

SUGGESTIONS FOR BEING FIT WHILE YOU SIT: POSTURAL TIPS FOR YOUR COMPUTER WORK STATION

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With increased computer usage both at work and at home, we have seen a proportionate increase in conditions such as headaches, neck pain, pain between the shoulder blades, low back pain, and elbow and wrist pain.

Many of us know that sitting for prolonged periods is uncomfortable and unhealthy but few of us understand why. Let us review what happens to our bodies in a prolonged seated position:

- Our heads jut forward
- Our shoulders assume a forward, rounded position
- Our arms are flexed out in front of us, with wrists bent while our hands control a mouse, keyboard, phone, etc.
- Our low backs lose the normal curve (lordosis). Loss of lordosis may play a role in disc injuries.
- Our hips and knees are bent, predisposing us to tight muscles which can affect the low back.

Our bodies have the incredible ability to adapt to stresses which we impose on them, be it physical (poor posture, bruise, sprain, muscle pull), emotional (work stress, life stress), or biochemical (poor diet, alcohol, tobacco). Regardless of the stress, our bodies continue to function.

Our joints tissue (muscles, ligaments, tendon) are no different. They adapt to stress (in this case, poor posture) by assuming a new length. The new length is not meant to support normal spinal and joint biomechanics. The result: Some muscles become short and tight while others become weakened. This can lead to...

Headaches

Pain between the shoulder blades

Neck pain

Shoulder pain

Upper back pain

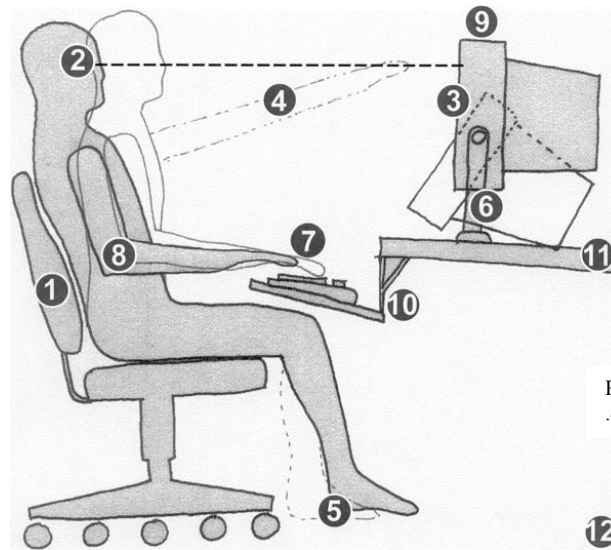
Low back pain

Elbow pain

Wrist pain

Hip pain

I recognize the fact that for many, computer work and prolonged periods of sitting are unavoidable. The following page contains information on modifications to ensure proper spinal alignment to remove stress on the surrounding musculature and soft tissues including the discs of the spine.



Reference: <http://ergo.human.cornell.edu/>

1. use a good chair and sit back (to maintain the normal lumbar curve)
2. top of monitor 2-3" (5-8 cm) above eyes
3. no glare on screen (prevents us from tilting our head to see clearly)
4. sit at arms length (this will avoid eye strain and the need to lean back)
5. feet on floor or footrest or sometimes, having the knees slightly higher than the hips can relieve low back stress
6. use a document holder (prevents us from looking down)
7. wrists flat and straight
8. arms and elbows close to body
9. center monitor and keyboard in front of you
10. use a negative tilt keyboard tray
11. use a stable work surface (unsure proper wrist and hand alignment)
12. take frequent short breaks

Special considerations for children:

Although children have the same needs of adults when it comes to keyboarding, they also have some unique needs:

- A child, especially a very young one, may not be very aware of the position of his/her extremities in space. Therefore, it is especially important for the adult to notice and try to correct the child's posture.
- Children, especially the younger ones, have smaller hands than adults. A conventional keyboard may be too large for him/her. Search on the web for types of products designed for children's small hands.
- Sometimes children like to use a trackballs instead of a mouse because their small hands find them easier to handle. A small mouse would be just as good.
- Children may find it more difficult than adults to know when to take breaks from typing or surfing the web. Thus, monitoring your child would be helpful.
- Being able to adjust chairs, monitors, desks, etc., is very important for children to know how to do in order to be comfortable. Be sure that they understand and are physically strong enough to do so (some mechanisms are even difficult for adults).
- Adjustability is absolutely essential when a family shares a computer workstation.

Final tip- **GET ACTIVE!** If you have not already begun an exercise or walking routine, begin one today. Find an activity which will promote strength, relaxation, balance, flexibility, and overall well being. Yoga, Tai chi, Pilates, or a comprehensive resistance and cardiovascular training routine are all great examples. If you have any questions, please contact me. **914-844-7712 / drruck@ruckspineandsports.com**

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