

# Workstation Ergonomics

## Ergonomics For Everyone

Hairdressers, athletes, construction workers, delivery people ... no one is immune from stress and strain on the body. An ergonomic work environment can help you feel better, work more efficiently and avoid injury, no matter what your job. Here are some helpful hints.

**Use the right tools and keep them in working order.** Tools that are in good repair and right for the job reduce strain on muscles and joints.

**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, so it is more ergonomically correct.

**Exercise regularly.** Keeping your body in shape makes you more resistant to work-related injury.

**Regulate temperature when possible.** Being too cold puts extra stress on muscles and joints. If you can't control the temperature of your workplace, wear layered clothing, so you stay comfortable.

**Check your posture.** Allow your spine to be in a natural position as you work — don't sit or stand stiffly straight or slouch. Keep your chin level.

**The goal:** No matter what your workplace, arrange it so you feel comfortable, and you don't have to reach, strain or struggle.



**Ergonomics:**  
the  
scientific  
study of  
how work  
affects the  
body.

### Symptoms You Shouldn't Ignore

The following can be signs of a wrist or hand injury, such as carpal tunnel syndrome, ganglion cyst, tendonitis or "wear and tear" arthritis. All of these problems are treatable, especially if they are caught early. Letting the problem go without treatment can lead to pain and possible disability.

If you have the following symptoms, see your doctor:

- Tingling and numbness in one or both hands, either during the day or at night
- Pain when you grip things, such as a steering wheel or coffee mug
- Clumsiness when handling objects, dropping things
- Bumps or swelling in your hand, wrist or fingers that do not go away
- Pain at the base of your thumb

**Keep it simple:** Ergonomics doesn't have to be complicated or costly — just paying attention to your body and not pushing your physique beyond its limits will help you stay healthy and injury free.

## How to Counter Computer Vision Syndrome

Studies show that nearly 60 million people suffer from eye or vision problems due to computer work. The American Optometric Association (AOA) reports that approximately 14 percent of patients schedule eye exams because of what is now known as computer vision syndrome (CVS).

**What is it?** CVS is defined by the AOA as "the complex of eye and vision problems ... which are experienced during or related to computer use." Symptoms include:

- Eyestrain
- Blurred near or distance vision
- Headaches
- Dry or irritated eyes (red eyes)
- Neck and/or backaches
- Light sensitivity
- Double vision
- Fatigue



### Here's what you can do to prevent CVS:

- Set your computer screen 20-26 inches away from your eyes and about 20 degrees below eye level.
- Keep your document holder close to the screen.
- Dim overhead lights and keep desk lamps low and adjusted, so there is no glare on the screen (you can also get an anti-reflective filter for your screen).
- Take a break by taking your eyes off the screen every 15 minutes and focusing on distant objects to relax eye muscles.
- Blink frequently.

Illustration: Corbis, Photo: P. Cook

### Seeing Red?

**Overusing nonprescription drops to get rid of red eyes can actually lead to increased eye redness.**

**Why:** Eyes adjust to the drug in the drops.

**Smart move:** If you often experience red or dry eyes, consider using artificial tears instead.

**Or talk to your health care provider:** Those eye problems may be because of an underlying health condition or allergy.

### Fitting Your Workstation to You

If you work at a computer, your body pays the price for a poor workstation setup. But you don't need a consultant to help you achieve an "ergonomically correct workplace." You can make many changes easily yourself and at no cost to your employer. Try these tips.

**CHAIR:** Adjust your chair's height so your feet rest flat on the floor, and pressure is off the backs of your thighs. Try to find a chair that is firm and supportive. **Easy fix:** If your chair does not have good lower back support, place a small cushion behind the small of your back.

### KEYBOARD and MOUSE:

Your keyboard and mouse should be 1-2 inches from your thighs, so your elbows and wrists are in a straight line as you work. If necessary, attach a sliding keyboard tray underneath your desk. **Note:** Don't pound the keyboard. A light touch prevents extra wear and tear on wrists and hands.



**MONITOR:** Position your monitor in front of you, so you don't have to twist your neck to look at it. Be sure it is no more than an arm's length away, and the top of the screen is at eye level.

**More tips:** Keep your monitor screen clean to avoid eyestrain ... clear the area under your desk to provide room for your legs to stretch ... use a footrest if your feet don't reach the floor.