

TIP SHEET: DESK ERGONOMICS WHILE WORKING FROM HOME

Think about all that you do while working at your computer. What is your body posture while you are performing general computer functions, such as keying, using the mouse or writing notes? How long do you work at your computer without taking breaks? How is your work area set up? All of these are important questions to ask yourself in order to ensure you are comfortable and at your best when working – both physically and mentally.

Being at your best is even more important when you find yourself working from home, especially for long periods of time, as your home workspace may not have all the necessary things to help you maintain that physical and mental balance. Simply changing the way you interact with your computer equipment and furniture is the first step in making sure you can be as productive as possible.

IS YOUR WORKSTATION SET UP FOR YOUR “HANDEDNESS”?

Look at the direction of the workflow when performing simultaneous tasks. Generally, people are most comfortable when they work toward their dominant side. For example, if you are right-handed, your right hand is your dominant hand and your right side is your dominant side. Does the “handedness” of your workstation fit your hand dominance? In other words, does the design of the workstation promote your work to flow toward your dominant hand?

The “handedness” of the workstation is determined by the location of the keyboard relative to the work area where other tasks are performed simultaneously with keying. When this work area (often the writing surface) is to the left of the keyboard, it is said to be a left-handed workstation, and vice versa.

A right-handed employee who sits at a left-handed workstation will twist, turn, and reach to get to the work area to his/her left. The “handedness” of the workstation is not always a concern, as in the case when only one task is performed there (e.g. keying only).

RISK FACTORS

For computer users, there are certain conditions or risk factors that, when you are exposed frequently, can contribute to the development of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).

Associated with computer use, the conditions for exposing a user to the risk of MSDs are:

- Keying for long periods of time without breaks or rest
- Using force when striking the keyboard or when gripping the pointing device (e.g. mouse, trackball)
- Working with awkward neck, shoulder, elbow, wrist, or back postures
- Remaining in the same position for a long time with little or no movement (e.g. sitting, holding the mouse)
- Continuous pressure against (leaning on) the wrist rest, work surface edge, or armrest with the wrists, forearms, or elbows; or against the front edge of the chair with the back of the legs.

Do not wait until you feel pain or discomfort. Learn to change the way you work. If you understand your body posture in relationship to your computer equipment and furniture, you may be able to prevent this kind of injury. If you are exposed to any of these risk factors repeatedly or for long periods, you might experience pain or discomfort:

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LOWER BACK

- Chair adjustment
- Organization of the workstation

UPPER BACK

- Chair adjustment
- Keyboard height
- Location of the pointing device
- Organization of the workstation
- Computer monitor height and distance
- Placement of the document

NECK

- Organization of the workstation
- Computer monitor height and distance
- Placement of the document

ARMS/SHOULDERS

- Chair adjustment
- Keyboard height
- Location of the pointing device
- Organization of the workstation

FOREARMS

- Keyboard height
- Location of the pointing device
- Organization of the workstation

WRISTS/HANDS

- Keyboard height
- Location of the pointing device
- Organization of the workstation

VISION

- Computer monitor height and distance

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- Computer glare
- Placement of the document

HELPFUL TIPS

To help you avoid any issues with your workstation and your health, follow these tips:

- When searching for an ergonomic chair, focus on comfort such as lower back support, armrests and wheels to help you move more easily without straining yourself.
- Sitting straight and keeping your head, neck and torso in line can help you avoid extra strain on your back and neck.
- Keep your monitor/screens at or below eye level; having to look up at a screen can strain your neck.
- Adjust your chair so that your feet sit flat on the floor.
- Step away from your desk and move around or stretch even before you start to feel sore.

Source: Cal/OSHA, Division of Occupational Safety and Health, California Department of Industrial Relations