

As a student you will probably be working at a desk or using a computer for long periods of time. An organised and well planned work station and an awareness of good positioning and effective work practices will assist you to be more productive and avoid physical stress, low back pain and increased fatigue.

If you work for an organisation check their environmental health and safety regulations to ensure you are conforming to them.

Setting up your work station

- Work stations should be adjusted to meet the body shape and the work requirements of the user.
- The most often used equipment, eg computer, telephone, books or writing tasks should be positioned close at hand with tasks directly in front of you to avoid twisting and rotating your body.
- When working, do not bend over to perform tasks. This will place strain on your low back.
- You should be in a relaxed and comfortable position with your work area tidy and clutter free.
- Ensure your work set up provides a variety of work tasks to allow variation in movement and posture. This reduces static muscle tension which results from being in one position too long.
- Think about how to work and adjust your position, tasks and work station to improve your well being and productivity.

Correct sitting posture

This is important as sitting places greater stress on the spine than standing. Incorrect sitting may cause discomfort and fatigue due to increased muscle activity and poor body alignment.

To achieve a correct sitting posture you should have:

- Good low back support – sit back in your chair
- Knees slightly higher than hips
- Feet flat on the floor or on a footstool
- Task at waist level
- Shoulders relaxed and arms at your sides
- Elbows bent at 90 degrees
- Wrists in a neutral position.

Adjust your office chair to achieve this position

Your chair should support your back at all times. You should be able to adjust the seat height, the back angle and the back height of your chair to achieve a good working position. Adjust the chair so your thighs are approximately horizontal and feet rest comfortably on the floor. An angled foot rest may help if the desk is too high. Work should be at elbow height and legs should have room to move easily under the desk. A chair without arms allows you to move more freely. Use a chair

on rollers so you can easily move the chair rather than having to stretch or twist to reach work on a different area of the desk.

Lighting

Poor lighting may increase fatigue, headaches and eye strain. When adjusting light sources, aim to reduce glare (especially on computer screens), and reduce the contrast between foreground and background. An anti glare screen may help. Light should illuminate the work area adequately without glare. Avoid sitting directly facing a bright window. Use equipment with matt finishes to reduce glare.

Using a computer

- Position the VDU (Visual Display Unit) so the top of the screen is level with your eye and at a distance of one full arm length when you are seated at the computer. Having to look down or up at the screen may cause neck and shoulder strain.
- Reference documents (on document holders) should be placed centrally between the key board and the screen. This avoids twisting the low back and neck when using additional documents.
- The angle of the key board should be lowered so arms and hands are in the position shown in the diagram. This reduces the load on shoulder and wrist muscles.
- If using a mouse the hand and arm should be in a neutral position. Keep the wrist flat and support the arm on the desk or on a wrist support.

Preparing for work

Prepare for work with some warm up exercises. Relax and perform them gently, do not overstretch and stop if you feel discomfort. Remember to stretch each side and maintain an upright position. Try the following:

Head roll – Gently lower ear toward shoulder – hold 10 seconds, slowly roll chin to chest and up to shoulder. Repeat several times. Do not over extend neck.

Head turns – Turn head to look over left shoulder, hold 10 seconds. Repeat for right side. Repeat several times.

Shoulder rolls – Circle shoulders forward several times then back. Repeat 3-5 times.

Shoulder stretch — Stretch arm above head, cradle elbow with hand and gently pull elbow behind the head. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat several times.

Wrist stretch — Interlace fingers, palms outwards, straighten arms in front. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat several times.

Back arch — Stand up. Support lower back with hands and gently arch back — hold for 5-10 seconds and relax — repeat several times.

Foot rotation — While sitting in chair straighten leg and lift foot from floor. Rotate foot and ankle both ways. Point toes up then down. Repeat several times each foot.

During work

- Repeat the above exercises several times per day.
- Avoid prolonged repetitive movements such as keyboarding, handwriting or playing an instrument and sustained or constrained postures, such as holding something still or remaining in one position for a long time. Get up, move around or vary your task at least every 40 minutes.
- If you use heavy books, files or other items regularly, store them close by on the desk so you can slide, rather than lift them. If they need to be stored, place them at levels between mid thigh and shoulder height always remembering to use two hands to lift and move them.

For further information

Comcare, Australia (1991). *Developing an action plan to improve health and productivity*. A Resource Kit, Quality of Life Series.

Ergonomics Unit, Health and Safety Organisation (1996). *Office wise. A guide to health and safety in the office*. Health and Safety Organisation, Victoria.

Worksafe Australia (1991). *Ergonomic principles and checklists for the selection of office furniture and equipment*.

REMEMBER!!!

If you work well and work safe,
you will be able to work on!

Study Skills



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Making your work station work for you



Equity & Learning Programs
Ground Floor, 723 Swanston St
Carlton Vic. 3053 Australia
Phone: (03) 8344 0930
Fax: (03) 9349 1039

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Learning Programs, University of Melbourne