

10 Ergonomic Tips for a Healthier Workspace

Eyestrain? Sore back? It is amazing how making even small tweaks to office furnishings or work habits can make you more comfortable. To reduce your risk of injury, and improve your performance, consider these ten practical ergonomic tips for your workspace—and work style.



To minimize glare and illuminate work materials as needed, use an adjustable task light.

Adjust Your Immediate Surroundings

See the light. Task lighting will allow you to adjust illumination to fit the task at hand. An adjustable task light will help to minimize glare, reducing eyestrain and headaches. To avoid glare on the screen, position the light to the side of the monitor, rather than behind or in front of it.



To stay in the right ergonomic position while working, incorporate a keyboard tray.

Use a keyboard tray to get your arms at the right height. Awkward wrist, arm and shoulder positions can lead to carpal tunnel syndrome. Your elbows should dangle even with the height of your keyboard and your forearms should be parallel with the floor. A keyboard tray helps you achieve an ergonomically correct position without sacrificing space or legroom. For best ergonomics, a mouse platform should be part of the keyboard tray solution, as well.



To reduce eyestrain, a monitor arm should easily hold the screen in the proper position.

Invest in a high-quality monitor arm to position your screen correctly. To reduce eyestrain, position your screen at least 20-30 inches from your face (an arm's length). To decrease neck strain, the screen should be centered directly in front of you at eye height and tilted up a bit so that the screen surface is perpendicular to your face. Invest in a high quality monitor arm, which will let you make these adjustments with ease.



Incorporate Movement and Visual Breaks into Your Work Day

Keep moving but save the treadmill for the gym. Recent studies show an increase in injury risk from falls, and a loss of productivity and focus for employees using treadmill desks. Instead, take a short walk during your lunch break (even within the building) or, during your work day, send your print job to a location that requires you to get up and walk a short distance.



For best comfort and reduced risk of injury, sit using an ergonomic task chair.

Jettison the “exercise ball” as an office seat. Stick with proper ergonomic seating products. Anything else greatly increases your chance of injury, directly from a fall, or over time, from muscle strain. Choose a flexible agile seating experience that supports a range of postures, and your need to shift between individual and group work tasks. Adjust the seat so your feet are flat on the floor.



For better health, create a daily work style that includes both seated and standing postures.

Vary your posture between sitting and standing at work. Work in spaces that support work while standing, such as standing height tables, islands, etc. Use a worksurface that can be adjusted to meet both sitting and standing positions. If a “sit-stand” worksurface is not available, use a combination of worksurfaces that offer both seated and standing-height work postures within your primary work setting. Some people like to stand during impromptu meetings,

during phone calls, or when reading, and sit for computer work. Whatever your preferences, standing even occasionally during your workday is good for your health.



To reduce eyestrain, incorporate brief “rest breaks” to refocus and rest your eyes throughout the day.

Rest your eyes at regular intervals. When your eyes are focused on an object in the distance, they’re meeting optical infinity, in which eyes are totally at rest. Practice the “20-20-20 rule.” For 20 seconds every 20 minutes, take a break and look 20 feet away. Also, remember to blink more. People under normal conditions blink 12 to 15 times a minute, but those reading on a screen blink only seven times.

Nourish Your Spirit with Connections to Nature

Expose yourself to sunlight. Sunlight, even filtered through a window, has been shown to improve mood. When walking through your office building, choose a route that takes you near windows for that daylight exposure.



Improve your mood by working in, or walking through, areas in direct sunlight.

Surround yourself with plants. A 2011 study published in the journal *Nature* suggests that greenery in the office space decreases anger and frustration. Place plants in your workspace (if your organization permits this) or occasionally locate yourself near greenery within the building during your workday.

View the outdoors while working. A growing number of studies suggest that views to, or images of, nature boosts memory and focus. If possible, select an occasional work location within your building with views to the outdoors and natural objects (trees, sky, clouds, greenery, etc.). If this is not possible, use images of nature on your screen saver.



Improve memory and focus by viewing natural settings, or images of such, during the work day.

Where to Go From Here

The ten tips above are basic guidelines to help ensure that the work environment is comfortable and supportive for employees. For additional information and specifics on what elements should be considered when developing a standard for a primary workspace, refer to the Knoll research paper ‘Office Ergonomic Standards: A Layperson’s Guide.’ This paper can help you better understand how to interpret and apply ergonomic standards and guidelines in your own workplace.

Related Research and Additional Reading

O’Neill, M. (2013). *New Workplace Ergonomics Research: Emerging Risks and Solutions*. Knoll Workplace Research, Knoll, Inc., New York, NY.

O’Neill, M. (2012). *A Guide to Trouble-Free Selection and Ergonomic Setup of Monitor Arms*. Knoll Workplace Research, Knoll, Inc., New York, NY.

O’Neill, M. (2011). *Holistic Ergonomics for the Evolving Nature of Work*. Knoll Workplace Research, Knoll, Inc., New York, NY.

O’Neill, M. (2011). *Office Ergonomic Standards: A Layperson’s Guide*. Knoll Workplace Research, Knoll, Inc., New York, NY.

O’Neill, M. (2010). *A New Way of Thinking about Seating*. Knoll Workplace Research, Knoll, Inc., New York, NY.

Springer, T. (2010). *The Future of Ergonomic Office Seating*. Knoll Workplace Research, Knoll, Inc., New York, NY.

The BIFMA G1 Guideline

The ANSI/HFES 100 Ergonomic Workstation Standard