

Preventing Injuries at Work



Did you know there is a science that relates you to your work? In fact, it includes the anatomic, physiologic and mechanical principles that affect how efficiently you work. It's called ergonomics, and it's something you should take seriously.

There are plenty of simple things you can do to help you work more efficiently and prevent injury while at work.

An injury at work is more common than you think. One can easily pull a back muscle, strain the eyes, or develop long-term wrist pain by simply working. But by changing a few things, like the way you sit or position items at your desk, you can decrease the chances of a work-related injury.

GET THAT DESK IN SHAPE

Sore arms? Achy neck? If you use a keyboard and mouse, follow these tips to decrease the likelihood of carpal tunnel syndrome and achy joints:

Keyboard. Place the keyboard directly in front of you. As you type, your arms should hang comfortably and your shoulders will feel more relaxed.

Adjust the slope of the keyboard so that your forearms, wrists and hands feel comfortable. Be sure your wrists and hands do not rest on hard edges. Use rest pads for your wrists if you commonly feel pain.

Mouse. Make sure the mouse is located immediately to the right or left of your keyboard. Leaving it too far to any side or toward the keyboard's back can create strain. Only use a mouse that fits

well in your hand.

Monitor. Raise the monitor so the top of the screen is at eye level. This will allow you to read without bending your head or neck. If you need to lean forward or backward to read the screen, it is not at the right position. Consider using bifocals or positioning the monitor closer or farther away to read it. Note: the monitor should be two feet away from you.

Position the monitor directly in front of you so you don't have to twist your head or neck to the side. Consider using a glare screen, which eliminates glare from lights or windows for a clearer image.

TAKE A SEAT

There's a right way and a wrong way to sit. Try these steps to adjust your work chair and prevent injury:

1. Remove all the items in your pockets.
2. Sit down in your chair and move your hips back so they are against the back of the chair.
3. Adjust the seat height until your feet are on the floor. Remember, your hips should be at the same height or slightly higher than your knees. There should be no massive difference.
4. Adjust the backrest height so the curve of your lower back is resting comfortably. This position will allow the most comfort throughout your day.

NEED A LIFT?

If your job involves heavy lifting, there are a few techniques you should practice to avoid injury to your back:

Stand close to the object you need to lift and center yourself over it. Your feet should be shoulder-width apart.

Tighten your abdominal muscles and—while keeping your back straight—squat down to the floor. Use both hands and grip the object tightly.

Using your leg muscles, lift the object off the floor and keep it close to your body. Your back should remain straight throughout the lift.

When moving, avoid twisting your body. Take small steps with your feet until you reach the

object's destination. Again, bend at your knees and using only your leg muscles.

BREAK IT UP

Try to avoid sitting at your desk all day. Take a short break to step outside or get coffee. No time? Stand up and stretch, or consider walking around the office for a moment.

Just stretching your arms and legs will do wonders for the body, and you'll feel like you recharged your batteries. Here are a few simple stretches you can do to stay limber and avoid injury:

Arm Stretches. Bring your arms behind your back and clasp your hands. If you can't clasp your hands, hold a tie or a shirt. Lift your arms as high as you can and allow your chest to lift. Hold this stretch for 30 seconds, relax then repeat. Lace your fingers and extend your arms out, straight in front of your shoulders. Keep your palms facing outward. Raise your hands over your head slowly. Try to keep your elbows straight and allow the body to stretch from the waist up. Hold this stretch for 30 seconds, relax, then repeat.

Chair Twists. Begin on the edge of your chair, sitting sideways with your left side facing the back of the chair. Keep your feet and knees together.

Place your hands on the top corners of the chair. Inhale and straighten your spine. Then exhale and twist toward the back of the chair. You should be pushing with your left hand and pulling with your right hand. Repeat this several times and switch sides.

Sit in the chair and place your legs wider than hip-distance apart. Bend forward, round your back and drop your head to relax your neck.

If this feels uncomfortable, try placing a rolled blanket or towel at the hip crease and lean over again. Hold the position as long as you like, relaxing a little more with each exhale. Inhale as you sit up, and try again.

Work can be stressful enough. Don't add injury to the mix. By keeping a more ergonomic work station and stretching daily, you can lower the odds of injury and feel better all day long. ■

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