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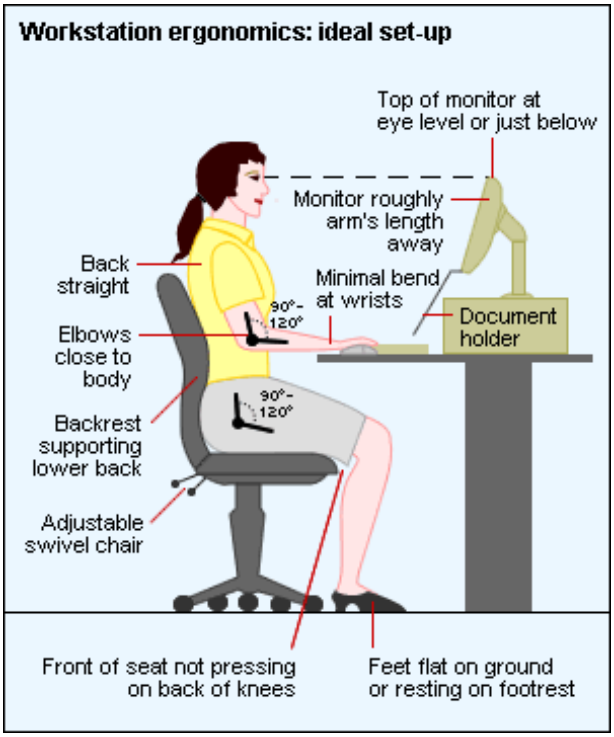
Workstation Ergonomics

Occupational overuse syndrome (OOS) related to the use of computers is a common problem in the workplace so the following information is provided to assist staff to arrange computer workstations in such a way so that the risk of such injuries is reduced.



Chairs and Posture Checklist for Keyboard Workers

Well adjusted chairs improve body position and circulation, reduce muscular effort and decrease pressure on the worker's back. Chairs should swivel, breathable fabric on the seat, a rounded front edge and have adjustable height and tilt for both the backrest and the seat base.

Adjust the seat tilt so that you are comfortable when you are using the keyboard. Usually this will be close to horizontal but tilted slightly forwards. If this places an uncomfortable strain on the leg muscles or if the feet do not reach the floor then a footrest should be used. Adjust the backrest so that it supports the lower back when you are sitting upright.

Work surface height

Adjust the height of the work surface and/or the chair so that the work surface is approximately at finger length below the height of the elbow when seated.

Keyboard placement

Place the keyboard in a position that allows the forearms to be close to the horizontal and the wrists to be straight. That is, with the hand in line with the forearm. If this causes the elbows to be held far out from the side of the body then re-check the work surface height.

Screen placement

Set the eye to screen distance at the distance that permits you to most easily focus on the screen. Usually this will be within an arm's length. Set the height of the monitor so that the top of the screen is below eye level and the bottom of the screen can be read without a marked inclination of the head. Usually this means that the centre of the screen will need to be near shoulder height.

Desk-top layout

Place all controls and task materials within a comfortable reach of both hands so that there is no unnecessary twisting of any part of the body.

Document holder

Place this close to the monitor screen in the position that causes the least twisting or inclination of the head.

Posture and environment

- Change posture at frequent intervals to minimise fatigue.
- Avoid awkward postures at the extremes of the joint range, especially the wrists.
- Take frequent short rest breaks rather than infrequent longer ones.
- Changes should be gradual to ensure that the workload does not result in excessive fatigue.
- After prolonged absences from work the periods of keyboard work should be increased gradually.

Glare and reflection

It is important to detect the presence of glare and reflection. To determine whether there is glare from overhead lights the seated worker should hold an object such as a book above the eyes at eyebrow level and establish whether the screen image becomes clearer in the absence of overhead glare. To detect whether there are reflections from the desk surface the worker should hold the book above the surface and assess the change in reflected glare from the screen.

A number of ways are available to eliminate or reduce the influence of these reflections:

- Tilt the screen so that the reflections are directed below eye level.
- Purchase a screen with matt or light diffusing surfaces.
- Cover screen with a light diffusing surface or anti-glare screen.
- Negative contrast screen (dark characters on light background) will reduce the influence of these reflections.

If you experience eye discomfort when using a bright screen you should make the following adjustments:

- Turn the screen brightness down to a comfortable level.
- Look away into the distance in order to rest the eyes for a short while every ten minutes or so.
- Change the text and background colours. Recommended are black characters on white or yellow background, or yellow on black, white on black, white on blue and green on white. Avoid red and green and yellow on white.

Using a mouse

A well designed mouse should not cause undue pressure on the wrist and forearm muscles. A large bulky mouse may keep the wrist continuously bent at an uncomfortable angle. Pressure can be reduced by releasing the mouse at frequent intervals, by selecting a slim-line, low-profile mouse and by using the mouse at a comfortable distance from the body. The arm should never be out-stretched to reach the mouse.

Keyboard and telephone operations

Lightweight adjustable headsets with a volume control should be provided for staff on continuous keyboard/telephone operation.

Use of laptop/notebook computers

Where possible and practical it is advisable that all of the principles outlined above be applied when working with these types of computers. In particular you should try and avoid awkward body postures and ensure that frequent short breaks are taken to minimise the onset of fatigue.