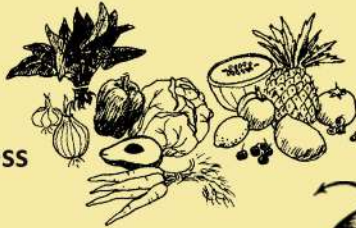
My contractor wants the order finished, my husband wants dinner, my mother has to go to the clinic, and the children need attention! But at least no supervisor tells me what to do!



With so many demands on your time, when do you take care of your needs?

❖ You can reduce the harm from stress to your body and mind by: 

◆ Eat healthy foods



◆ Learn what causes stress for you and others

◆ Stretch during your breaks



◆ Spiritual practices and simple exercises



◆ Form a support group



7. Balanced diet is key for overall health and wellbeing

When your body is weak from lack of food you feel tired and can get sick easily. Pregnant and breastfeeding women, and people with health problems need to take special care of their diet.

❖ What to eat?

- ◆ **Carbohydrates** found in rice, wheat, millet, plantain, bread give the body energy. But whole grains and brown rice are healthier than white rice or processed grains



- ◆ **Proteins** found in legumes, beans, seeds, nuts, milk, milk products, fish, meat, eggs are needed for strong muscles, bones and blood



- ◆ **Vitamins and minerals** found in fruits and vegetables fight infections



❖ What to avoid?

- ◆ Junk food, packaged or processed foods sold in the stores, carbonated drinks, (sweets, bakery items, fried food, oily food, soda and so on
- ◆ Too much sugar or fat from causes serious health problems, such as obesity, diabetes, and heart problems



8. Find support with other homeworkers

Doing factory work at home can be very isolating, and competition for work can be intense. Bosses encourage this competition, because it keeps costs low.

Invite other homeworkers in your community to talk about common problems, learn about each other's successes and failures, and find ways of working together for better conditions. Some homeworkers share space, buy supplies in bulk so they are cheaper, and share childcare responsibilities.





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