

## Office Ergonomics

Do you experience neck, shoulder or back pain after sitting at your desk all day?

Do you find your arms or wrists aching?

Do your eyes feel strained, or do you get frequent headaches?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may want to investigate whether your workstation is ergonomically correct.

A few simple adjustments to your computer, chair and desktop items can help you maintain an ergonomically correct posture. This, in turn, will help alleviate back, neck, shoulder and wrist pain.

Use the following information to learn more about ergonomics and how you can implement the principles into your work environment.

### Neutral Posture

Ergonomics is based on neutral posture, or the position of your spine and other joints that allows for natural support from the surrounding ligaments, tendons, and muscles. Think of sitting up straight at your desk, shoulders relaxed, eyes at a comfortable distance from your computer screen, wrists resting on a wrist guard.

This neutral posture offers muscles the best advantage for efficient usage, lessens trauma to the spine and joints and helps to prevent fatigue.

Neutral posture is the opposite of sustained awkward posture, the primary risk factor associated with the development of joint and muscle strain in the office setting. This happens when you routinely slouch, twist your neck, hunch over, pound at the keyboard, etc. Lessen the chance of sustained awkward posture by making slight adjustments to your workspace.

### Assessing Your Office Chair

An ergonomic chair is one that has many adjustable components. If your current chair does not have an adjustable seat pan, tilt and back/lumbar support, or does not have a rolling five-point base with coasters (to improve stability), you may want to request one.

Use the following tips when adjusting an office chair:

- **Seat:** Adjust the height so feet are flat on the floor and knees are approximately at a 90-degree bend when you are sitting back in the seat. You can adjust the seat-pan depth by moving the backrest

forward or backward. Ideally, you should have three to four finger widths between the edge of the seat pan and the back of your knees when sitting fully back in the seat. If there is more or less space, you may want to use a lumbar cushion to decrease the length or move the backrest as far back as possible to increase the depth.

- **Tilt:** Adjust the tilt to accommodate needs. For instance, a forward tilt is better when typing; a backward tilt may be more comfortable during a lengthy phone call.
- **Backrest/lumbar support:** A standard office chair should offer back and lumbar support. The top of the backrest should hit the bottom to middle of the shoulder blades; the lumbar support should be in the middle of the lower back, where the back curves inward the most. If your chair does not have lumbar support, a small towel roll is an adequate and inexpensive substitution.
- **Armrest:** Armrests are not necessary, but many people prefer them. If you have armrests, a three-quarter length is preferred to avoid having contact with the desk while getting close to your work. The armrest height and width should be at a level that allows your elbow to rest at your side.

Avoid crossing your legs: this shifts the pelvis, causing the spine to bend out of the neutral position. If you are taller or shorter than average and cannot get your chair to fit properly, or if you have a larger stature, you may want to consider a larger or more petite chair.

## Assessing Your Monitor

Use these tips to minimize eye, neck and shoulder strain:

- Center the monitor in front of you and your keyboard. Look at your monitor without turning your head to the side. If this is not practical, place the monitor in the corner of the desk and the keyboard and mouse on top of the desk or in a dropdown tray directly in front of the monitor. A dropdown tray with a swivel component allows you to turn the keyboard and mouse toward the monitor if it cannot be installed directly under the monitor.
- Adjust the monitor height so your eye height is at the top three-quarters of the screen (or top half if your monitor is larger than 17 inches). Standard bifocal wearers should have an eye height that is at the same level as the top of the screen.
- Place the monitor so it is an arms-length away for optimal viewing.
- Avoid screen glare and decrease eye strain by dusting the monitor face regularly. Place the screen perpendicular to light sources, tilting the monitor down slightly to decrease glare from lighting overhead, or use a glare screen.
- Old phone books make inexpensive risers for monitors. If space is limited, use a riser that has a drawer or space underneath for storage.

## Assessing Your Keyboard and Mouse

- Place the keyboard and mouse next to each other, whether you use a dropdown tray or desktop.

- When seated properly in your chair, the keyboard and mouse should be at a height that allows arms to comfortably rest at your side, with elbows bent at about 90 to 100 degrees. Wrists should be straight or slightly extended in a neutral wrist position. Some people find keeping their keyboard tray in a negative tilt (tilting downhill from the user) to be more comfortable.
- Use a wrist rest when you are not typing.
- When typing, keep hands and wrists slightly above the wrist rest, similar to the hand position when playing the piano; this allows for fluid motion. Keeping hands down while typing can cause compression in the carpal tunnel area, making fingers work harder than necessary.

## Assessing Desktop Accessories

These tips can help maintain an ergonomically correct position while working with many documents or when talking on the phone.

- If you type or do data entry from hard copies, use a document holder. When used properly, a holder decreases neck and eye strain and eliminates having to refocus your eyes. Place the holder either directly in front or to the side of the computer; ideally, the document should be the same height and depth as the computer screen. Choose a document holder specific to the job: lighter documents can use a simple copy clip attached to the side of the monitor; larger documents should be placed in a copyholder that mounts to the monitor or is placed in front or next to the monitor on the desktop; and oversized or irregular documents or books should use a document- or book-stand placed directly in front of the monitor.
- If you write or type while talking on the phone, avoid cradling the phone between your ear and shoulder, which can cause neck and shoulder strain. Using a phone shoulder rest is also discouraged, as it requires bending the neck, thus deviating from a neutral spine position. Instead, use a phone headset to type or write while on the phone. Make sure it fits comfortably and suits your needs.

## General Ergonomic Office Tips

- Gently stretch your neck, shoulder and wrist muscles at least once a day, immediately if you start to feel fatigue in these areas.
- Get up and walk around at least once an hour to improve overall circulation.
- If possible, take a 15- to 20-minute walk at lunch, especially if you sit all day.

## Resources

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration: [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health: [www.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.nlm.nih.gov)

Here when you need us.

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