



Office Ergonomics

Arkansas Workers' Compensation Commission/
Health and Safety Division

www.awcc.state.ar.us 1-800-622-4472 fax: 501-683-3169
Health&Safety@awcc.state.ar.us

Do you know what ergonomic means? It's nothing magic; it just means making the workplace fit the worker instead of making the worker fit the workplace. You may have an ergonomic chair, an ergonomic wrist rest, or other types of ergonomically designed office equipment, but do you know

how to use and adjust them to get the most benefit? This pamphlet offers some tips on how to get the most out of your ergonomic office equipment:

1. If it hurts, stop doing it!

Pay attention to what you're doing, how you're sitting, and what hurts. Look for another way to do it that doesn't hurt.

2. Ergonomic = Adjustable

Usually, if a chair or other piece of office equipment is advertised as ergonomic, it means that it can be adjusted. Learn how to adjust your chair, footrest, keyboard tray and other equipment or furniture and make the adjustments so your workstation fits you, not the person who worked there before you.

3. Practice Body-Friendly Posture

Body friendly posture is posture that puts a minimum amount of strain on your body; especially the joints, muscles and nerves. Adjust your furniture and equipment so you use body friendly posture. For seated work, the following are some general guidelines:

Head, Neck and Eyes:

Face your work head-on; don't sit sideways or work with your head twisted to one side.

Don't stick your neck out; your head weighs about 15 pounds

Don't tilt your head back; most of the time you should be looking straight ahead or slightly down.

Don't hold the telephone receiver between your cheek and shoulder. Either hold the receiver with your hand or use a headset.

Avoid eye strain. Keep your work area evenly lit. Avoid placing your computer in front of a window.

Shoulders, Arms and Forearms:

Shoulders should be relaxed; avoid pulling your shoulders up.

Arms should hang straight down from shoulders.

Avoid lifting elbows above chest height; keep elbows close to the body (no “chicken wings”).

Forearms work well in a variety of positions; best position depends on type of work being done.

For work where close inspection or viewing is required (“threading a needle” type work), forearms should be bent to bring work into best visual focus. For most hand work (typing, light assembly, etc.) forearms should be at 90o angle to arms. For work requiring force (packing, pushing, etc.) forearms and arms should be in more of a straight line.

Hands and Wrists:

Keep your wrists straight. The normal position for a handshake is a straight wrist position. It’s OK to rotate your hand, but avoid bending your wrist.

When keyboarding, don’t let your wrists drop. Keep your hands floating above the keyboard.

Don’t prop your hands on wrist rests or other supports.

Don’t reach for your mouse; place it in a comfortable position so your arm and forearm stay at about a 90o angle.

Back:

Sit up straight; don’t slouch down in your chair or sit hunched over.

Face your work head-on; don’t sit sideways.

Avoid bending and twisting; twist the chair, not your back.

Avoid reaches over your head or behind your back. Don’t put items you frequently need in areas where you will have to stretch, twist or bend to get them.

Hips, Legs, Knees and Feet:

Hips should be supported by the chair seat.

When seated, knees should be at about the same height or slightly higher than hips; a foot rest may be needed to raise the knees to a comfortable position.

The front edge of the chair should not cut into the back of the knees.

Feet should be flat on floor or other support. Wearing very high heels while seated may cause ankle and leg strains.

For standing work in addition to the tips listed above, wear comfortable footwear, consider using fatigue mats and, if work requires standing in one spot, try using a ‘bar rail’ support. If you can prop a foot up while standing, it eases a lot of the stress on your lower back.

Positioning Work

You may find it easier to use many of the guidelines for body-friendly posture if you pay attention to how you lay out your work. Place items you frequently use in areas so you won’t have to reach overhead, bend or twist to get them. It is often better to move an object further away--forcing you to stand up and walk to it--than leave it close by if you will be tempted to bend or twist to retrieve it.

Use Mechanical Assists

Invest in carts if you must carry heavy loads. Use the elevator instead of the stairs when carrying heavy objects. You may also find that automatic staplers or postage machines can reduce wrist and hand problems.

Break Up Your Day

Reduce the time--and thus the stress on your body--of tasks by breaking up the amount of time spent doing any one thing. This means not saving all of your filing and then standing up for four hours! Move from seated to standing work, from work requiring lots of hand motion to work requiring little hand motion, etc.

Report Pain and Injuries Promptly

Your company can't work with you to make your workplace safer unless you let them know there's a problem. Report problems promptly.