

Health and teleworking

Press release of the French National Academy of Medicine *

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In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, teleworking has developed significantly, allowing many activities to continue. According to a recent survey¹, 58% of the workers questioned believe that their job can be done by teleworking and more than one third have actually continued their activity in this way. A recent Dares² survey of companies with more than ten employees has confirmed that about one third of the employees are teleworking. However, in both surveys, there was a decrease (13 points compared to November 2020) in the proportion of teleworkers.

The expansion of this work organization has opened up attractive prospects for both employees and employers. It has also revealed the technical, functional and confidentiality problems of locating work within the family framework. Companies have noticed an erosion of the cohesion and creativity of their employees. Suffering from isolation, several wish to return to the company. Psychological distress is noted in almost in two employees, 53% of women and 62% of young people.³

It would be useful to everyone, employees and employers, if the advantages and disadvantages of teleworking were better assessed according to the relative time spent on it, and to the nature of the professional activity, the socio-professional category, the average level of resources, the characteristics of the housing ... Adopting the point of view of occupational medicine, the French National Academy of Medicine, for its part, would like the impact of prolonged teleworking on the concerned persons health to be better documented.

Indeed, the often poor ergonomics of the workstation at home can lead to postural problems, osteoarticular disorders and neck pain. The long time spent in a sitting position and the lack of travel to work increase the sedentary lifestyle of people in office jobs. The consequences of this increased sedentary lifestyle are known⁴: muscular deconditioning with tiredness and loss of muscle mass, affecting mobility and postural maintenance as well as increasing the risk of falls.

Neurosensory disturbances are also common. Visual fatigue and ophthalmological disorders (diplopia, conjunctival hemorrhages, headaches, blurred vision) occur when the screen is located away from a window. Awareness of hearing discomfort when the listening time with

¹ Follow-up survey by Harris Interactive commissioned by the Ministry of Labour.

² Direction de l'Animation de la Recherche, des Etudes et des statistiques (Ministry of Labour)

³ Opinion Way barometer for the firm Empreinte humaine (March 2021)

⁴ French National Academy of Medicine: press releases of March, 30 and November 30, 2020

headphones or earphones increases. An ENT consultation is observed in 67% of permanent teleworkers compared to 57% of non-teleworkers over 55.

Finally, the solitary exercise of a professional activity has a psychological impact. The feeling of isolation, which is distressing for 26% of employees, can be aggravated by the presence of ambient noise (spouse, children, neighborhood) at home, hindering concentration on the task. When teleworking, women are 1.5 times more disturbed by children than during normal working hours⁵. Teleworking favors the deletion of a clear break in time signal between work and personal life, by a continuous flow of requests at all hours (multinationals). This can lead to a desynchronization of the internal clock and an excessive computer grip. The collisions of information then lead to emotional reactions of anxiety, even panic, which paralyze the cognitive system and are sources of fatigue, irritability, sleep and mood disorders.

Obviously, conviviality and social contacts in work relationships, the perception of hierarchy satisfaction, and the understanding of the meaning and purpose of work are important for a good physical and psychological health of the individual. Teleworking recent expansion is sometimes adopted inappropriately, but in all cases it requires the individual's ability to adapt to a reorganization of the professional and family life, and can therefore affect to varying degrees the teleworkers health.

The French National Academy of Medicine proposes that:

- Occupational medicine provides employees with a guide for equipping and fitting out the home workstation, and invites companies to help their employees to equip themselves with good ergonomic teleworking conditions.
- Teleworking employees have a guide for the use of the home workstation, encouraging them to separate the two living spaces, to maintain routine schedules (getting up, going to bed) and an average sleeping time of about 8 hours, to avoid using screens in the hour before bedtime, and to keep a regular physical activity useful for resynchronizing the internal clock.
- The organization and schedules of teleworking preserve the factors of well-being, in particular the conditions of social links, by keeping at least one day per week at the workplace, and remote activities..
- Occupational medicine should identify any possible problems.
- Epidemiological studies be set up in the general population and in a population of patients suffering from mental disorders, to analyze the prevalence and impact of teleworking in these two populations.

⁵ IPSOS survey