

- Remember, even the most ergonomic desk in the world will not prevent fatigue eventually.
- The best way of avoiding the onset of fatigue is to allow rest and recovery through breaking.
- The best break involves a change of posture. Rather break a little and often than once for a long period.
- Remember to give your eyes mini-breaks by looking away from the screen frequently.
- Lastly, contact your Occupational Health, Safety or Personnel department if you need help or are unsure.

Do the activities and exercises that ease your pain - follow the advice and exercises of your physiotherapist.

## Adjusting your Office Chair

**Your chair should be comfortable. It should support your spine in an S-shaped posture, with the lumbar arch well supported.**

**A good office chair will offer you adjustability. You should take the time to familiarise yourself with these adjustments. Then follow these easy steps:**

1. Raise the seatpan height so that your elbows are just above desk height when you are sitting with your arms by your side.
2. Adjust the depth of the seatpan. Your back should be in contact with the backrest with about an inch or more between the front of the seat and your lower legs.
3. Set the backrest tension (resistance) to suit you and your weight.
4. Adjust the backrest height so that the backrest bulge fits into your lumbar arch.
5. Adjust the tilt of the backrest so that it is comfortable; this is usually a few degrees into a reclined position.
6. Adjust your armrests so that they don't prevent access to the desk.

## Setting up your chair and workstation



1. Top of screen should be level with your eyes
2. Arms relaxed and by sides. Keep your mouse close.
3. Lumbar support of chair comfortably fits in to lower back.
4. Hips either level or slightly higher than the knees
5. Screen straight in front and approximately at arms length.
6. Elbows at right angles, forearms just above level of desk.
7. Both feet comfortably on the floor or on a footrest.

### Our bodies were designed to move

Short frequent breaks are better than infrequent longer ones.

### Posture is important!

There is nothing wrong with reclining - tilt your chair back rather than slouch.

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## LOOKING AFTER YOUR BACK AT WORK

**DOs and DON'Ts**

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# Back pain is miserable!

It affects 1 in 8 of us at any one time, but it is important to remember that 80% of back pain settles within 8 weeks. It is often caused by everyday activities at work such as:

Working at your computer

Driving    Lifting

## Managing back pain at work

Firstly, try to stay at work. If you can't keep doing the job that you usually do due to pain, see whether your duties can be changed. Common short-term solutions for back pain sufferers are:

Reduced hours    Altered work duties  
More frequent breaks

If you can't stay at work, then ensure you use your time off constructively and arrange to have treatment.

Don't feel guilty about being off work - the worst thing you could do is put yourself to bed like a "sick" person.

Do the activities and exercises that ease your pain - follow the advice and exercises of your physiotherapist.

If walking eases your pain, then go out for a walk and don't worry about being seen by someone from work - after all, your walking is the equivalent of taking medicine for illness!

When you return to your normal job, stand back and take a look at things objectively - make it a mission to optimise your work environment ergonomically. Look for ways of changing workplace layout and tasks so that you:

- maintain a good posture (S-shaped spine)
- avoid or reduce bending
- avoid or reduce twisting
- avoid or reduce repetition

This advice leaflet is designed to give you some useful tips, ideas and exercises that may help you manage your back pain.

- alternate tasks
- break during tasks that take a long time or are repetitive
- change your posture frequently
- reduce heavy loads by breaking it up, if possible
- use adjustments on equipment
- introduce as much mechanical equipment that is practical or possible

There are many ways of making a task less physically demanding - all it needs is for you to stop and think about it. If you need help with workplace ergonomics then contact your Occupational Health, Safety or Personnel Department.

- Prolonged bending will cause problems. Wherever possible ensure that your work height allows you to keep your back straight
- Avoid leaning forwards when in a crouched or a seated position.
- If you have to work with a bent back then stand up frequently and stretch backwards five to six times as shown by your physiotherapist before returning to your work.



## Basic computer workstation ergonomics

Begin with what you've already got: assess your current workstation to identify what changes should be made.

There is no ceiling when it comes to furniture and equipment, so it is important to balance cost and benefit before investing in a change.

### Firstly think about what you do at your workstation:

- Do you only use your computer or do you also do handwriting?
- Do you need space for documents to refer to?
- Make a list of all the functions conducted at your desk.

#### Desk:

- Is there enough space to carry out all your functions you have identified?
- Is it at the correct height for you?
- Ensure that the space under the desk is not obstructed.

#### Chair:

- Your chair should support you in a comfortable position with an S-shape spine.
- Ensure the arch in your lower back is well supported.
- Pull the chair into your desk - don't perch on the edge, sit right back into the corner of the seat.
- Adjust your chair height so that your forearms are horizontal and your upper arms vertical when you place your hands on the keyboard.
- See our advice on office chairs for more info.
- Only use a footrest if your feet are not well supported on the floor.

#### Screen:

- The screen must be directly in front of the user. The top of the screen should be at about eye level.
- A rule of thumb is to have the screen an arm's length away from the user but this will vary from person to person.
- Ensure the characters on the screen are easy to read and flicker-free.
- Your screen should be free of reflections.

#### Keyboard and mouse:

- Ensure the keyboard is positioned close to you - to avoid reaching.
- Ideally, there should be space to rest your wrists when required.
- See our advice on ergonomic keyboards and mouse.