

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Creating a Comfort Zone: Ergo-Friendly on the Job

All jobs present their share of daily challenges. Whether working on a website or a construction site, anyone can face physical stresses caused by workplace routines.

Ergonomics is the science of designing the job, equipment and workplace to fit the worker. Combating the strains and pains of the work site is an important part of a positive, productive and healthy work environment.

By including a few ergonomic features in your workspace, you can help keep your job from becoming a literal "pain in the neck."

Understanding Workplace Ergonomics

The basic goal of workplace ergonomics is to increase comfort on the job. Whatever your work, stresses from repetitive movements, done in a way that isn't quite right for your body, can accumulate and increase your risk of injury. Common injuries can include:

- Repetitive Motion Injury (RMI)
- Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)
- Cumulative Trauma Disorder (CTD)

Constant typing, sitting, walking and lifting are just some of the daily duties that can lead to musculoskeletal disorders over time.

You can take control of your comfort level and improve your mental and physical well-being by recognizing stressors and working to improve your workplace and your personal health.

Five Steps to an Ergo-Friendly Workplace

1. **Change your pose.** Extended sitting, walking or standing during the day can cause muscle strains and overall fatigue. To avoid aches in your back, shoulders and neck:
    - Purposely change your posture regularly throughout the day.
    - Gently stretch your head to each side (ear toward shoulder) and hold for 15 seconds.
    - Make sure your chair has some support for your lower back. The hollow of your back should have some support to maintain the correct lumbar curve.
2. **Refocus.** From staring at a computer screen to focusing on a production line, many work-related tasks can be visually demanding. Fatigue, strain and irritation of the eyes are all unfortunate by-products of some positions and can lead to headaches and nausea. To help make your work easy on the eyes:
    - Stare at a distant point (a few feet away) for several seconds to readjust your focus.
    - If indoors, step outside and get some natural light.
    - Frequently blink or force yourself to yawn—both produce tears to fight dryness and discomfort.
3. **Do the legwork.** To prevent cramping or poor circulation in your legs and joints, consider:
    - Getting up and walking around at certain points of the day to avoid stiffness and improve circulation.

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    - Varying your leg position frequently and ensuring there is a good amount of leg room under your desk or work station.
    - Doing foot rotation exercises while seated or standing in place.
4. **Take a break.** Taking short breaks throughout the day allows you to step away from a strenuous routine, and can actually increase productivity by providing a clearer state of mind. Try:
    - Taking a walk or stopping to have a short conversation with a co-worker to relieve work tension and mentally regroup.
    - Stretching and moving around to re-energize your body and mind.
    - Taking deep relaxing breaths regularly to provide a sense of calm.
5. **Customize your cubicle.** Making small adjustments to your workspace can reap big benefits in terms of your well-being. Here are some tips to try for indoor-based activities:

Reduce overall strain by adjusting your computer monitor so that it is parallel to your face and tilted toward your eye line. Make the most of your chair's adjustment features. The seat should be tilted forward slightly and feet should be able to comfortably sit flat on the floor.

With a little effort and a few simple steps, you can create a happier and healthier environment for everyone, and help your workplace “go ergo”.