Ergonomic Tips: Posture and Breaks

Check Your Posture

When you work at a computer, your body has to maintain the same posture or position for long periods. This can cause fatigue, and sometimes pain, in the working muscles and joints. It is important to use good posture as often as possible. Good posture results in the least amount of stress on muscles and joints.

What is good posture?
- ✓ Head is straight
- ✓ Natural curves of the spine are supported
- ✓ Shoulders are down and relaxed
- ✓ Elbows are bent to about 90^0
- ✓ Wrists are straight
- ✓ Hips and knees are bent to about 90^0
- ✓ Feet are flat on the floor

Poor posture can be the result of your desk set-up! Use the handout "*Setting-up the Computer Workstation*" for more information.

Top 10 Posture Problems:

Problem	Most Likely Cause
Leaning forward or head pulled forward	Monitor is too far away and/or text is too small
Head tilted back	Monitor is too high or not set to match prescription
Head tilted down	Monitor is too low
Perching on the edge of the chair seat	Chair is too high
Feeling like you are sliding out of your chair	Chair is too high
Feet up on base of chair	Chair is too high
Shoulders up, arms out to the side	Keyboard/mouse too high or cramped in corner of desk
Wrist(s) pressing on desk	Keyboard/mouse too high
Arm(s) reaching forward	Keyboard/mouse too far and may also be too high

Take a Break and Move, Move, Move

Even if your posture is *perfect*: it is very important to move your body and take a break from static positions in order to prevent injury or overload on muscles and joints. Breaks are a very important part of the workday. They can refresh you, and help to maintain your productivity.

Use Scheduled Breaks

Take advantage of regularly scheduled coffee and lunch breaks that give you an opportunity to change your posture and relax. Do something during your break that is *different* from your work. For example, take a walk; recline and listen to music with your eyes closed. The point is: you aren't really giving yourself a break if you do more *work-like* activities.

Take Mini Breaks Every Hour

Mini breaks last for a few seconds or minutes, and can help to reduce physical and mental stress. They should be done at least every hour. Post a note or set a timer to remind yourself to break. Here are some ideas for mini breaks:

STAND and WALK: Meet with a co-worker, get a glass of water, etc.

BREATHE: Most computer users tend to shallow breathe resulting feeling sleepy or sluggish: pause to take full breaths regularly.

BLINK: Most computer users blink less than normal, which causes dry, irritated eyes. Try these exercises: blink rapidly a few times; close your eyes for a few seconds; close your eyes and roll eyes a few times in one direction then in the opposite direction; focus for a few seconds on things around the office other than the monitor.

STRETCH: Follow the stretching exercises in the handout "*Breaks and Exercises for Office Workers*".