

When you think of work activities that can result in musculoskeletal disorders, you may think of strenuous tasks like heavy lifting. But you may be surprised to hear that one of the most significant causes of aches, pains, and serious musculoskeletal disorders can actually come from sitting at your desk. Today, we'll look at office ergonomics and how to adjust your workstation to be not only comfortable, but to also prevent pain and injury.

Office Ergonomics

Ergonomics is the science of designing the workstation to fit the worker. In the early days of the Industrial Revolution, it was thought that the worker needed to fit the workstation, but this approach was flawed. A poorly designed workstation leads to lower production rates, discomfort, and even injury. That's why you see the workstations of today are designed to be adjustable so they can fit each person correctly.

A well-arranged, ergonomically-friendly work station can help you avoid fatigue and discomfort while also making you more mentally sharp and productive.

Office Ergonomic Tips

The good news is, office ergonomics principals are reasonably simple. Follow these tips to improve your workstation set up.

- 1.** Make sure the weight of your arms is supported. When your arms are not supported, it causes tension in the muscles of your neck and shoulders, resulting in headaches, shoulder aches, and even upper backaches.
- 2.** Observe your head position. Sometimes, the head will move forward of the shoulders, straining to get closer to the computer monitor. Notice the position of your head. It should be directly above the neck and shoulders, not back or forward.
- 3.** Monitor your posture. Slouching puts more pressure on the discs and vertebrae of your back. Adjust the lumbar support of your chair and avoid sitting in ways that cause your weight to be unevenly distributed. Keep your chair as close to your work as possible to avoid reaching. Always scoot your chair in every time you sit down.
- 4.** Hold the phone. Talking on the phone with the receiver pinched between the neck and ear is bad practice and causes aches. Either hold the phone with your hand or get a headset.
- 5.** Place your computer monitor directly in front of you. The top should be no higher than eye level, and you should only need to look down slightly (about 15 degrees) when reading. Place the keyboard directly in front of the monitor and make sure the entire set-up is directly in front of you, so your neck is in a neutral position and not turning side to side.
- 6.** Easy on the eyes. Avoid eye strain by making sure that your monitor is not too close. The monitor should be about an arm's length away.
- 7.** No glaring. Make sure the monitor is not placed in front of a window or a bright background.
- 8.** Support your feet. Feet should be able to be placed on a surface while you are seated. If your feet don't comfortably reach the floor or there is pressure on the backs of your legs, use a footrest or lower the keyboard and chair.
- 9.** Give it a rest. Rest your eyes periodically for several seconds by looking at objects at a distance to give your eyes a break.



10.

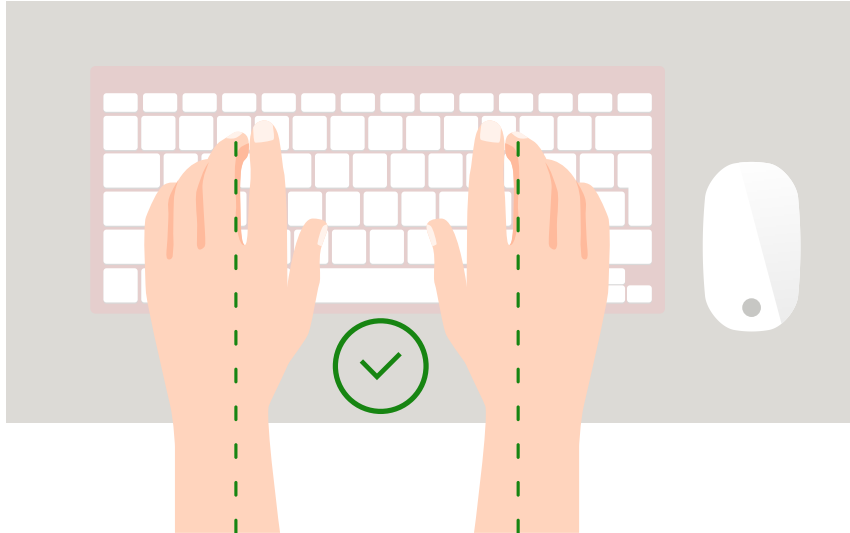
Keep the keyboard and mouse close. The keyboard and mouse should be near enough to one another that you are not reaching for either. Remember, the best way to place them is so that the hands and wrists can remain in a neutral position at all times.

11.

Place the keyboard tray and mouse at the same height as the elbows and forearms. The shoulders should fall relaxed by your side. Your wrists should be at a neutral angle, not causing your hands to reach up or down, but to comfortably be placed on the keyboard.

12.

Place the keyboard close to the front of the desk. - about 2 inches (5 cm) from the desk edge. The spacing should allow enough room to rest your wrists but not enough to require reaching.



13.

Is your wrist reaching? When accessing the mouse your hand should remain in line with your wrist. Your arm should bend from the elbow, not the wrist, to reach the mouse.

14.

Take just a moment to notice the angles of the hands and wrists in the top image and bottom image. The top image displays a neutral posture that will reduce the likelihood of aches, pains, and injuries. The bottom image displays a poor placement of the hands and wrists that will cause strain, and overtime, can result in injury. Observe your own positioning and work to maintain a neutral placement.

15.

Bending the wrist upward. One of the most common issues with keyboards is the tendency to bend the wrist upward. Check that the keyboard is properly adjusted and doesn't push your wrist into awkward angles.



16.

Discomfort from mouse use? You may find your hand fatiguing from frequent mouse usage. Consider alternative devices such as trackballs or an ergo mouse to relieve pressure.

18.

How do you feel? Set a timer on your phone that will remind you to observe how you feel twice a day for a week to notice any issues. Set the timer to alarm after a few hours of work and then close to the end of the work day. Notice if you are experiencing any aches, pains, strain, or unusual body fatigue. If you find you are, take a moment to adjust and perfect your workstation set-up. This small action can be enough to improve your energy at the end of the day, prevent aches and pains, and ensure you are able to work injury-free.

... Follow-Up Questions

1. Do you experience aches or pains after an extended period at your workstation?
2. Have you adjusted your workstation to fit your needs?
3. What is one thing you can do to improve your current workstation set up?