

OFFICE ERGONOMICS

PREVENT INJURY WITH A WELL DESIGNED WORK SPACE

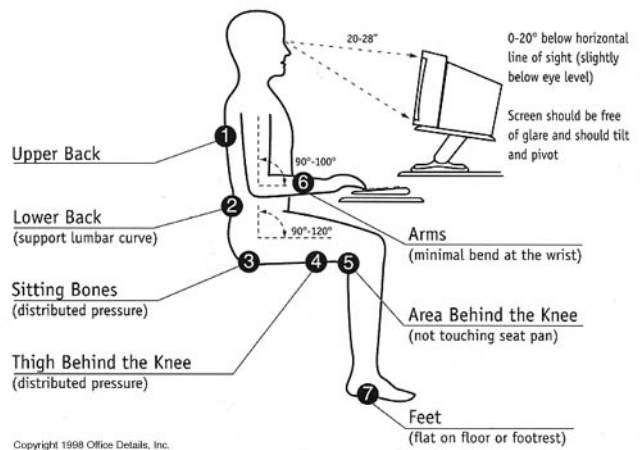
The most important purchase you make this year may not be a new computer, but rather the wrist pad to accompany it. As workplace injury claims increase, repetitive strain injury and other ergonomic related ailments have forced businesses to take the issues of posture and lighting more seriously.

Good ergonomics are vitally important for desk-intensive jobs such as data input, accounting and drafting. Even casual computer users will be happier and will work more productively in an ergonomically correct environment.

Understanding proper ergonomics is as easy as listening to your body. Here are some typical ergonomic ailments that plague the modern office worker, and what you can do to alleviate them.

- **Pain in the wrist**

- Experiment with the height and angle of your keyboard, so your elbows are bent to 90 degrees and you are able to type comfortably. Invest in a wrist pad to help minimize wrist pain. Try lightening your touch on the keyboard; many users pound on the keyboard unnecessarily.



- **Sore back**

- Adjust the position of your chair so both feet touch flat on the floor, knees should be slightly higher than the hips. Make sure your chair has good lumbar support so that spinal curvatures are maintained; use a pillow or towel behind the low back if necessary. Consider investing in an “Obus Forme” style of back support if your chair is inadequate. Sit-Fit cushions are another great way to force yourself in to proper posture, and they give the added benefit of helping you train your core stabilizers (muscles around your mid-section) while you sit.



- **Eye strain**

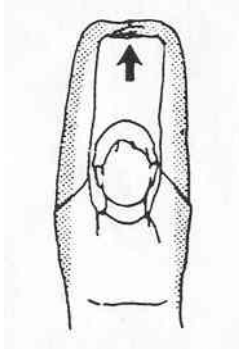
- Adjust the light source or your computer monitor so light shines at right angles to your screen. If you can't adjust the light angle, buy a glare-proof screen. Take at least a 5-minute break after every hour or two at the screen.

- **Neck / shoulder and upper back pain**

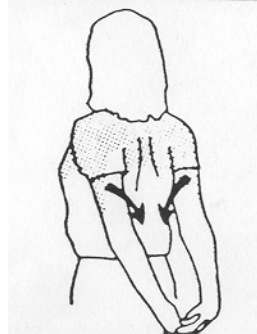
- This is an extremely common ailment of those who must work at a computer all day. Performing some simple neck and upper back stretches, as shown below, will minimize the discomfort that you feel. The addition of the aforementioned back support, as well as elevating your monitor so that the top of it is level with your eye level will ensure that you stay “sitting tall”. This upright posture will place less burden on the base of your neck and upper back.
- You can have the most expensive chair in the world, but if you don't sit in it properly, you will not reap the benefits. When sitting down, make sure that you are sitting *in* the chair, with your back supported completely.
- Relax your shoulders. **Take this test:** Shrug your shoulders up to your ears, and then forcefully drop them. Take note of this new shoulder position, as this is where your shoulders should remain throughout the day. Most people find it very difficult to truly relax their shoulders. This inability to relax leads to prolonged low-level muscle firing, which in turn leads to muscle tightness and pain.

The following stretches can be performed from the convenience of your desk chair. As with all stretches, hold these positions for 30 seconds, with no bouncing. The sensation should be one of noticeable stretch, with no pain. You should be able to smile and stretch at the same time!

Side / Arm stretch



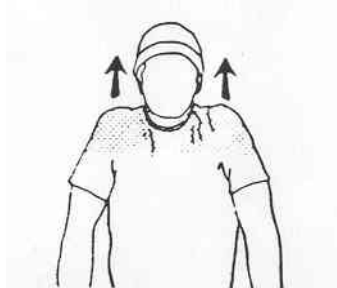
Chest / Shoulder Stretch



Shoulder stretch



Shoulder / Neck Shrug



Shoulder/Neck Stretch



POSTURE

Maintaining proper posture not only allows your joints to move freely through their ranges of motion, it also allows your organs to work more efficiently (i.e.: bowels to function, heart to pump, lungs to fill with air). The importance of good posture cannot be overemphasized, so even if you consider yourself to have poor posture, there are always ways to change.

Poor posture is often caused by muscle imbalances. Some muscles are too tight and become shortened, and others become permanently elongated and weakened. This process is termed "*plastic deformation*". People who work all day in front of a computer often experience the effects of this process. The rounded shoulders (shortened chest muscles and continually elongated mid back muscles) and forward drawn head position (tightness in the back of the neck and lengthening of the muscles in the front of the neck) lead to all sorts of pain patterns and discomfort. The key to changing muscle imbalances, and therefore posture, is through a specific and personalized exercise program geared to lengthening and strengthening appropriate tissues.

POSTURE TIPS

- When sitting, make sure both feet touch flat on the floor; knees should be slightly higher than the hips and spinal curvatures maintained. Use a pillow or towel behind the low back if necessary.
- Use the arm rests on your office chair to take stress off the shoulders.
- Avoid holding the phone between the shoulder and ear. Use a headset if a large part of your day is spent on the phone.
- For deskwork, bring documents up to eye level to avoid hunching over with the head looking down for long periods of time.
- Take regular breaks during the day to move joints and stretch.
- Have your workstation ergonomically assessed.
- The back support of your chair is only beneficial if you sit against it.
- When standing, keep one foot elevated on a box or step.
- Maintain abdominal hollow and pelvic tilt to support the low back.
- Wear supportive footwear.
- When sleeping, the use of an orthopaedic pillow may be beneficial to help rest the neck and shoulder musculature.
- Do not use more than one pillow and avoid sleeping on your stomach.
- A pillow between the knees when side lying, helps minimize pelvic rotation.

TIPS FOR STRETCHING

- Perform a 5-10 minute general full body warm up first (walking stairs, marching)
- Get into stretch position carefully and gently take up muscle slack until a stretch is felt
- Pay close attention to posture and body alignment, only stretching one specific muscle at a time
- **Hold** stretch and take out slack as muscle relaxes. Do not bounce while stretching. *Simply hold and breathe deep* to encourage relaxation.
- Use a chair or wall for support if necessary
- Stretches should be performed once and performed at least twice per day in order to achieve optimal increases in range of motion.

Stretches should be performed both before and after activity. Stretches before activity (occupational) can be specific to the muscles to be used in the activity. Stretching for general elongation of tissue can be performed after activity when the core body temperature is higher.

“Sit tall, Walk tall, Think tall!”