

Ergonomic Office Chairs: Advice for People who Sit at Work

1. Choosing a good chair.

- Firstly, make sure that the chair you're using is suitably designed for the environment you're using it in e.g. a meeting room chair is not designed to work well at a PC desk.
- The secret to a good chair is adjustability. We all have different sized legs, arms and spines. Obviously a chair that can be adjusted will be able to fit a larger variety of people.
- A good chair will allow you to adjust it in such a way that it supports you in a good sitting posture. One of the most important aspects of a good sitting posture is that your spine should be in an S shape, with your lower back in an arched position. For most people, it can be quite difficult to keep up a good posture all day long, for this reason its important that the chair does the work of keeping you in this position so that you don't have to do much work to maintain it. Lets face it, we're at work to work and it's unlikely that we are able to spend our whole day thinking of our posture!
- Assuming you're looking for a chair to use at a computer workstation here are some guidelines for choosing a chair:
 - Make sure the chair has a five base support points and swivel through 360 degrees.
 - The seatpan height must be adjustable to allow you to sit at the correct height.
 - The seatpan depth should be a few centimeters short of your thigh length, supporting most of your thigh but not compressing the back of your knee. This will ensure that you can sit right back into the corner of the chair and get the full support of the backrest.
 - The backrest should offer good lumbar support - this support may need to be height adjustable to fit you correctly (either the entire backrest height adjustable wrt the seatpan or the support itself)
 - The backrest/seatpan angle should be adjustable, preferably independent of one another, so that you can find a comfortable position
 - Ensure the glides/castors are appropriate for the floor on which the chair is used
 - Armrests should not obstruct access to the desk.
 - The seat cushioning/cover should distribute your pressure evenly.
 - The chair should feel sturdy and robust.
- If you're unsure about whether a chair is suitable for you get the advice of an ergonomist or physiotherapist or contact your Occupational Health, Safety or Personnel department, they should be able to help with someone who is trained to assess and advise you on seating at work.

2. Adjust your chair.

It's all very well to have a well adjustable chair to sit in at work but it's of no use if the adjustments aren't used! Familiarise yourself with the adjustments on your chair - and *USE* them. In the beginning you will probably need to experiment a little to find a position that is comfortable. Once you've found it there is no need to feel that the settings should remain fixed in that position. Your postural needs change throughout the day. You might want to recline the seat back while reading documents or interacting with other people, and then you'd want to sit more forward when using your PC.

3. Change your posture frequently.

So, you have a good chair and you use the adjustments properly. Well, unfortunately that's not enough. The reality is that the human body is just not designed to keep still for prolonged periods of time - regardless of how good your postural support is. Breaking your sitting posture is essential to prevent the onset of fatigue, discomfort and the cumulative damage of spinal structures caused by long periods of sitting. Taking a complete break away from the desk is ideal. However, not all breaks need be this disruptive to your work. "Mini breaks" are a very useful way of changing your posture. These can take the form of moving while remaining sitting to change your posture e.g. rocking your pelvis back and forward.

Most people see the sense in frequent breaking but find it difficult to remember because their concentration is taken up with the job at hand and before they know it "Three hours have passed and I've scarcely moved". A good way of overcoming this problem is to incorporate breaks into the normal routine of your job e.g. offer to get the morning and afternoon coffees for the office or, move your printer away so that you need to walk over it to get your printout. Another way of designing in postural breaks is to alter the tasks you have to carry out at work. The message is really: be a fidget at work! Some people set programmes or reminders on their PCs to remind them to break. There are a number of software packages on the market now.

4. Make sure that the other furniture and equipment you're using is appropriate and well set up.

The benefit of using a good chair can be undone by having to twist to see a poorly positioned PC screen.

Make sure your chair fits under your desk.

Don't perch on the edge of your chair to reach forward to your desk.

Ensure your feet are well supported.

See our leaflet on computer workstation ergonomics for more information.