



## Is Your Computer Workstation Ergonomically Correct?

Have you ever found yourself sitting at your desk for an extended period of time, and arise to find that you have a backache? Poor posture can be caused by everyday activities such as sitting in office chairs, looking at the computer, driving, or even sleeping. The good news is that posture and ergonomics are within your ability to control and not hard to change.

It's important to fit the computer workstation to the worker. Help avoid unnecessary neck and back aches by making sure your computer station is set up properly.

### The Chair

When sitting in your chair, push your hips as far back as they can go. Next, adjust the seat height so that your feet are flat on the floor and your knees are equal to, or slightly lower than, your hips. It is also important to adjust the back of the chair to a 100°-110° reclined angle, but make sure your upper and lower back are supported. A pillow or inflatable cushion can provide additional support for your lower or mid back. Last, adjust the armrests (if fitted) so that your shoulders are relaxed.

When sitting, be aware of and avoid unbalanced postures, such as crossing your legs unevenly while sitting, leaning to one side, hunching your shoulders or tilting your neck or head. After all the adjustments have been made to the chair, remember to use a footrest if your feet dangle.

### The Keyboard

Start by pulling yourself up close to your keyboard and position the keyboard directly in front of your body. Once you determine which section of the keyboard you use most frequently, readjust it so that section is centered with your body. Next, adjust the keyboard height so that your shoulders are relaxed, forearms are approximately parallel to the floor, elbows are in a slightly open position (100° to 110°), and wrists and hands are straight. Use your keyboard tray mechanism or keyboard feet to adjust the tilt. If you sit in a forward or upright position, try tilting your keyboard away from you at a negative angle.

Wrist rests can help to maintain neutral postures and pad hard desktop surfaces. Wrist rests should only be used to rest the palms of your hands between keystrokes. Try to avoid resting on the wrist rest while typing. Avoid excessively wide wrist rests, or wrist rests that are higher than the space bar of your keyboard. If you do not have a fully adjustable keyboard tray, you may need to adjust your workstation height, the height of your chair, or use a seat cushion to achieve a comfortable position.

### The Computer Monitor and Work Space

Incorrect positioning of your screen or source documents could result in awkward postures. Adjust your monitor and source documents so that your neck is in a neutral, relaxed position. Start by centering your monitor directly in front of you, above your keyboard. Position the top of the monitor screen approximately even with your seated eye level. (People who wear bifocals may need to lower the monitor to a comfortable reading level.) Position yourself at least an arm's length (18-25") away from the screen and then adjust the distance for your vision. You can reduce glare by placing the screen at right angles to windows and adjusting curtains or blinds.

Remember to place the things that you use the most often (i.e. telephone, documents or stapler) close to you so that you don't have to reach far away for them. Using headsets or a speaker phone can help to eliminate cradling the handset between your head and shoulder as you write or handle a keyboard or documents. To retrieve an item from the floor, pull the chair out, rotate it until you're facing the object, and then bend forward and pick it up while seated. Never bend over the side of your chair.



### **Take Frequent Breaks**

Once you have correctly set up your computer workstation, make it a priority to use good work habits. No matter how perfect your environment, prolonged static postures will inhibit blood circulation and take a toll on your body. As muscles tire and become stiff, slouching, slumping, and other poor postures will become more likely. In order to maintain a relaxed yet supported posture, change your position, stretch and take breaks frequently.

Fortunately, many workplaces are starting to pay more attention to ergonomics in the office. If your company doesn't have ergonomic information, ask your manager about programs that make employees aware of ergonomics and healthy computing. If there isn't already a program, volunteer to start one—it will only help you in the long run.

### **Sources:**

[www.ergonomics-information.com](http://www.ergonomics-information.com)

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