

Ergonomics at work

In this article you will learn how to optimize workplace posture and setup to enhance health and productivity.

Good posture

Standing

Natural “S” shape curve of your spine maintained.

Shoulders relaxed back and down.

Feet hips width apart with weight evenly through both legs.

Head central, not tilting forwards or backwards.

Sitting

Back upright with a natural “S” curve through your spine - hips slightly higher than your knees.

Shoulders relaxed.

Forearms horizontal.

Feet flat on the floor.

Move regularly. No matter how good your posture, even this can become painful after some time. Take breaks little and often, rather than one long break.

Avoid

Slumping

Lowering your chair

Leaning forward

Sitting or standing unevenly for long periods

Twisting

Work station

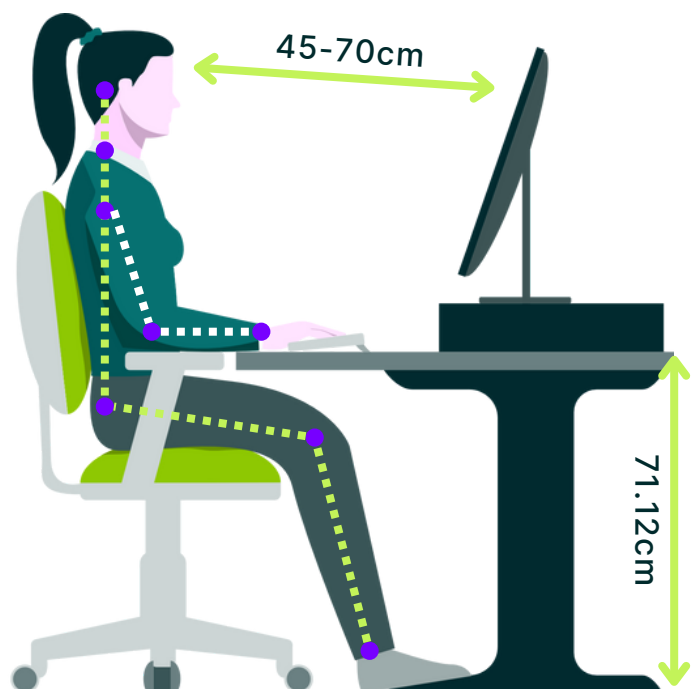
Having both an adjustable desk and chair is important to ensure you can set your workstation up to a point that fits you.

Adjust your chair so that when your buttocks are right at the back of your chair, your feet rest flat on the floor, and your hips are slightly higher than your knees.

Adjust your desk to ensure that when your shoulders are relaxed, your forearms rest horizontally on the table.

If you aren't able to adjust your desk, move your chair to a position that allows you to sit at your desk comfortably. Use a foot rest to place your feet on if required.

You may have an adjustable seat and/or backrest. Ensure your seat is not tilted too far forward, and your back rest fits comfortably into the small of your back, supporting a slight curve. Make sure the front of your chair does not press into the back of your legs as this can restrict your circulation.



You may have armrests on your chair. If so, make sure that they are at a height that allows you to rest your forearms on them, without having to slouch or even hunch your shoulders.

Many armrests can actually be a hinderance if it means you cannot move your chair in close enough to your desk. It may be worth removing them if so.

Keep a tidy work space. Not only does this mean physically you can sit at your desk as optimally as possible, but psychologically it helps with managing stress levels.

Equipment

Be flexible with your desk arrangement. Move your equipment around depending on the task in hand. If you are going to spend a lot of time on the phone, ensure it is close at hand. If your task requires you to be more computer based, ensure your keyboard and mouse are in the correct position.

Your keyboard should be positioned directly in front of you with your wrist and forearms supported on the table. This helps to prevent forearm and wrist aches and pains.

You will often see people reaching for their mouse - ensure it is positioned near to the end of your keyboard so that you do not have to move your arm too much to the front.

Screen and document holder

Make sure you sit directly at your computer. Your screen should be positioned around arms length away from you. When looking at the screen your head should be in a neutral position (neither tilted forwards nor backwards). If it is not, adjust the height of your screen accordingly. Your document holder ideally sits directly below your screen to ensure you are not having to turn your head from one way to the other.



If you are a touch typist, you may wish to raise your document holder to be a little higher as you will spend more of your time looking at it.

Eyes

Look away from your screen regularly to avoid straining your eyes. Keep your screen clean from dust and debris, and don't be afraid to adjust your screen settings or zoom in and out as and when you need to.

STS

Many workplaces are starting to embrace sitting and standing desks. These allow you to sit for some periods of the day, and then adjust your desk to be able to stand. This helps employees to move more regularly, lowering their risk of cardiovascular problems, musculoskeletal aches and pains and other related complications.

If you have one of these desks, alternate periods of sitting and standing little and often, eg, sit for 30 minutes, stand for 30 minutes. This is far better than half a day sitting then half a day standing as these are still significantly long periods of time.

Remember: when you stand up you may need to adjust your equipment positioning and height so ensure you take the time to do this.

Environment

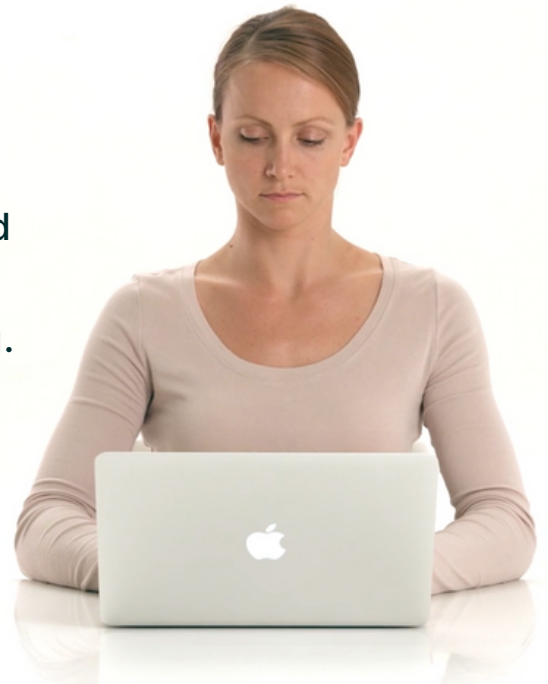
Make sure your working environment is as optimal as possible. Poor temperature, whether that's too hot or too cold, can increase your likelihood of stress and physical aches and pains. It can also affect your concentration as can noise, be it from a colleagues or your own music.



Laptops

Many of our jobs require us to be more portable with our work. Laptops fulfill an excellent role of letting you be on the road with your job. There are down side to this however, when it comes to your wellbeing.

Laptop computers force us into poor postures with the screen being fused to the keyboard, forcing you to slump and hunch. Tablets and smartphones present a similar issue.



Try to avoid long periods of time working on any of these devices. If your laptop is your only computer, get a separate keyboard, mouse and a laptop stand. These do not have to be expensive, but will allow you to achieve the same ergonomic set-up that you would with your desktop computer.

If working on your laptop or tablet is unavoidable, ensure you find the most suitable place to work, and take more regular breaks as this poor posture will cause issues much quicker than a good posture.

Some employees have to carry their laptops and other work documents with them fairly regularly. If this is the case, ensure you carry it in a rucksack wearing both straps. This prevents asymmetrical leaning postures and frees up your hands.

If using a phone consider a headset. Holding the phone between your ear and your shoulder quite quickly aggravates musculoskeletal aches and pains.