

ERGONOMICS AND YOUR HEALTH

Simple workplace adjustments can help you avoid discomfort and injury.

WE DON'T OFTEN THINK ABOUT the position our bodies are in every day. But long periods of sitting, standing or performing repetitive motions could have an impact on our health. Over time, subtle aches and pains may appear that, if left untreated, could potentially develop into chronic injuries.

Workplace ergonomics is the practice of physically “fitting” the job to the worker as well as possible, with comfort and injury prevention being the goal. If you work in an office or spend a lot of time at a computer, you should pay particular attention to your chair and desk. The following steps can help you create an ergonomically sound workstation that is customized for your body.

1. Position your chair height so that when your shoulders are relaxed, the surface you are typing on is level with your elbow. If your arm rests adjust, they should also be at elbow level, flush with the typing surface. If they do not adjust, keep your elbows tight to your body and avoid the armrests if they are too high.
2. If changing your chair height results in your feet no longer touching the floor, use a footrest to keep your legs supported.
3. Ideally, your chair height should ensure your knees are slightly below hip level to reduce excessive hip flexion, which is a precursor for developing tight hip flexors.
4. If you stand at a table or countertop while working, principle #1 still applies: your elbow height should be level with the working surface. Alternating between standing and sitting is ideal whenever possible.
5. Ensure the top two or three inches of your computer screen are positioned at eye level. If you use a laptop, you can either:
 - ✦ Type on your laptop keypad and plug into a secondary monitor, or
 - ✦ Raise your laptop screen to the right height, and plug in a mouse and a secondary keyboard to use at elbow level.

Although symptoms may not be present, it's a good idea to take inventory of your setup to align yourself for long-term comfort and prevent injury from occurring. Conversely, if you are experiencing symptoms, therapy alone may not be enough to rid you of the issue unless your workspace is set up appropriately. Speak to your health care professional or an ergonomic specialist for further advice. ■

WORK SAFELY

Use this visual ergonomics guide to make your workspace more comfortable and efficient.

