

APA Article on Workplace Ergonomics

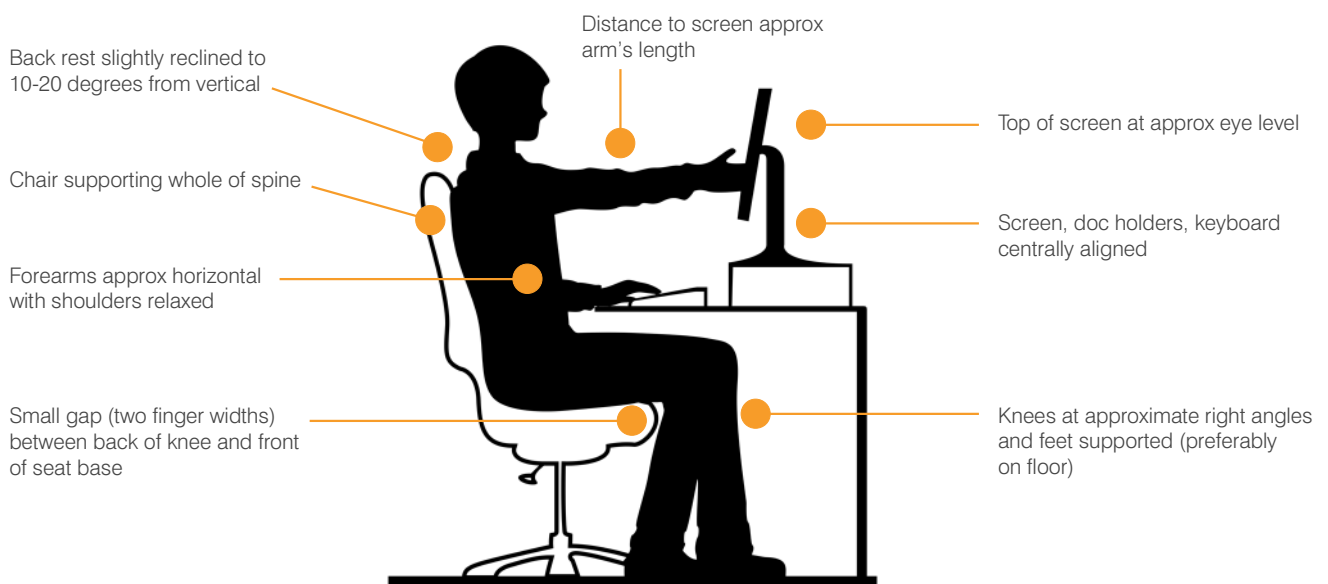
David Hall August 2013

Given how many hours most of us spend at our workplace; it's worth putting energy into designing our work stations well. A key element of this is how friendly is it for our body? Often a few minor Ergonomic adjustments can ease the strain on our body significantly and reduce our chance of aches and pains.

Note that when talking about workplace ergonomics we are looking at principles and not hard fast rules. Some individual variations exist depending on how exactly we use the work station. Use this article as a general guideline, and if you need more specific information, consult with an Occupational Health Physiotherapist or Ergonomist.

Sitting work stations

The basic guidelines for setting up a sitting work station are outlined below:



Also consider:

- Use a mouse that feels comfortable (different shapes and angles for holding these are possible) and keep the mouse within close reach.
- Preferably place the mouse on the opposite side of the desk to the phone.
- Footrests are a plan B when a desk is too tall and cannot be adjusted (adjusting desk height to suit you is preferable).



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Reclined propped position for keyboarding

The above diagram shows the “elbow floating position” for keyboarding, where your elbows are beside your body but unsupported. A variation on this which can assist in reducing neck tension is the “reclined propped position” where you move the keyboard further away from you and support the forearms along the desk. You may need to slightly reduce the height of the chair for this position to ensure you stay supported in your seat.



Reclined propped position for keyboarding

See the diagram opposite to note the difference here.

Taking breaks

Note that even when your work station is set up well, it is important to break this sitting position regularly (every 45-60 mins at least) to stand up, walk around and stretch. Also consider a work station that can be converted to a standing work station as this helps create variation.

Reach zones

Once you have set up the work station along these guidelines, consider the overall use of the work station in terms of the reach zones:



Primary reach zone

Things you are constantly using – you don't want to reach at all to use these. This zone is usually best for the keyboard and the mouse.



Secondary reach zone

The things you are using semi frequently and don't want to be reaching far to get. Common examples are the phone and commonly accessed files.



Outer reach zone

The things you use only occasionally. These can provide a good excuse to get up out of your seat. For example drink bottles, stationary, or infrequently accessed files and documents.

Standing work stations

The same principles apply except that instead of the reclined posture shown in the chair, an upright standing posture is adopted with the head balanced over the centre of gravity.

As with sitting, it is recommended to break this position regularly (every 45-60 mins at least) to sit down and/or stretch.



Standing work station recommended position

With standing work stations it is also important to ensure you store items in an easy to reach space to avoid excess bending, twisting or over reaching to obtain items.

Be sure to use these principles to good effect and enjoy the difference it will make to your body and mind. Should you be unsure how to apply these principles, or require more detailed information, consult with an Occupational Health Physiotherapist.

References

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Contact details

Fountain Gate Physiotherapy

427 Princes Hwy

Narre Warren, Victoria, 3805

Phone: (+61 3) 9796 7599 Fax: (+61 3) 9796 0341

Email: info@fountaingatephysio.com.au

Website: www.fountaingatephysio.com.au