

More Good Advice

PROTECT YOUR BACK

Your back is always working. Maintaining **good posture** ensures that your vertebrae are properly aligned. Your ears, shoulders and hips should be in a straight line. Without support from strong, flexible muscles, your back will begin to lose its natural alignment, which can lead to pain and strain.

Exercise strengthens your back as well as other muscles that support it. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderately intense exercise most days. Try aerobics, walking and abdominal crunches. It's also important to maintain a healthy weight. Excess abdominal weight pulls on your lower back, eventually causing strain.

LIFT IT RIGHT

- Squat and get close to the load.
- Lift with your legs.
- Don't twist your back while carrying.
- If it's too heavy, get help.
- Never pick up objects, even light ones, by bending at the waist.



WATCH OUT FOR EYESTRAIN

Prolonged close work or computer viewing won't permanently damage your eyesight — but you may feel eyestrain. **8 smart moves:**

1. Use adequate task lights to help you read documents.
2. Close drapes or blinds when possible to reduce glare.
3. Use a glare screen when possible.
4. Blink frequently to keep your eyes lubricated.
5. Clean your monitor screen.
6. Rest your eyes periodically by focusing on a distant object for a few seconds.
7. Increase the font size of your documents so they are easier to read.
8. Use a light screen with dark letters for contrast.



Stretches for the Working Stiff

There's more to ergonomics than just what your work area looks and feels like. Keeping your body flexible, strong and healthy means you're more resistant to work-related aches, pains and injury. You can do some easy stretches right at your workstation. **Smart moves:**

FINGER FLEXER. Twist a rubber band around all five fingers of one hand. Gently spread your fingers wide against the rubber band's resistance. Relax and repeat.



BACK RELAXER. Lower your head and slowly curl your spine forward toward the floor as far as you can. Hold for 10 seconds. Unwind slowly, allowing the spine to gently uncurl. Repeat several times a day.

NECK and SHOULDER STRETCH. Tilt your head so your left ear is pointing toward your left shoulder and hold for a few seconds, then switch sides. Drop your chin toward your chest, then raise your head and look over each shoulder. Shrug your shoulders toward your ears, then release them.

FEET and LEG FLEXER. If you stand at work, raise yourself up on your toes for a few seconds, then lower back down. Lift each foot and circle the ankle a few times in each direction, then flex and point your foot. Shake out your legs, letting your feet dangle loose.

Final thought: Applying ergonomics doesn't have to be complicated or costly — just paying attention to your body and not pushing beyond its limits will help you stay healthy and injury-free.

ERGONOMICS

MAKING YOUR SPACE
WORK FOR YOU





WHAT IS ERGONOMICS?

Ergonomics is the scientific study of how work affects the body. It simply means fitting the workspace (and tools used to do the job) to the person doing the work.

An ill-fitting workstation may lead to overreaching, awkward working positions and repetitive motions. Over time, this can lead to strain, pain and conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome, neck tension, tendonitis and low-back pain. However, an ergonomically friendly workstation improves comfort and can guard against such muscle strain. For helpful how-tos, read on.

What You Can Do

- **Adjust** your chair, keyboard, mouse and monitor so they are positioned appropriately for you.
- **Avoid** overreaching and awkward working positions.
- **Check** your posture.
- **Get** 7-8 hours of sleep per night and reduce stress.
- **Shift** your position periodically and gently stretch.
- **Use** the right tools for the job.
- **Exercise** regularly.
- **Don't** ignore numbness or pain.



A Workstation That Fits

Good work habits, physical fitness and proper posture can significantly reduce the muscle tension that can result from the static routine of work. To improve comfort at your workstation, **check the habits listed below that you can work on.**



- Your chair is positioned so that your feet rest flat on the floor. If your chair does not have good low-back support, use a small cushion or rolled-up towel behind your lower back.
- Your keyboard and mouse are positioned so that your elbows fall comfortably at your sides at a right angle ... forearms parallel to the floor ... wrists straight.
- You rest your hands in your lap when you're not typing.
- While sitting, you leave approximately 2-3 inches between the back of your knees and the edge of your seat.
- Your monitor is level with your line of vision and approximately at arm's length. The monitor is also angled so that you do not have to crane your neck up, tilt your head down or turn to the side to look at it.
- Your desk accessories are within easy reach.

Did You Know?

The study of ergonomics has grown along with a rise in workplace musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). MSDs refer to conditions that involve the nerves, tendons, muscles and supporting structures of the body. The neck, shoulders, elbows, hands, wrists and back are the areas most often affected.

Don't ignore these symptoms:

Pain when you grip things; numbness, tingling or a "pins and needles" feeling in one or both hands; dropping things or clumsiness when handling objects; persistent back pain or back pain that radiates down one or both legs; or other unusual sensations, particularly in the hands or wrists. If symptoms persist, see your health care provider.



Sitting Pretty

No other position puts as much pressure on your back muscles and spinal column as sitting. Slouching in your chair — whether it's in a car, an airplane, a classroom, the office or your favorite recliner — can cause backache as well as neck, shoulder, head and leg pain. You can ease the strain with proper posture. **When sitting, keep your:**

- **Feet** flat on the floor or resting on a footrest.
- **Back** flat against the chair's backrest with your lower back bolstered by a lumbar support or cushion.
- **Head** up, chin tucked in.
- **Weight** resting evenly on your upper thighs, to help support your spine.



Ergonomics for Everyone

No one is immune to stress and strain on the body. An ergonomic work environment can help you feel better, work more efficiently and avoid injury, no matter what the job. **Helpful hints for at work and at home:**

Use the right tools and keep them in good repair. They can reduce strain on your muscles and joints.

Use a better grip. Try to use a full-hand grip rather than a precision finger grip.

Listen to your body. If you feel pain, numbness, stiffness or soreness in any body part, take it as a sign to adjust your work environment.

Regulate the temperature. Being too cold puts extra stress on muscles and joints. If you can't control the temperature, wear layered clothing.

Check your posture. Allow your spine to be in a natural position — don't sit or stand stiffly straight or slouch.