



WHS Fact Sheet

Workstation Ergonomics: Desk and Chairs

Desks

A range of desk shapes and sizes are available. The placement of equipment on your desk is a key aspect of appropriate workstation ergonomics. You need to be able to sit close to your desk and use symmetrical postures with your head and neck facing forwards and in midline.

Firstly get your working heights correct;

You should raise or lower your chair (or the desk if it is height-adjustable) so that your work is positioned near the point of your bent elbow (with elbows near 90-100 degrees). If you are using a keyboard, your hands and wrists should be at the same height as the space bar on your keyboard. Your shoulders should be relaxed, with your elbows close to your body and you should not need to strain forwards to reach the keyboard.

When your chair is at the correct height, your thighs should be horizontal or parallel to the floor with your feet resting comfortably on the floor. If your thighs are not horizontal or you have trouble reaching the floor, then request a footrest from your supervisor. Your feet should be positioned onto a stable base (the floor or a footrest) and not wrapped around the chair, the chair base or crossed under your desk, as these are not recommended work postures.

Having your keyboard too high or your chair too low, places muscular stress of your neck, shoulders and arms.

Chairs

You need to sit fully into your seat to achieve good chair adjustment. The backrest position should support your spine and have you sitting with your hips at about 90 to 110 degrees. A lever beneath the seat will allow you to change the backrest position.

Your chair should support your lumbar spine. Adjust the height of your chair's back support so that its curve fits into the curve of your lower back. The backrest height can usually be repositioned through using a knob at the rear of the chair or by lifting the backrest upwards.

Adjust the tilt of the seat pan so that your thighs are roughly horizontal or you can keep a slight forward angle to the seat pan if you prefer.

Some chairs offer seat slide adjustment so the length of the seat pan can be varied. Your seat should support most of your thigh, allowing you to place 2 to 3 fingers between the back of your knee and the front of the seat pan. A seat pan which is too long can prevent you sitting fully into the chair and maintaining a well-supported posture. A seat pan which is too short may not provide you enough leg support.

Common chair and desk problems include;

- A chair backrest angled too far back or with the lumbar support not adjusted to support the lumbar spine.
- Armrests are not generally recommended on chairs. Armrests can force you to be too far away from your work, obstruct full movement of your arms and can get stuck under the desk.
- Having the keyboard too high (or chair too low) increasing muscular strain in the neck, shoulders and arms.
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- Having a seat pan which is too long or too short for you.



Hot Desks

Where more than one person uses a workstation, then adjustability between users is needed to accommodate the different sizes and shapes of users and the different work activities they may perform. Advice on equipment offering increased adjustability can be sought from the WHS unit. If you share a workstation make sure you adjust the equipment to yourself, including the chair, each time.