Ergonomics – Checking your workstation

To understand the best way to set up a computer workstation, it helps to understand the concept of neutral body positioning. This is a comfortable working posture in which your joints are naturally aligned. Working in a neutral position reduces stress and strain on your muscles, tendons and skeletal system, and reduces your risk of injuring your muscles or bones. You are in control of your workstation, so adjust it to suit your needs and increase your comfort at work.

An Ergonomic Workstation

It is important to have an ergonomic workstation that suits your individual and work needs, working posture, tasks/duties and products or tools that you use regularly. This can be achieved by having your workstation checked by a healthcare professional and by implementing the following guidelines.

Chair

1. Adjust your chair so that your thighs are parallel to the floor and your feet rest flat on the floor or on a footrest.

2. Adjust the back rest of your chair so that the lumbar support fits into the small of your back and supports your spine.

3. Adjust the back rest angle so you are sitting upright, especially if you are mainly typing. Adjust the seat pan forward if you need to lean forward at your desk slightly, but not so much that you slide off the seat.

Desk

Make sure that your forearms are parallel with the floor or angled slightly downwards. Elbows should sit just above level of desk. You can achieve this by adjusting your chair up or down if the desk is fixed.

Footrest

You will need a footrest if your feet can't rest flat on the floor with the chair at the correct height. Ensure that it is large enough to support both your feet.

Computer screen

When sitting in the correct position look straight ahead and you should be looking just below the top of the computer screen. The screen should be a minimum one arms length away (adjust depending on your focal range and screen size and number), and the most comfortable viewing zone is 15° below the horizontal.

Keep your screen free of grime and dust as this will help to avoid eye strain.
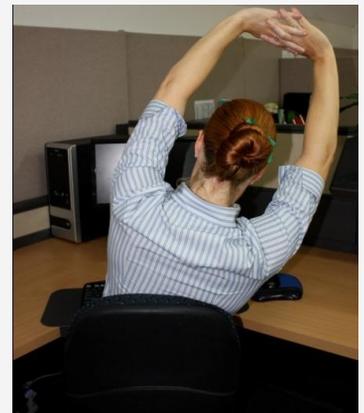
Work breaks

Try to get up from your desk and move around every 30 minutes, even if it is only for a minute.

If you don't have time to leave your desk, you should take a short 5 to 10 second break moving your fingers from the keyboard to relax your hands.

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Keyboard and Mouse

1. Position the keyboard back from the edge of the desk so there is enough room to rest your hands when you pause from typing.

2. Adjust the height of your keyboard incline so your hands are relaxed and in a neutral position in line with your forearms.

3. The mouse should always be kept within easy reach and as close to you as possible. Keep your hands and fingers relaxed when using the mouse and have regular breaks from using it.

Lighting in the workplace

Place your monitor to the side of a light source, rather than directly underneath. If the lighting source is fluorescent strip lighting, the sides of the desks should be parallel with the lights.

Try not to put your desk near a window. If this is unavoidable, the general rule to prevent glare is to ensure that neither you nor your screen faces the window.

Resting your eyes

If you are working at your computer for long periods of time you should rest your eyes frequently. Every 15 minutes or so, refocus your eyes on a distant object for at least 5 seconds. You should also try to break up your work during the day so that you have a longer rest from the screen.

Glare and reflection

It is important to detect the presence of glare and reflection to determine whether there is glare from overhead lights or natural sources. You can detect glare on your screen by switching off the screen.

If you detect any glare, you can do one of the following to try to reduce it:

• Tilt the screen so that the reflections are directed below eye level.
• Purchase a light diffusing cover for your screen.
• Add blinds or shades to windows.
• Adjust software settings so that dark characters are on a light background.

A tidy desk matters

• Adequate space to get in and out of the workstation
• Adequate space under the desk to sit comfortably, facing front
• A clean desktop, with only what you are currently working on.
• File, delegate or discard piles of paper.
• Ensure plenty of working surface on either side of keyboard
• Keep "most used" items within easy reach.

Things to check…

1. **Head, neck, shoulders** and **spine** in alignment.

2. **Head, neck** and **trunk** to face forward (not twisted).

3. **Shoulders** and **upper arms** to be parallel and close to the body.

4. **Forearms** at right angles to the body, with **wrists** and **hands** in neutral position.

5. **Thighs** to be parallel to the desk and **lower legs** at right angles to the floor.

6. **Feet** to rest flat on the floor. Use a footrest if required.

Stretches

As well as moving around, there are stretches in the factsheet titled 'Stretches to do at your desk'.

Stretching is very important to do regularly (every 30 minutes or so) if you are sitting most of the day.