

## When To Replace An Office Chair

A well-made office chair won't wear out quickly, but it won't last forever. The process of replacing office seating has three stages:

- Determining life expectancy
- Signs that replacement is necessary
- End-of-life planning

### Determining Life Expectancy

How long should an office chair last? The short answer is: it depends.

The longer—and more complicated—answer is probably up to 7 or 8 years for a chair with a 5-year warranty and 12-15 years for a chair that offers a warranty of 10-years or more. These life expectancy estimates are not directly related to the warranty period but are based on quality such guarantees imply. There are many additional factors which will significantly impact the effective lifespan of an office chair.<sup>1</sup>

#### Environment

A chair used in a dirty, dusty environment such as a warehouse may not last as long as a chair used in a cleaner setting. At the very least frequent cleaning will be required to keep the mechanism and casters working smoothly. Although not an ergonomic benefit, weight capacity and fabric selection can also affect employee productivity as anyone who has sat on an unstable or scratchy upholstered chair knows.

#### Multi-Shift Use

Standard warranties are based on 8 hours a day, 5 days per week use. Deploying a chair in a multi-shift application without upgrading for heavy duty use will limit the lifespan of the chair.

#### Textiles

Not all textiles are the same. A rating known as "double rubs" is the standard for rating fabric durability. Stain and soil resistant fabric can preserve appearances longer.

#### Options

Many chairs offer upgrades designed to combat wear and tear. Heavy duty casters, heavy duty cylinders and ballistic nylon backing can help protect against everyday abuse. Moisture barrier applications to seat and back can limit damage. Heavy duty options have weight ratings designed for bariatric users

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Another detriment to life expectancy is if the chair is not suited for the user. For example, an armless chair may be more appropriate for a worker who wears a tool belt. Over time the tool belt can damage an arm.

### Signs that Replacement is Necessary

There are no hard and fast rules for assessing a chair for replacement, but here are some things to consider.<sup>ii</sup>

- Does the chair appear worn? Appearance is important to some organizations. A chair visible to or used by clients may need replacing sooner than a chair serving a backroom function.
- Are components falling off or working loose? Routine maintenance may extend the chair's life. Many chair components are readily available and easy to install.
- Is a lack of comfort causing a loss of productivity? Hard to document, for sure, but most employees will readily acknowledge if this is the case.
- Has the seat foam failed? Typically "soft" components such as foam and fabric do not last as long as "hard" components such as mechanism and base.

If there is a problem with spending several hundred dollars on a new chair, try looking at things differently.

What is the user's time worth? Let's assume she makes \$30 per hour. What if by having a good chair that properly supported her all day she gained an extra 10 minutes work? This means she will get \$5 a day more work done than before. In just 6 months her productivity gain would have been \$600 — enough to buy a top quality ergonomic chair designed to give years of productive service.

Once viewed this way it's easy to see how investing in the right chair at the outset will provide benefits many times over.<sup>iii</sup>

### End-of-Life Planning

No matter how long a chair lasts, preparing for the eventual replacement is a necessity.

Most organizations have a capital budget, and seating is normally included in it. Capital expenses are depreciated at different rates for different items. An air conditioning unit may be depreciated over 10 years, while office furniture may be depreciated over seven. Heavy use items such as chairs may have a shorter budgetary lifespan.

Some budgets may call for replacing 20% of the chairs each year; over five years each chair will be replaced and the process starts again. Other budgets may replace 100% of the chairs every five years and allocate that money to other expenses in the intervening years.

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## In Conclusion

Although the lifespan of an office chair may depend upon a multitude of variables, organizations should plan for their eventual replacement, taking into account how the chair is used, where it is used and the organization's capital expenditure policies. Routine inspection of all chairs is recommended and minor repairs performed as necessary.

## References

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- <sup>ii</sup> Office Chair Advice, What Are The Signs That Your Office Chair Needs Replacing? Cull That Productivity Pooper., <http://www.blog.officechairadvice.com/signs-that-your-office-chair-needs-replacing/>, accessed 1/07/2014
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