

DuPage County Environmental, Safety, Health & Property Loss Control Program Office Ergonomic Work Station Practices Handout

Sitting with your feet flat on the floor (or supported by a footrest) will help support your spine. Having your thighs parallel to the seat with knees bent at approximately a 90° angle, and having adequate clearance behind your knees, will keep the chair from interfering with the circulation to your legs.

If the back of your chair is adjustable, raise or lower it so that the contour of the chair provides maximum lumbar (lower back) support. If possible, adjust the tilt of the back rest to support your body in an upright position. A slight angle, either forward or back, is also acceptable. Adjust the chair according to what is most comfortable for you.

If your chair has arms, they should allow you to get close to your work without getting in the way. If you're typing, they should be at a height where they just barely contact your elbows when your arms are resting comfortably at your side. Chair arms should not force you to elevate your shoulders or swing your arms out to the side.

Worksurface/Keyboard Adjustment

Ideally, with your arms resting comfortably at your side, the home row of your keyboard (the row with letters a, s, d...) should be at approximately elbow level. If your worksurface is adjustable, start by adjusting your chair as indicated above. Once that's at the proper height, then adjust the worksurface. If your worksurface is too high and cannot be adjusted, adjust the chair to bring your elbows to the home row level of the keyboard and support your feet with a footrest if necessary

Monitor Adjustment

- Is the viewing distance to your computer monitor somewhere between 16 and 24 inches?
- Is your computer protected from excess glare?
- If you wear bifocals or trifocals, are you able to look at the monitor without tilting your head?

Once your chair and worksurface are properly adjusted, adjust your computer monitor so that the top of the screen is at or just below eye level.

People who wear bifocals or trifocals often end up tilting their heads back to read through the lower portion of their glasses. This can sometimes lead to neck, shoulder and back discomfort. Lowering the computer monitor or purchasing glasses specifically designed for the viewing distance to your terminal screen can help alleviate this problem.

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Workstation Accessory Arrangements

Rectangular worksurfaces often don't allow enough space for computers and related accessories. Keyboard trays or similar devices are one option to increase desk space. However, these devices can sometimes force you too far away from your primary worksurface, force you to reach for your mouse or other accessories, or put your mouse at a higher level than the keyboard. All of these problems may cause pain or discomfort to arms and shoulders. They may also interfere with the thigh clearance under your worksurface. Corner worksurfaces are often preferable because they provide additional depth and, since they wrap around you, place your accessories closer to you.

As you change tasks, remember to move primary materials/input devices in front of you. If you must frequently look at reference materials as you type you should consider using a document holder or slant board. Either will help you keep your head aligned over your spine and can prevent or relieve neck, shoulder and back discomfort. If using a document holder, position it at the same height and distance as your monitor.

A padded wrist rest can help support your wrists in a straight and neutral position. This takes some of the load off your neck, shoulder and back muscles, plus helps maintain circulation by keeping your arms off the hard edges of the worksurface. Ideally, the wrist rest should be made of a firm foam and constructed so that the pad height matches the front (toe) height of your keyboard.

Talking on the phone with the receiver cradled between your ear and your shoulder can cause neck, shoulder and back pain. A headset will allow you to maintain the spine in alignment while talking on the phone.

Work Habits

Periodic breaks help to alleviate fatigue and strain to your eyes and upper body. Taking a break does not mean that you have to stop working. Rather, it allows you to integrate other activities such as making phone calls, making copies or talking with a co-worker.

Finally, develop good habits outside of work. While you may not be able to adjust all the worksurfaces at home, you may be able to make minor adjustments that are significant to your body. Good posture and good work habits are just as important outside of work, whether you're typing on your home computer, doing chores around the house or involved in special projects or hobbies.

Questions please call Patrick Genovese CSP, Risk Management Coordinator 630-407-6124