

Healthy Back Habits: Workstation Wellness

If your daily routine requires a lot of computer time or desk work, chances are you spend most of your time sitting. Staying in a seated position for a long period of time can affect your back. The position your body is in while looking at a screen, sitting in a chair, or leaning over a desk can put extra stress on your back and result in back pain.

It is important to pay special attention to the set up of your workstation. This includes the position of your chair, screen, mouse, and keyboard. Proper setup of a workstation is sometimes referred to as *ergonomics*. Ergonomics relates to ensuring proper body position during movement, or body mechanics, by changing your environment. For example, you can ensure good body mechanics and reduce back strain and pain by correctly setting up the environment you work in, or your workstation.



Your Desk

- Your work desk should be about the same height as your elbows when you are sitting. There are no specific desk heights that are recommended, however it is usually appropriate to choose one that has a desktop 25 to 29 inches high. This will also ensure proper height for the keyboard which will be discussed later.
- Make sure the space under the desk is clear of objects. There should be enough room for your legs to rest comfortably and for you to stretch out your legs.
- Keep the things you use most often within reach. Extending, reaching, and bending from your chair can add stress on the back. Keep your phone near you and any frequently used items, such as your printer, a stapler, books, and documents.



Your Chair

When your body is in a sitting position for a long time there is pressure on the spine and blood can pool in the legs and feet. When your sitting position doesn't provide proper posture and alignment of the body this adds to the stress on the back.

- Try to avoid sitting for longer than 30 minutes.
 - Keep this in mind when you are involved in long meetings. Take stand and stretch breaks, to relieve your body of the sitting position for a few minutes.
 - At your desk, stand while you are reading, or take a few steps around the office.
- Follow these tips for sitting and adjusting your chair:
 - Sit up straight. Your lower back should be against the back of the chair and your shoulders should also be in contact with the back of the chair. Consider using a rolled-up towel to support your lower back while seated.
 - Adjust the height of your chair so that your feet are flat on the ground. The angle of the back of the chair should allow your upper and lower body to be at a 90-degree angle from the bend of the hip.
 - Your knees should be at the same level as your hips and there should be 2 to 3 inches between the back of your knees and the edge of the seat.
 - It is best for your arms to be at your sides while working at the computer. If you can't adjust your armrests to allow for this, rest the elbows lightly on the armrest. Avoid using the armrests to slouch.

Your Computer Monitor

Properly aligning your computer monitor can help with three main things: eye strain, neck pain, and fatigued shoulders. It is important to pay attention to both the placement of the monitor and the view of the screen.

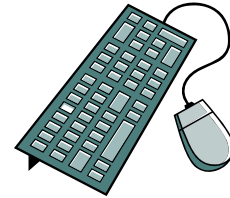
- Follow these tips for setting up your computer monitor:
 - Place your monitor directly in front of you.
 - The top of the screen should be eye level when you are sitting in the proper position.
 - The monitor should be arms length away from you, or 20 to 26 inches.
 - Angle the top of the monitor so that it tilts back about 10 to 20 degrees.
 - Keep the screen clean and free of dust.
 - Make sure the brightness is on an appropriate setting so that it doesn't hurt your eyes when reading. Also pay attention to glare from windows or lights. Avoid positions or lighting that causes glare which can cause eye strain.



Your Keyboard and Mouse

The keyboard and mouse position in your workstation has more of an influence on your forearms, wrist, and hands than on your back. However, it is an important part of a healthy work station.

- The level and placement of your keyboard should allow your upper body to be in the following position:
 - Shoulders relaxed and arms resting at your sides.
 - Sitting up straight without reaching or extending to reach the keyboard.
 - Elbows bent at a 90-degree angle with forearms parallel to the floor.
- If your desk does not allow for this proper position, consider using an extendable keyboard tray. Your mouse should be at the same level as your keyboard and should be within close reach.
- Avoid resting your hand on your mouse when you are not using it.



Sources

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January 2006

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