A. Summary

Use the following checklists to assess your own computer workstation. If you say “No” to any items within the lists, it may indicate a need for workstation adjustments or modifications. Refer to the diagram for the proper sitting position at a computer. For videos and classes about ergonomics, please visit the Safety Services website [1].

B. Chair Adjustment

☐ Is your chair height adjustable?

☐ Does your chair support your lower back?

☐ Is there room between the front edge of the chair seat and the back of your knees?

☐ Can you easily reach your work without interference from the arms of your chair?

☐ When using the keyboard or mouse, are you able to keep your arms in a comfortable position with elbows in at your sides?
Do your feet rest on a footrest?

Are your knees bent at approximately 90-110 degree angles?

Sitting with your feet supported by a footrest will help support your spine. Having your thighs parallel to the seat with knees bent at approximately a 90-110 degree angle, and having adequate clearance behind your knees will keep the chair from interfering with the blood circulation of your legs.

If the back of your chair is adjustable, raise or lower it so that the contour of the chair provides maximum lumbar (lower back) support. If possible, adjust the tilt of the backrest to support your body in an upright position. A slight backward angle is also acceptable. Adjust the chair according to what is most comfortable for you.

If your chair has arms, they should allow you to get close to your work without getting in the way. When using the keyboard, they should be at a height where they barely contact your elbows when your arms are resting comfortably at your side. Chair arms should not force you to elevate your shoulders or wing your arms to the side.

C. Work Surface/Keyboard Adjustment

With your chair adjusted properly, is your keyboard at approximately elbow height level?

Are your arms in at your sides rather than stretched out in front of you?

Are your shoulders relaxed and not elevated when you work at your work surface?

When using the computer, is there approximately a 90-110 degree angle between your forearms and upper arms?

When using the keyboard or mouse, are your wrists in line with your forearms and not bent upwards, downwards, or to one side or the other?

Are there at least 2 inches of clearance between the bottom of your work surface and the top of your thighs?

Ideally, with your arms resting comfortably at your sides, the bottom of your elbow should be at the same height as the surface supporting your keyboard. To easily check this, turn sideways to your keyboard. If your work surface is too high and cannot be adjusted, raise the chair to bring your elbows level with the keyboard and support your feet with a footrest.

D. Monitor Adjustment

Is your monitor aligned with your keyboard rather than off to the side?
☐ Is the viewing distance to your computer monitor at least 18-30 inches (arm’s length)?

☐ Is the top of the computer screen at, or just below, eye level?

☐ Is your computer monitor protected from excess glare?

☐ If you wear bifocals or trifocals, are you able to look at the monitor without tilting your head backward?

Position your monitor so it is aligned with your keyboard to allow your neck to remain straight when viewing the monitor. Raise or lower your computer monitor so that the top of the screen is at, or just below, eye level. You may need to unstack the monitor from the central processing unit (CPU) to lower the monitor to the correct height, or place a book between the monitor and CPU to raise it to the correct height. People who wear bifocals or trifocals often end up tilting their heads back to read through the lower portion of their glasses. Lowering the computer monitor by placing it directly on the desk surface typically helps. Bifocal users may want to discuss with their eye doctor the possibility of obtaining glasses specifically designed for computer use.

E. Workstation Accessory Adjustments

☐ Are your input devices (mouse, trackball, digitizing tablet) at the same level and next to your keyboard?

☐ Are your primary work materials located in front of you?

☐ Are your most frequently accessed items (phone, manuals, etc.) easy to reach?

☐ Do you have a document or copyholder to hold reference material?

☐ Are you able to keep your arms from resting on any sharp, square edges of your work surface?

☐ If a large percentage of your time involves using a phone, do you use a phone headset?

Computer input devices such as a mouse or trackball should be located at the same level and next to the keyboard to avoid stretching to reach. This can sometimes be a problem if using a keyboard tray that is not wide enough to accommodate the keyboard and mouse. Modification or replacement of the keyboard tray may be necessary.

As you change tasks, remember to move primary materials in front of you. If you must frequently look at reference materials as you type, you should consider a document holder to allow your head to remain in a more upright position. Position the document holder at the same height and distance as your monitor. If doing a lot of reading or writing on the desk, inclining
the material by placing it in a 3-ring binder helps reduce the need to bend your neck forward.

Your wrists should remain straight when using the keyboard or mouse. If you have poor wrist habits, a padded wrist rest can help support your wrists in a straight position. The height of the wrist rest should not exceed the height of the space bar on the keyboard. Avoid wrist rests that are wider than 3 inches since this causes you to reach further for the keyboard.

When talking on the phone, it is not good for the neck to cradle the phone between your ear and shoulder. For jobs with a high volume of phone calls, headsets are recommended since they allow you to maintain the head in an upright position when talking on the phone.

**F. Work Habits**

☐ When using the keyboard, do you have a light touch on the keys?

☐ When using the keyboard or mouse, do your fingers, forearms and shoulders remain relaxed?

☐ When using the mouse, do you move your arm from your shoulder instead of reaching excessively with your wrist or fingers?

☐ Do you take short and frequent micro breaks throughout the day to reduce fatigue?

☐ Do you frequently change body positions while working?

☐ Do you provide your eyes with vision breaks at least every hour?

☐ Do you work fairly regular hours without a lot of overtime?

☐ Are you able to meet deadlines without excessive stress?

☐ Are you comfortable and free of discomfort while working?

When typing, it is important to use a light touch on the computer keys. Sometimes, slowing your typing speed just 5-10% helps you use a lighter touch and reduces tension in the fingers, forearms, and shoulders. During mouse use, hold the mouse lightly. Movement of the mouse should occur from the shoulder instead of only at the wrist. When not actively using the mouse, ease your grip to let your hand relax.

Periodic micro breaks (10-20 seconds) every 40 minutes should help alleviate fatigue and strain to your eyes and upper body. Taking a break does not mean that you have to stop working. Rather, it allows you to integrate other activities such as making phone calls, making copies or talking with a co-worker. Changing positions periodically helps maintain circulation and prevents putting pressure on any one area of the body for an extended period of time.
Working overtime, or working under stress to meet deadlines can add to tension or discomfort. In addition to taking breaks and frequently changing positions, you should pay attention to how your body responds to discomfort. Discomfort can be a sign of fatigue, and can lead to a more serious problem. If you experience lasting discomfort, please discuss this with your supervisor or contact Employee Health Services (530-752-2330) for medical advice. Aches and pains that are addressed early, typically resolve quickly. Ignoring pain prolongs and may worsen the problem.

Finally, develop good habits away from work. While you may not be able to adjust all of the work surfaces at home, you may be able to make minor adjustments that are significant to your body. Good posture and good work habits are just as important away from work, whether you are using your home computer, doing chores around the house, or are involved in special projects or hobbies.

For further information refer to the Easy Ergonomics For Desktop Computer Users workbook [2], and the Ergonomics: Setting Up Your Computer Workstation video [3].

Contact

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External links


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