

**TECHNICAL INFORMATION PAPER SERIES:  
WORKPLACE ERGONOMICS: A GUIDE TO HEALTH AND COMFORT AT WORK**



**FOR A MORE COMFORTABLE, PRODUCTIVE EXPERIENCE,  
MAKE YOUR WORKSTATION WORK FOR YOU.**

**SELF-HELP QUESTIONS**

- How do you adjust your chair for good posture and comfort?
- How do you position your screen to reduce glare?
- How do you adjust the brightness and contrast to improve the clarity of the characters on your screen?
- Do you remember to take your breaks, stretch and change your position during the day?
- Do you routinely clear your workstation of clutter?
- What workstation exercises do you perform regularly?

Read on to learn how to make yourself more comfortable at work.

The way you manage and arrange your workstation affects your productivity, comfort and health. This document is designed to help you use some basic guidelines and techniques to keep working safely and comfortably.

Adjusting your workstation and working in neutral postures are the first steps.

**Take rest breaks and move around periodically.**

To prevent issues from sitting in static postures for prolonged periods, frequently taking rest breaks and alternating tasks can make a significant difference in the way you feel. A short rest break or “micro-break” can be simply standing up, then sitting back down. Even this short micro-break is sufficient to promote circulation through the spine and to the extremities, keeping those areas healthy.

Remind yourself to move frequently by using simple reminders in the workplace, such as standing up every time you hear a phone ring.



Here's the  
ideal way  
to sit for  
comfortable  
posture.

## HOW TO MAKE YOUR WORKSTATION WORK FOR YOU

Do you sometimes or often experience discomfort when working for hours at your computer? If so, this paper can help you troubleshoot, identify and correct the problem(s).

### Your workstation.

A well-arranged workstation can enhance your productivity and comfort. It can facilitate keeping the joints of your body in neutral postures, helping to eliminate discomfort.

The first step is learning how your equipment works so you can take full advantage of its adjustable features and keep your posture in check.

You should be able to easily reach frequently used items whether you're sitting or standing. Your reach for routine tasks should not be over-extended. Unwieldy items, such as heavy manuals, or continually used service aids, such as a telephone, should be kept close.

### Your chair.

Taking advantage of all the features of your chair will likely have the greatest impact on your comfort.

Adjust your chair to meet the following criteria:

- Your feet should be flat on the floor or angled slightly if using a footrest.
- The seat pan should support the upper legs and back without contacting the back of the knee.
- Your shoulders should rest on the seatback to provide proper support and to avoid craning the neck, continuously leaning forward, and/or using the forearms to support your entire upper body weight. Leaning back in the chair prevents upper and lower back discomfort, including burning in the neck between the shoulder blades.
- Raise or lower the chair so your forearms are at the same height as the keyboard. If raising the chair causes your legs to dangle, use a foot rest to add leg support.
- Adjust the chair's recline to between 100-110 degrees from horizontal. Excessive recline creates awkward back postures, potentially leading to discomfort, pain and injury.
- Reduce the amount of "play" in the seat back's recline feature to prevent flipping the chair.

### **Your mouse and/or other input devices.**

Your keyboard, mouse or other input device should be placed within easy reach. The following tips can help in placing keyboard, mice, and other input devices.

- Ideally, your keyboard should be at elbow height. Your wrists should be flat with your knuckles at the same height as your elbows. If the “legs” located at the back of the keyboard are up, they should be retracted to help keep your wrists flat.
- Your upper arms should be nearly vertical at your sides, with shoulders relaxed.
- Your forearms should be nearly horizontal with elbows at 90 degrees or slightly angled down to 120 degrees below horizontal. Keeping the wrist flat is the key.
- Avoid resting your wrists or forearms on the desk or table edge as this could stress the shoulders, cause nerve impingement, or restrict blood supply. The ideal keyboard location is at the front edge of the workstation within easy reach.
- Avoid using a mouse wrist rest as it creates contact with the soft underside of the wrist, creating contact stress that could lead to nerve impingement or a reduction in the blood supply to the wrist, hands and fingers.
- A variety of input devices are available if a conventional mouse creates discomfort. Regardless of the device chosen, your wrists should be flat and the soft underside of your wrists should not contact hard or elevated surfaces.

### **Your monitor(s).**

The monitor plays a significant role in the mid-back, upper back, shoulder and neck regions. Ideally, the neck is neutral by looking downward 5-30 degrees, similar to the neck posture when you walk.

- The monitor top should be at or slightly below eye height to allow downward viewing from 5-30 degrees below horizontal. Bifocal wearers should avoid tipping the head back to see; computer glasses can eliminate this issue. Keeping the neck in neutral postures will reduce fatigue in the neck.

- The monitor should be positioned directly in front of you. When the monitor isn't aligned, twisting of the back and neck can occur.
- If multiple monitors are present, position the two monitors close with the primary monitor placed directly in front of you. Using three monitors should be avoided since too many monitors create twisting postures.
- If using paper documents or other media, obtain a document holder and place your document holder at about the same height and right beside the primary monitor.
- Clean your monitor frequently to prevent accumulations of fingerprints and dust, as they create glare.
- Know how to use your monitor's brightness and contrast controls. Most computers using a Windows operating system have adjustments in the Control Panel > Displays links.

### **Lighting**

Glare is probably the most notable and frequent problem with lighting in a work area. Here are simple remedies:

- Properly adjusted window treatments (blinds, curtains, reflective films) can reduce glare.
- Positioning your display screen perpendicular to windows or other bright light sources reduces the likelihood of glare.
- If you're uncertain as to the source of the glare, hold a small mirror on the screen. The reflection will help you determine the origin of the stray light. Properly placed partitions can also help block excess light.
- Dimmer switches and diffusing cover panels can control artificial light.
- Repositioning the display screen can eliminate glare.
- An anti-glare screen may be placed on the display.

Excessively bright light can cause eye discomfort over time. Headaches may result. If you're squinting, the lighting is probably too bright. Sometimes too little light may be the problem. Use a task lamp to supplement lighting for detailed work, writing, or suiting personal preference.

### **Accessory items.**

All items used frequently should be placed close to you to prevent excessive reaching and twisting. When speaking on the phone, a headset should be used to avoid cradling the phone between the ear and the neck.

If a long conference call is planned, consider using or reserving a small office or conference room. This allows you to hear and speak normally, without distractions. It also allows a break from sitting in the same position for extended periods of time.

### **A word about sit/stand workstations.**

Sit/stand workstations can provide the variety of movement to promote blood circulation and keep the muscles and joints healthy.

Studies are beginning to show an increase in alertness and productivity when using sit/stand workstations. However, only 5-10 percent of the population will actually use them. If you're considering using one of these workstations, it may not be a good choice if:

- You have difficulty standing for long periods at home when cooking or doing other tasks.
- Your feet are sore at the end of the day.
- Your knees, hips, or ankles hurt when standing after one hour.

Ideally, you should be able to easily switch between sitting and standing. Standing should be limited to a maximum of about two hours per day.

Similar to working when seated, the position while keying is critical to keeping the back, neck, shoulders, elbows, and wrists healthy:

- Your forearms should be nearly horizontal with elbows at 90 degrees or slightly angled down to 120 degrees below horizontal.
- The wrists should be flat with the elbows at the same height as the knuckles.
- The monitor should be at least arms' length away and at a height allowing downward viewing between 5-30 degrees below horizontal.

### **LEARN MORE.**

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