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Federal Coordination Commission for Occupational Safety FCOS

PREVENTION AT THE OFFICE

Practical tips for improved health and safety at work

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Minimal effort brings significant benefits

The Federal Coordination Commission for Occupational Safety FCOS takes an entertaining approach to showing with the «prevention at the office» initiative and the FCOS Box, its new online prevention instrument, just how easy it is to make improvements to health and safety in the office. This brochure summarizes the most important practical tips from the FCOS Box.

www.prevention-at-the-office.ch
www.fcos-box.ch

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Editor
Federal Coordination Commission for Occupational Safety FCOS
Fluhmattstrasse 1, 6002 Lucerne
Telephone 041 419 51 11, Fax 041 419 61 08
ekas@ekas.ch, www.fcos.ch

Adjusting table and chair optimally

Chair height
Adjust the height of your chair so that your feet are flat on the floor. Your legs should be bent at an angle of at least 90°.

Seat
The seat should be adjusted so that your back presses lightly against the chair back. There should be, however, a small gap between the seat and the backs of your knees – the width of around two fingers.

Chair back
The chair back should be adjusted so that you can lean back without exerting any strength. It should, however, provide enough resistance so that the curve provides support in the small of the back when sitting upright.

Lumbar support
Your office chair has a curved chair back. Adjust the height of your chair back so that the curve is at the small of your back. This encourages good posture. Some models allow you to adjust the height of the back support without changing the height of the chair back.

Armrests (optional)
Sit upright in your chair and adjust the armrests so that your elbows rest lightly on the armrests without having to raise the shoulders. Armrests are not absolutely necessary.

Table height
When you are sitting upright in your chair, the table height should be adjusted so that you can rest your elbows on the table without raising your shoulders.

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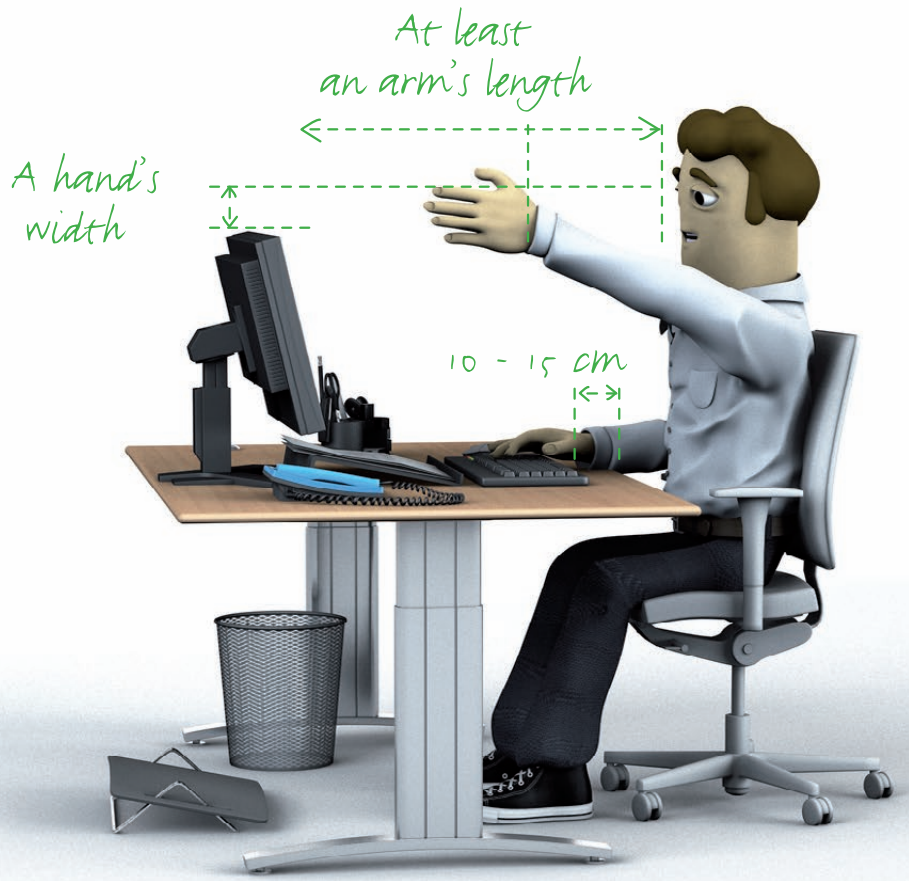


Installing working tools optimally

Monitor
Place your monitor directly in front of you so that you do not need to turn your head sideways. The height should be set so that the top of the screen is a hand's width below the level of your eyes.

The distance between your eyes and the screen should be at least an arm's length, a little more if you have a large screen. Do not bring the monitor closer if you cannot see text clearly. Instead, increase the type size in your programme.

Keyboard and mouse
The keyboard should be directly in front of you. The distance to the table edge should be between 10 and 15 cm so that you can rest the heels of your hands on the table. Place your mouse as close as possible to the keyboard.

Documents
Take care to place documents between the keyboard and the monitor and not between the table edge and the keyboard. If possible, the keyboard, document and monitor should be aligned.

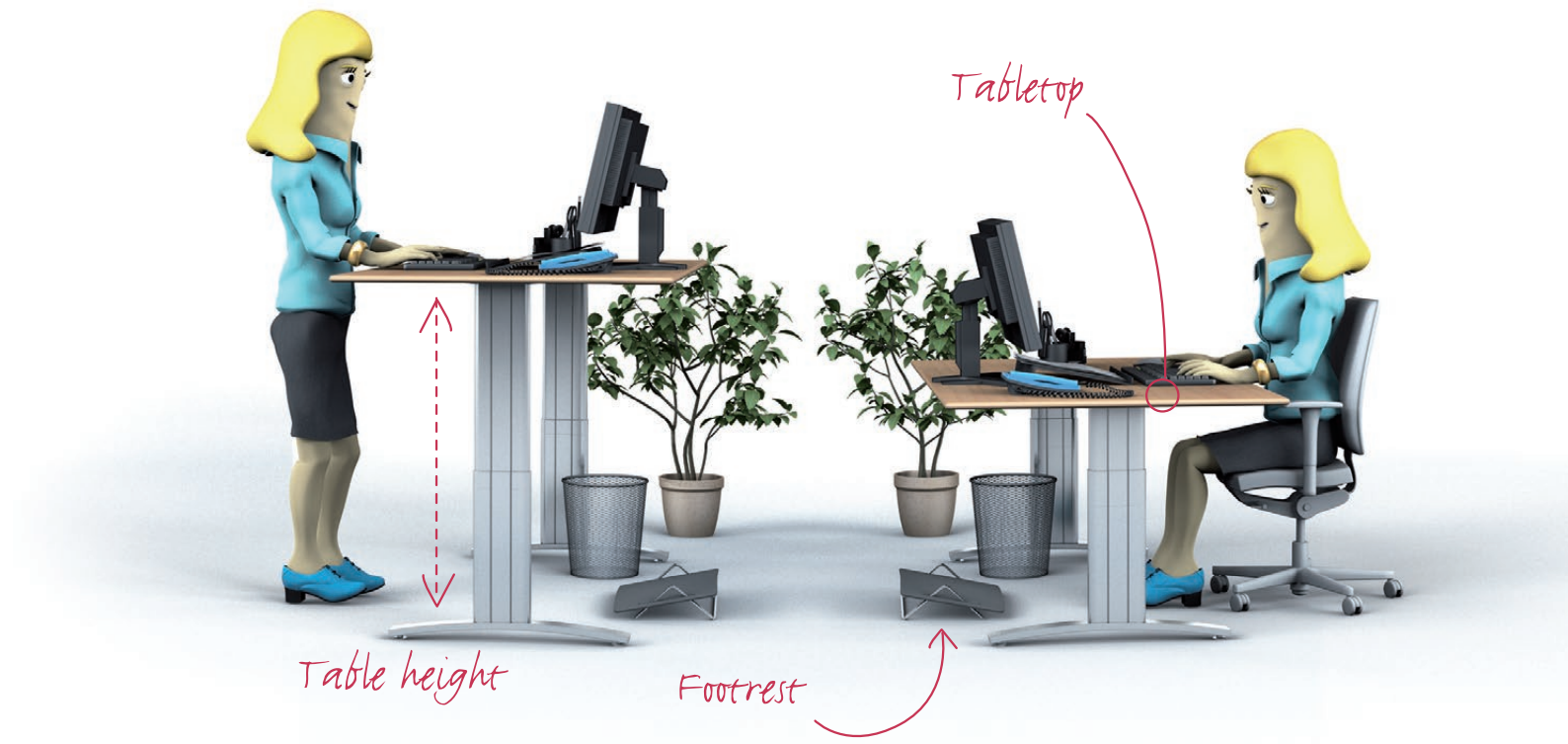


Table for office work

Table height
An office table should be adjustable in height between 65 and 85 centimetres. This will allow it to be adjusted to the height of most employees. Special solutions must be found for employees who are particularly small or tall.

A sit-stand model can be selected for office tables at which employees are seated for more than half the week. This kind of table should be adjustable between 65 and 125 centimetres. This allows for healthy alternation between seated and standing activities.

Table top
Take care when selecting the table top that it is not made of a cold material such as metal. Reflective surfaces should also be avoided as they can cause glare.

With a work surface of at least 160 by 80 cm, you have enough room to set up a monitor, keyboard and mouse ergonomically.

And with rounded-off corners, you can avoid painful bruising.

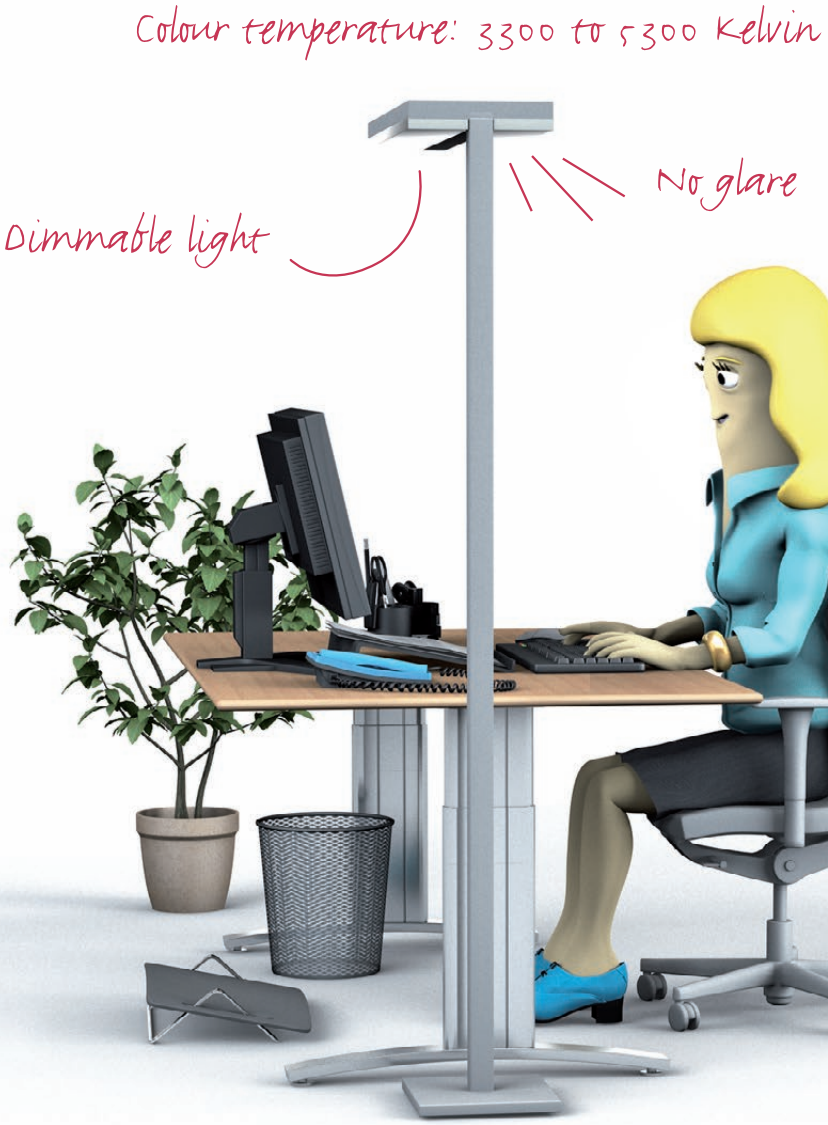
Footrest
A footrest can be helpful if your feet do not reach the floor. It is, however, only a temporary solution. It is better to adjust the table and chair to your height.

Office chair

An ergonomic chair has a height-adjustable backrest or a separately adjustable lumbar support. It is important that the seat of every chair can be adjusted in height and depth. Armrests are not absolutely necessary. Should the chair be fitted with armrests, these should be adjustable in height, width and depth.

→ Check your posture

1. Close your eyes!
   Is your head lightly balanced without having to exert any strength? No? Then you are not sitting correctly.
2. Breathe in and out deeply!
   Are you breathing in only as far as your chest or does your belly also expand? The better and deeper you are able to breathe, the better your posture when sitting.



Lighting for office work

Ambient office lighting should be a minimum of 500 Lux. As one gets older, the eyes require more light, so additional lighting that is individually adjustable should be provided for each workstation.

Office lighting should be individually adjustable and not cause any glare. Make sure that the light is neutral white or warm white and between 3300 and 5300 Kelvin for computer work.

Create a safer working environment

1. Storing objects
Do not store heavy objects on top of cupboards but always as close to the floor as possible.

2. Lifting and carrying
When lifting and carrying heavy loads, make sure to keep your back straight and hold the load as close as possible to the body. Your back should not be bent or twisted to one side.

3. Cart
Rolling is always better than lifting and carrying. With a cart you will make life easier and safer.

4. Free walkways
Always keep walkways and aisles free.

5. Open drawers
After being opened, drawers should always be closed again.

6. Exposed cable channels
Cover exposed cable channels or mark them if this is not possible.

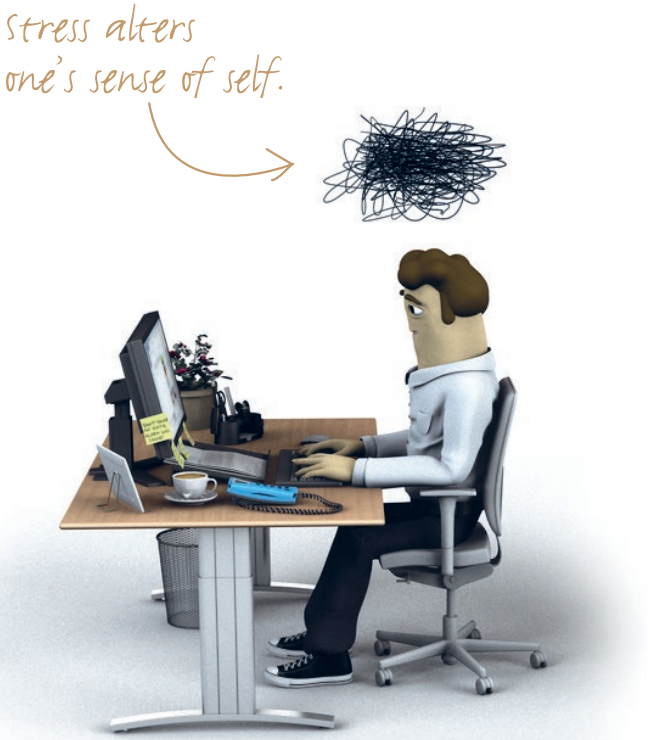
7. Spilled liquids on the floor
Wipe up spilled liquids as quickly as possible.

8. Mark uneven walking surfaces
Uneven walking surfaces of every sort should be clearly signed.

9. Temporary solutions
Machinery and cabling that have been set up provisionally can become invisible over time. Mark these clearly or tidy them away.

10. Climbing aid
Office chairs should never be used to stand on. Instead, always use a certified, purpose-made set of steps.

11. Bunched-up carpeting
Bunched-up carpeting or raised edges can lead to unfortunate accidents.



Efficiency and know yourself

Efficiency
Efficiency at work has a lot to do with your personal approach to tasks. Think of every task as a journey:

First find out where you are going and what you need for the journey. Good preparation is key. Before you start every activity you should understand what needs to be done, by when and for whom.

Then put one foot in front of the other: focus on one thing at a time and finish it before you go on to something else. And don't allow yourself to be distracted from your path: reduce the possibility of distractions or interruptions to a minimum.

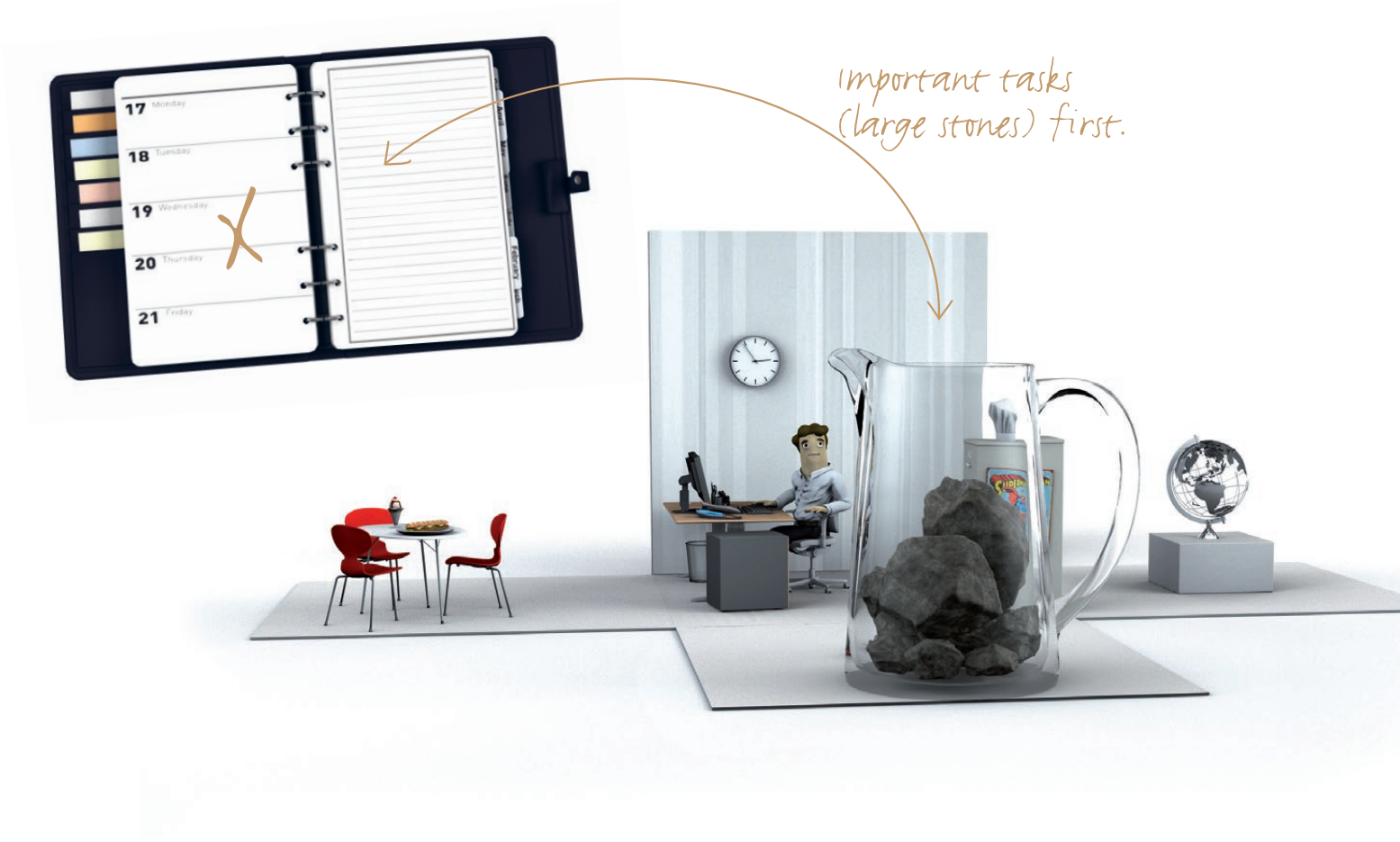
You will see that in this way you can work much more efficiently and arrive feeling more relaxed.

Know yourself
This is important: stress hormones change our sense of self. So if we experience ongoing stress, we tend not to realize just how exhausted we really are.

Symptoms of exhaustion like difficulty in concentrating, disturbed sleep patterns or loss of appetite are often not noticed or noticed too late.

Increase your awareness of how you are feeling by, for example, noting in your agenda the type and frequency of symptoms.

And take what people around you say seriously. Keep an eye on each other and make dealing with stress and pressure a topic of regular discussion.



Setting goals and time management

Setting goals
Having goals brings us closer to our dreams. Dreams and goals, however, are not the same thing. They complement each other: goals help you to realize your dream.

For example, if you would like to lead a healthier life, set yourself the goal of doing sport twice a week. Or if you would like to be better organized, you could decide to have your mail sorted by 10 o'clock every day.

Set yourself goals and put them down in writing. This is an important aspect of effective time management.

Time management
Imagine your agenda as an empty jug. You make appointments and fill the jug with stones. But it is not really full. There is still room for any number of smaller stones in between and you can even go one better.

Successful time management depends on how much you put in the jug. The deciding factor is the order in which you put things in. If you don't put the large stones in first, there won't be space for them afterwards.

Plan your time week by week and put in the big stones – the important tasks – first. The smaller stones can follow afterwards.

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Exercise, nutrition and balance

Exercise and nutrition
Regardless of whether you dance, jog or take walks. Exercise has the effect of reducing tension, helping you to think more clearly and sleep better. And taking exercise at work helps, too: For example if you stand while making phone calls or go out for a walk at lunchtime.

Equally important is a healthy and balanced diet. You are best off having only as many calories as you need spread over three meals and eating only nutritious foods.

And you'll find exercise an effective response to both smaller and larger transgressions.

Balance
Whether on a bodily, mental or emotional level, overdoing it in a single area puts stress on our system.

Wherever possible try to find something that balances your working life. Switch between routine and mental work as often as possible. If you work sitting down then try to get some exercise during your breaks.

The ideal situation is if you do something that is as important to you as your work. Something you enjoy that allows you to tank up on energy: a hobby or the family.

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Job requirements and realistic workloads

Job requirements
If the job requirements match the employee's skills, he or she can make a confident commitment to the company.

If the requirements and skills don't match, the employee finds it hard to cope or does not have enough of a challenge. Both situations can lead to stress and, over time, have a demoralizing effect.

So it's a good idea to go through the job and function description with your employees on a regular basis. Offer your staff support where necessary or the possibility of further training – particularly when the company is going through change.

Realistic workloads
Motivated employees can handle more and are well adjusted; they are also more efficient and make fewer errors.

For example, anyone who works every weekend will be less rested in the following week. Productivity drops, the «to do» list grows and errors increase.

Relaxed, concentrated employees are the key to success. Define realistic goals and check them on a regular basis. And make sure that overtime is compensated as soon as possible as tired employees achieve less.

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Meaningful corporate culture and individual work planning

Meaningful corporate culture
If employees can identify with the vision and goals of your company, their work will take on meaning.

Many employees, however, have no idea what the company stands for and which values are central. The way they identify with the company deteriorates and motivation drops.

Turn your employees into your company's greatest fans. The basis for this is a corporate culture they can understand and believe in.

Individual work planning
Variety as well as a high degree of expertise and responsibility simultaneously challenge and nurture. Those who can organize their work to ensure it is varied are more motivated and deal better with pressure and stress.

Monotonous tasks and little responsibility, on the other hand, are demotivating. If pressure at work increases, this rapidly leads to stress and those affected feel increasingly powerless in the face of the situation.

As far as possible, allow your employees to organize how they work. Set goals and let them tackle them in their own individual way.

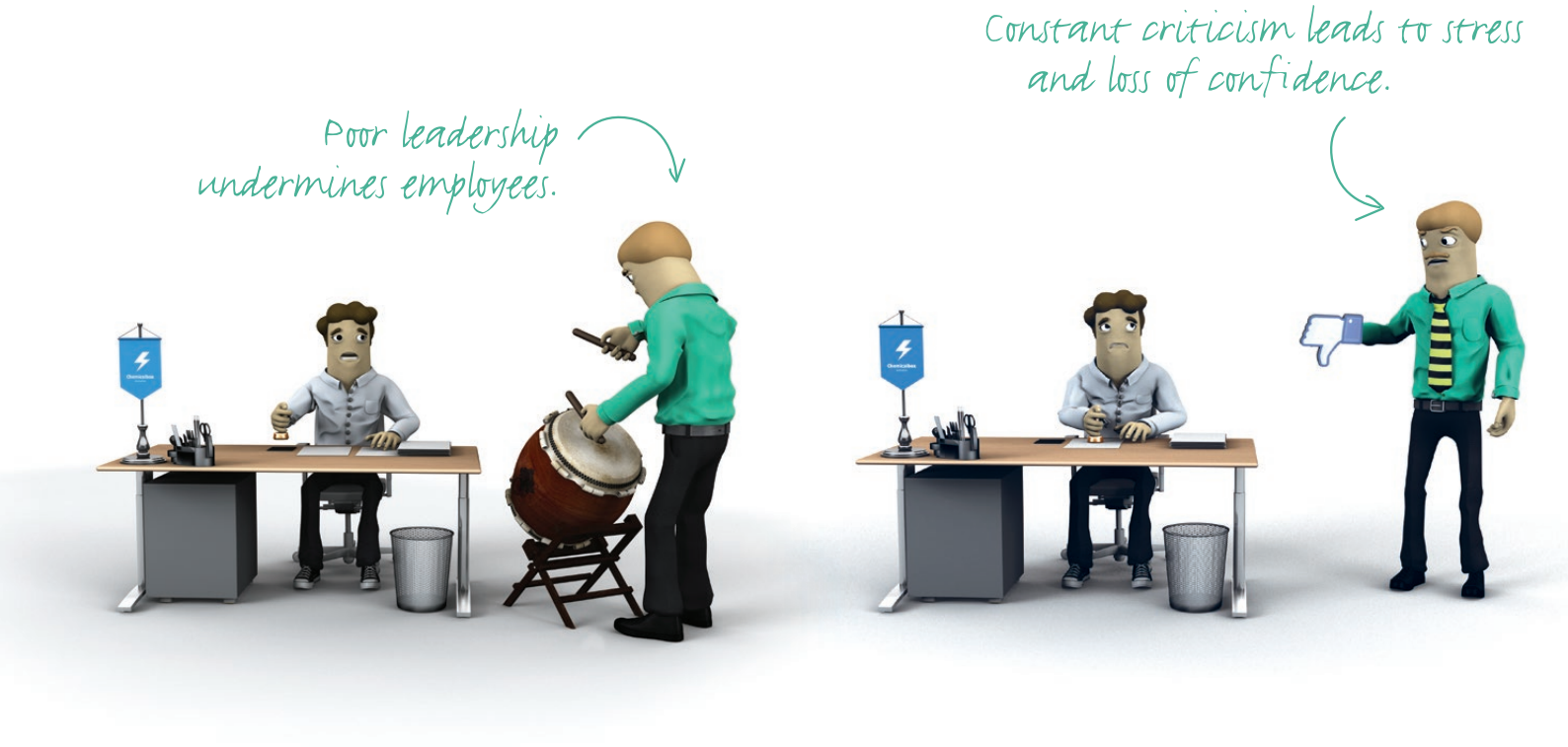
Conflicts can put both the company and individual health at risk.

Teamwork without conflict

A good team can achieve extraordinary results and truly excel.

A poor team, on the other hand, disrupts productivity and the working atmosphere. It puts the company as well as the health of all its members at risk, with burn-outs and mobbing as potential consequences.

That's why a team needs to get on, not only in terms of its expertise but also at the human level. Strengthen cooperation within the team. Pay attention to any ill feeling or conflict and deal with it early on. The key to doing this successfully is open communication.



Good leadership and supportive communication

Good leadership
Good leadership can create the conditions for a productive, healthy and motivating working atmosphere.

In the same way, poor leadership can lead to an unproductive and unhealthy working atmosphere that damages the company as well as all those involved. Poor leadership weighs heavily on employees, on their health, too.

Good leadership is not a gift, it has to be learned. Go for well-trained executives with a good leadership style. It's a win-win investment.

Supportive communication
A few words of praise or a thank you at the right moment are very motivating and have a positive effect on the working atmosphere.

In contrast, constant criticism normally leads to stress and lower self-confidence.

As a manager, your words carry considerable weight. Practise constructive criticism and praise good work. A supportive attitude should form the basis of every conversation with employees.

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Special safety provisions

Should you employ pregnant women or young people in your company, you are legally required to comply with current special safety provisions.

Pregnant women may work a maximum of 9 hours per day. Of these, only 4 should be spent standing and no heavy loads are to be carried. Ensure additional breaks, optimally offering the possibility to lie down in a quiet place.

Young people should only carry out activities that are suitable for their age and level of training.

Whether for pregnant women or young people, carry out a risk assessment in good time and then implement the necessary measures.

Moving around

Workstation
Ensure there is enough room to move freely around the workstation. The distance between the edge of the table and an obstacle or walkway should be at least one metre.

Access walkways
Walkways that give access to a workstation should be at least 80 cm wide. More space will ensure greater security.

Main walkways
Main walkways should be wider with a width of at least 1.2 metres.

→ As bags are frequently kept next to the workstation, these can become a tripping hazard if insufficient space is available in the aisles.

Light, noise and climate

Light
Emergency exits and routes should be clearly visible when interior lighting is off. Ambient office lighting should be a minimum of 500 Lux. As one gets older, the eyes require more light, so additional lighting that is individually adjustable should be provided for each workstation.

Soundproofing
Noise can be very distracting and have a strong impact on performance.

The maximum noise level for office activities is set at 65 decibels. That is the level at which a conversation can be held without having to raise one's voice. For work that requires concentration, noise should not exceed 50 decibels.

Plan in more space between workstations and improve the noise situation with soundproofing elements.

Indoor climate
The temperature in offices should be between 21 and 23°C, humidity should be between 30 and 65 percent. Occasional fluctuations above and below these levels a few times a year are harmless.

If you have air conditioning, in summer it should be set so that the temperature is not more than 8°C below the temperature outside. Ensure that the air conditioning unit is regularly serviced.

Climate control
If you have a controlled climate, make sure that none of the workstations is in a draught.

Meeting and equipment rooms, escape routes and natural light

Meeting and break room
Separate rooms should be available for confidential and important discussions.

Equipment and photocopier in a separate room
Place your fax, photocopier and other equipment in a separate room in order to protect your staff from noise and emissions. Distractions arise less from the devices and more from the individuals who make use of them.

Windows/natural light
Organize workstations so that everyone can see out of a window. Offices should provide both natural as well as artificial light. These should deliver optimal conditions for the type of work carried out there.

A window with natural light is also very important in the break room. This provides the basic conditions necessary to relax and tank up on energy.

Marked escape routes
Escape routes are not to be used for storage. They should be kept clear at all times. They should also be fitted with light panels that are self-luminous or remain on after the main lights have been extinguished.

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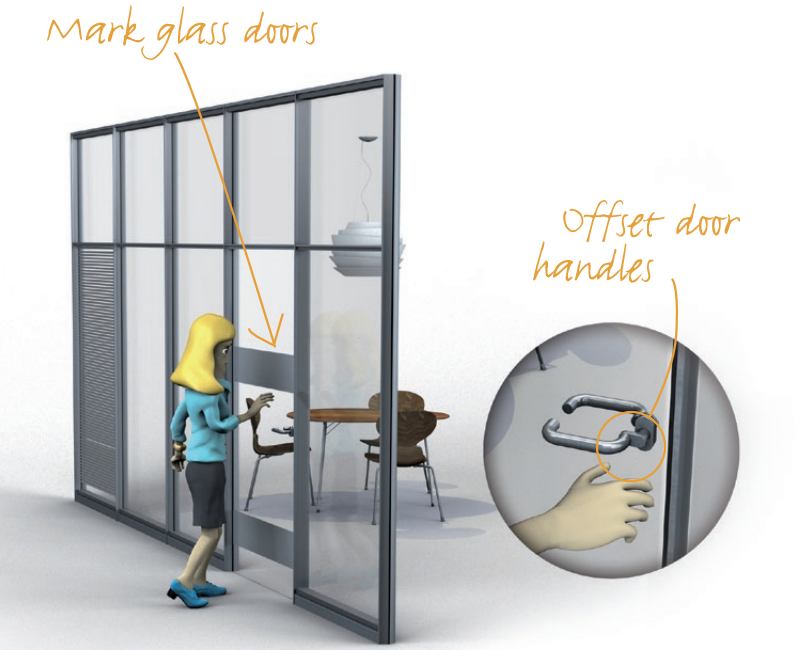
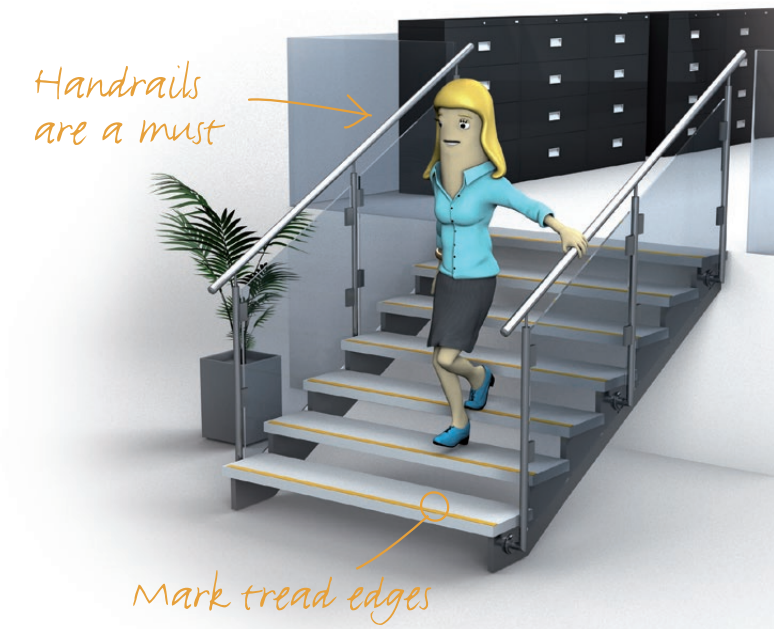




Doors and stairways

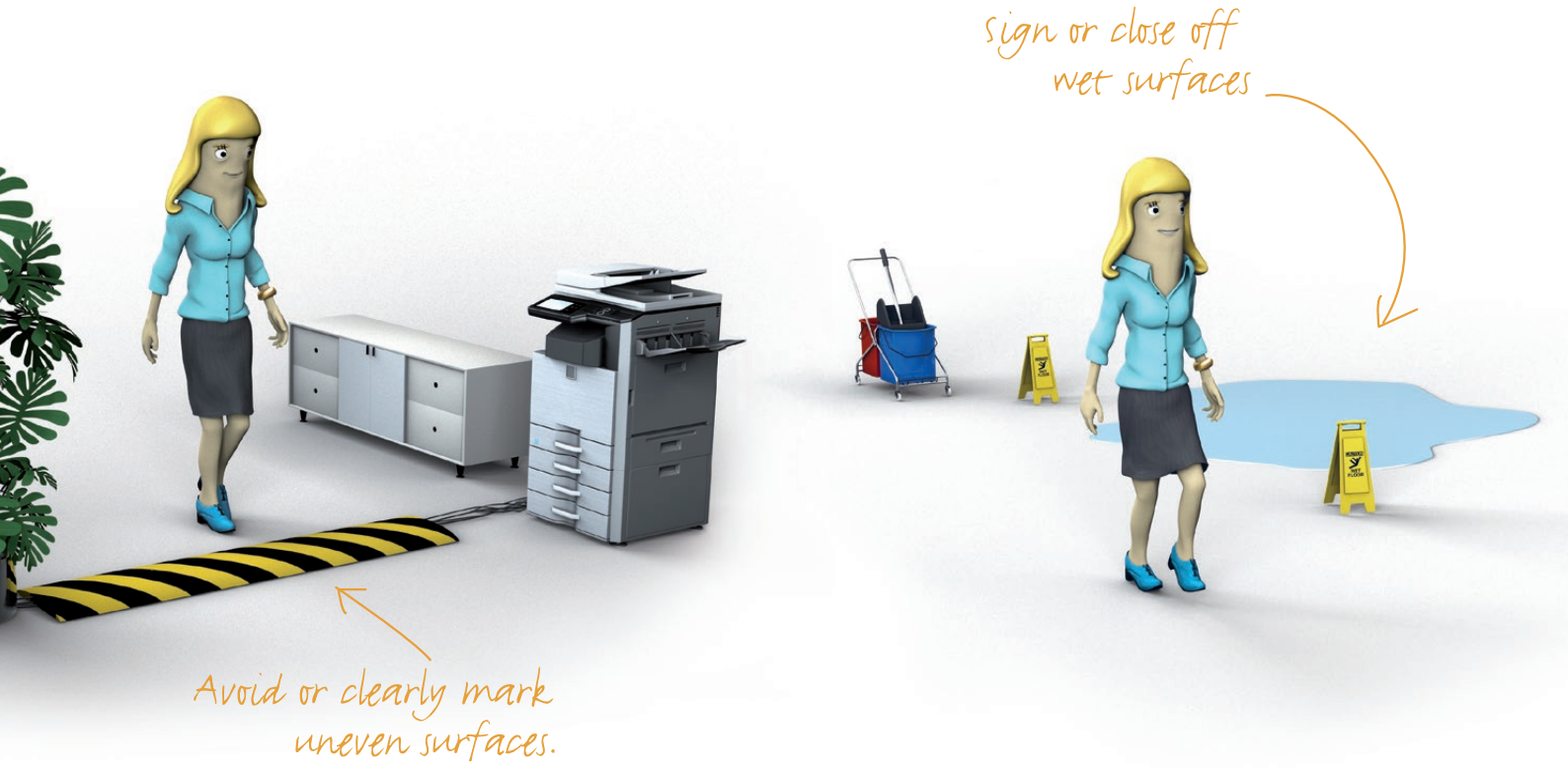
Doors
Glass doors allow for more light and make rooms friendlier. But it's not uncommon for people to run into them. This can be very painful. Use stripes, bands or symbols to make doors more clearly visible. For non-automatic doors, take care to use offset door handles in order to avoid squashing or bruising fingers.

Only install automatic doors and gates that comply with current safety regulations.

Stairways
Tripping or falling on the stairs is particularly dangerous, so every staircase should be fitted with a handrail. It will keep you safe if you lose your footing.

Depending on what they're made of and their colour as well as the ambient lighting, negotiating stairs can be difficult. Highlight the edge of each tread in order to increase its visibility.

To get everyone on a solid footing, use anti-slip floor coverings. This is particularly important for staircases in the entrance area, where wet conditions and dirt dramatically increase the risk of slipping.



Floors and cleaning

Floors
Watch out for differences in floor levels as well as floor coverings. Differences in floor levels are a classic tripping hazard: rises, steps and uneven surfaces should be avoided wherever possible. The same applies to floor openings and open cable ducts. When differences in levels cannot be avoided, they should be clearly marked.

Surer footing and improved safety are provided by the use of anti-slip floor coverings.

Cleaning
Wet, snowy, icy, leafy and dirty conditions all increase the risk of slipping. The building entrance should always be kept clean and swept – outside as well as inside.

Use of matting will stop dirt, rain and snow being carried inside and making the surface slippery.

Don't clean floors during peak times and clean them in sections. Indicate the wet areas clearly or close them off.

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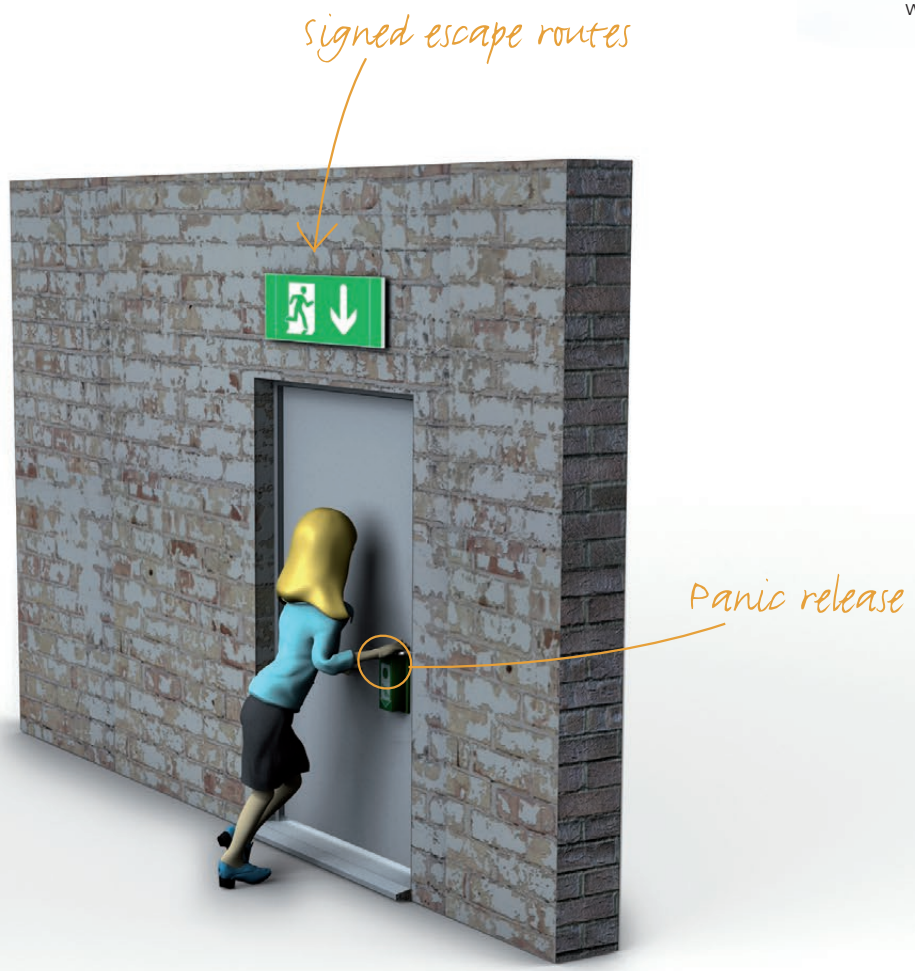
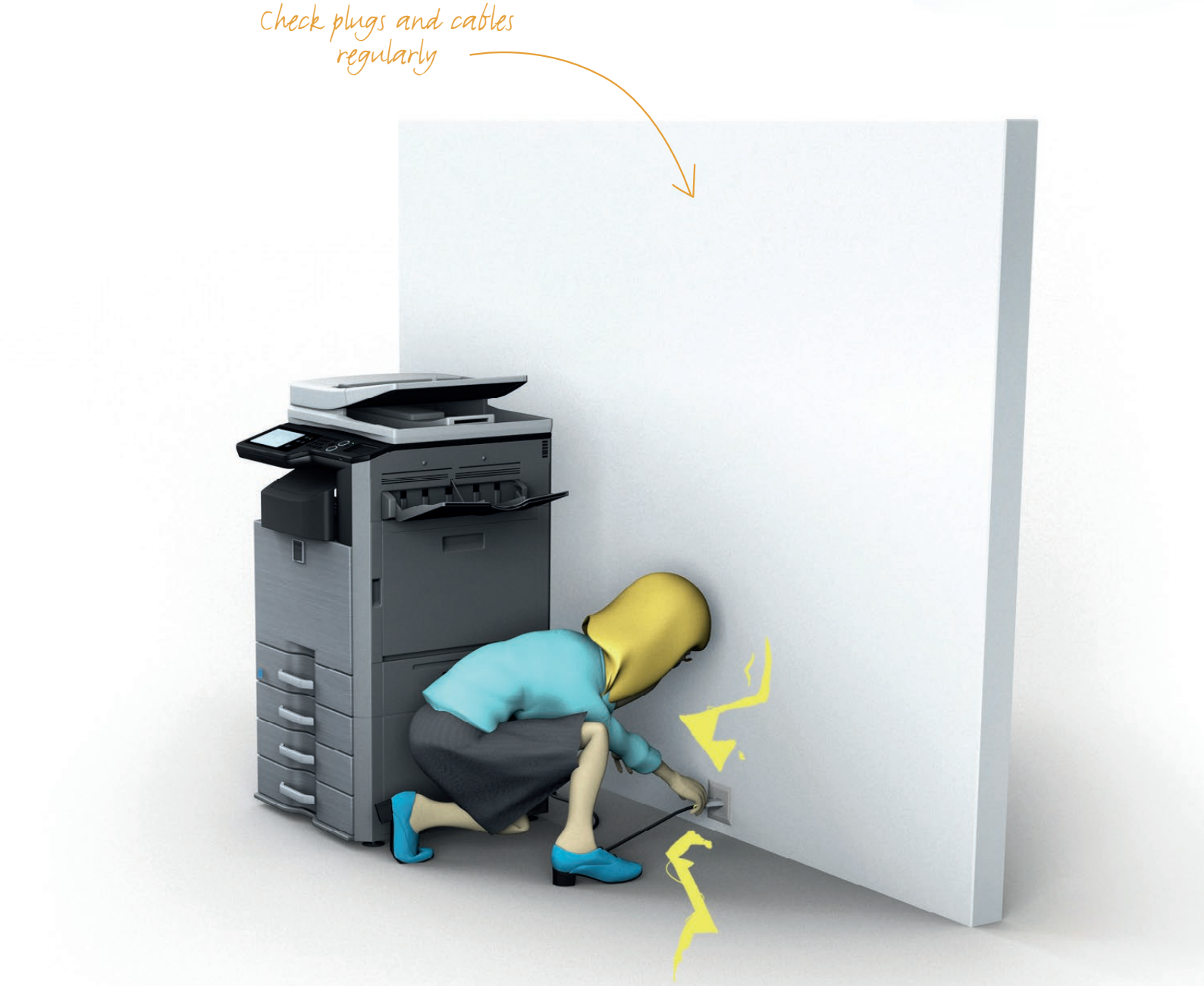


Escape routes

In an emergency – a fire, for example – everyone's survival depends on how quickly and safely they can be evacuated out of the building.

Make sure that escape routes are clearly visible by using emergency lighting and self-luminous emergency exit signs.

And ensure that main walkways and particularly escape routes are always kept clear. Avoid the use of key boxes at emergency exits as they can be easily missed in an emergency or turn into a death trap if lighting conditions are poor. Instead, install a panic release on all emergency exits. They unlock and open doors at the press of a single button and clear the way to safety in just seconds.



Dealing safely with electricity

Caution should be exercised when dealing with electrical devices and live equipment. Check plugs and cables regularly. Ensure any defective equipment is immediately repaired by a specialist and switch off power sources during maintenance work.

Inadequate insulation of cables, plugs and sockets can increase the risk of dangerous electric shocks. Also ensure outdoor and wet areas are safe and install a residual-current device (RCD).

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