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ERGONOMICS

Ergonomics is the process of organizing and designing people's workplaces, tailoring them to fit their individual needs. With an increasing percentage of our workforce spending extended periods of time using computers in a sedentary position, we need to try to minimize the stresses on our bodies by improving our working environments.

A number of helpful recommendations which will help minimize the stresses on our bodies are listed below.

Start by pushing your hips back into your chair as far as possible. Then adjust the height of your seat so your feet are flat on the floor and your knees at the same level or slightly lower than your hips. Adjust your chair so it reclines at an angle between 100 to 110 degrees. Your chair should have built in supports to maintain the curves in your spine. If your chair doesn't have the appropriate lumbar and cervical supports, use an added back support or small pillow to maintain the cervical and lumbar curves. If your chair has an active back mechanism, make sure to utilize it regularly to make frequent positional changes. Adjust the armrests on your chair so that your shoulders are in a relaxed position.

Correct positioning of your keyboard is essential in minimising the stress on your neck and shoulders. Your chair should be positioned as close to your keyboard as possible. Position the keyboard directly in front of your body. Determine what area of your keyboard you use most and adjust that position of the keyboard to the centre of your body. Adjust your keyboard height so your shoulders are in a relaxed position. Make sure your elbows are in a slightly flexed position (approximately 100 to 110 degrees) and your wrists and hands are neither flexed or extended but in a straight line. If you sit in a forward position, tilt the keyboard away from you at a negative angle. This will help maintain your wrists in a straight position. If you are reclined, a positive tilt is needed for correct wrist and hand positioning. If you don't have a fully adjustable keyboard tray, you might need to adjust the height of your workstation. Also consider the height of your chair or use a cushion to maintain a

comfortable position. A footrest should be used if you find your feet dangle off the floor.

Poor positioning of your screen or your documents will result in incorrect posture. Move your monitor and documents so that your neck is relaxed and in a neutral position. Make sure the centre of your monitor is directly in front of you, right above your keyboard. The top of your monitor should be 5 to 8cm above your seated eye level. You should sit at least an arm's length away from your screen and then adjust the distance for your vision. Re-position your screen to decrease glare. Place documents directly in front of you, between your screen and the keyboard.

Now that your workstation is set up correctly, always try to use good work habits. Prolonged static work postures may cause a decrease in blood and nerve flow throughout your body which can cause tightness in muscles and stress.

Make sure to take a short stretch break every 20 minutes. Try to change work tasks for at least 5 minutes after each hour of work. Always try to get away from your computer during your lunch time. Try to avoid eye fatigue by resting and refocusing your eyes. Look away from the monitor regularly and try to focus on a distant object. At every opportunity, get up from your desk and move around. Make sure the small of your back has an appropriate support and that your shoulders are in a relaxed position. Make sure there is no pressure underneath your thighs. Pay careful attention to the position of your head, neck and spine. Ensure you use minimum force while striking the keys with your fingers. Keep a relaxed and neutral position so that your wrists, forearms and hands are in a straight line. Try not to rest on your elbows. Take regular breaks from your work to give your body a chance to rest and recover. Alternate between different work tasks. This will help by using different muscle groups thereby reducing stress and avoiding overuse. Close your eyes for a moment and focus on a faraway object. This will help you avoid eye strain. Always try to avoid long periods of repetitive activity.