

Setting Up Your Ergonomic Office Space

Implementing good ergonomic practices can greatly reduce your chances of injury. These tips are standard adjustments you can do yourself to improve the ergonomics of your workstation.

Chair

Seat height: Your feet should be flat on the floor or footrest, and your knees should be bent at 90 degrees and at the same level as your hips.

Armrests: These should be positioned so that your elbows are supported and close to your sides, and so that your arms are in a relaxed position—not pushed up, and not hanging loosely. Your upper arms should be parallel with the rest of your body.

Backrest: Adjust the seat back to provide lumbar support—a good guideline is to set the curve directly across from your navel, and then adjust from there until it's comfortable for you. The chair back should be reclined so that your head is evenly balanced on the column of your spine, helping reduce your neck's work throughout the day.

Seat depth: Sitting completely back in the chair, you should be able to fit 2-3 fingers between the front of the seat and the back of your knee. This helps prevent back pain, leg pain, and sciatica, and helps make the chair far more comfortable.

Move More!

Every 15 Minutes
Change positions

Every Hour
Stretch, especially
your neck, shoulders,
arms, and wrists



Keyboard and Mouse

Height: The keyboard and mouse should be at elbow height, positioned in a straight line with your elbows, wrists, and hands. Move closer/farther so that your arms/shoulders are in a neutral position.

Keyboard: The keyboard should lay flat, allowing the wrist to be straight in line with the hand and forearm. Do not elevate the back of the keyboard with provided feet.

Mouse: Your mouse should be at the same height as your keyboard and as close as possible to either the left or right side. Minimize shoulder pain by reducing reach and keeping your arms close to your body with minimal elbow pivot. Move your mouse from your elbow, rather than your wrist. Be cautious in using wrist rests for mousing—they can encourage pivoting your wrist, increasing strain on that joint.

Adjustment Assistance

You can request an ergonomic evaluation by calling our office at (612) 626-6002. We can assist in providing information, making adjustments, and recommending equipment. Videos demonstrating chair adjustments can also be found on our website at dehs.umn.edu/ergonomics-programs.

Monitor

Height and distance: To reduce neck and shoulder discomfort, your monitor should be positioned so the top bar of the monitor is at eye-level. If you use bifocals, you may want to adjust your screens to a lower position. Your screens should be positioned at about arms' length.

Monitor separation: If you have one primary monitor, it should be centered on the G and H keys on your keyboard. If you use two monitors and use them equally, they should be placed side-by-side with minimal space between them—the space should be centered on the G and H keys on your keyboard.

Laptops: If you use a laptop as a secondary monitor while working, use a monitor riser or other elevator to match its height to your primary monitor. The top bar of the screens should be the same height, if possible.

Lighting and glare: Keep your monitor screen straight up and down, or tilted slightly towards you to help reduce glare.

Accessories

Phone: If you are on the phone for much of your workday, consider getting a headset to prevent neck and shoulder pain.

Footrest/Keyboard Tray: Some people require further adjustments to get to the right height to use their keyboard/mouse. When your feet are flat on the floor, you should be able to keep your elbow, wrist, and keyboard/mouse in a straight line. If you cannot, a footrest or keyboard tray may be needed.



Sit-Stand Desk Ergonomics

Body Position

Arms: Your arms should be relaxed and close to your sides. Your upper arms should be parallel with the rest of your body, and your elbow, wrist, and keyboard should be aligned in a straight line. Often this means raising up the desk higher than you would initially think. Asking a colleague to observe you can be helpful to make sure your alignment is correct.

Back: Your stance should be neutral so that your head is evenly balanced on the column of your spine, helping reduce your neck's work throughout the day. Avoid leaning extensively on your desk or from side to side.

Legs/Feet: Keep your weight balanced evenly between your feet, keeping your hips as square as possible. If you find yourself shifting your weight from side to side, it may be time to sit down for a while. Consider using a footrest to prop your foot up on, keeping your weight evenly balanced between your legs. Another good option is to adjust your office chair so you can comfortably bend one knee and rest it on the seat. This helps with weight distribution while keeping it evenly balanced.

Monitor

Monitor, keyboard, and mouse adjustments: Monitors, mice, and keyboards should not need much adjustment from where they are in your sitting position. More information on proper set-up can be found in our Setting Up Your Ergonomic Office Space fact sheet.

Footrest/Keyboard Tray

Some people require further adjustments to get to the right height to use their keyboard/mouse. When your feet are flat on the floor, you should be able to keep your elbow, wrist, and keyboard/mouse in a straight line. If you cannot, a footrest or keyboard tray may be needed.



Work Practices

Standing Time: Stand for no more than 4 hours a day, to reduce the physical concerns from standing too much. Ease into it—start standing for 30–60 minutes a day and gradually increase your time. We also recommend breaking the time up throughout the day. Another tip is to leave your desk in a standing position at the end of the day, so when you arrive at work in the morning, you start your day standing. Some people set a timer on their computer/phone to remind them to sit/stand at appropriate intervals.

Benefits of Standing: There is some evidence that standing at work can increase productivity and mood—in one study, 87% of users said that they felt more comfortable and energized after 4 weeks of using a sit-stand desk. Evidence for improvement in cardiovascular health and weight control is more nuanced—evidence often only shows that “not sitting” is beneficial, and doesn’t differentiate between walking, standing, or exercise. Enjoy your sit-stand desk, but remember standing is not a replacement for other physical activity.

Request an Ergonomic Evaluation

For assistance adjusting your work station, you can request an ergo evaluation with one of our Industrial Hygienists. Call (612) 626-6002 to schedule an appointment.

