

# Ergonomics: Computer Workstations, It Doesn't Have to Hurt!

Computers have become an increasing part of the workplace, with nearly every person on campus now having at least access to one. Unfortunately, few of us have had training regarding the proper positioning and location of the keyboard, mouse, and screen. The computer comes out of the box and onto the desk with little attention being paid to the positioning. The result is the more we use the computer, the more we suffer from stiff necks, back and shoulder pain, elbow pain, eye strain, headaches, and wrist pain. If any of these problems are occurring, something is wrong and needs to be corrected.

There are no universal answers for correcting problems with workstations, but there are some basic principles you can consider. The following paragraphs contain some basic things to look out for.

1. Check the height of your monitor. Sitting upright in your chair, look straight ahead at the monitor. If you aren't looking at the upper third of the screen, your monitor is probably at the wrong height. The result can be neck pain and pain between the shoulder blades. The solution? Raise or lower the monitor to avoid excessive tilting of the head. Your station isn't adjustable? Simply use large books under the monitor to raise it, taking care to assure the monitor remains stable.
2. Now look at the keyboard. It should be aligned directly in front of the monitor and at a proper height. The height can be determined simply by pushing your chair back from the table, letting your arms hang comfortably at your side, the raising the forearms to a level position in front of you. Moving the chair forward, are you touching or level with your keyboard? If not, your keyboard is too high or too low. The result can be shoulder pain, elbow pain, or wrist pain. Can't adjust the keyboard height? Then raise or lower the chair to keep the wrists in a more or less straight position. Place the mouse as close to the keyboard as possible. If your feet aren't sitting firmly on the floor, use a footrest or some other form of support (old phone book, etc.) to prevent lower back pain.
3. Exercise your eyes! After fifteen minutes or so, stop staring at the screen and focus on something across the room. You may notice the image is fuzzy or unclear, but rapidly comes into focus. Every thirty or forty minutes try to stand up and move around a bit. This will reduce eyestrain and stiff muscles.

Finally, if you are suffering from pain when you use your workstation, tell your physician. Also, contact Environmental Health and Safety Department (EHSD) for a free ergonomic inspection. There is no charge for this service to you or your department. Above all else, remember, it doesn't have to hurt!

NOTE: The above should be considered as a general reference, and not a cure-all for every workstation. If you are having pain, tell your physician and contact EHSD.