

Is Your Computer Station Working for You?

As we spend increasing amounts of time at our computer workstation we need to become more aware of how the arrangement of our equipment can effect our comfort, productivity and safety. Working at your computer can take a toll on your body. Prolonged work at an ill-adjusted computer workstation can cause sore muscles, headaches, eyestrain, tension and fatigue. By now most of us have heard of the term “Ergonomics”, which is the science of arranging your workstation to fit the individual’s structure and needs. The science of Ergonomics has in recent years become an effective tool in reducing the onset of potential injuries such as carpal tunnel injuries, back pain and other repetitive stress injuries. Studies have indicated that fatigue and decreased productivity can in many cases be significantly reduced by simply repositioning keyboards, mouse’s and computer monitors to more appropriate positions, and by making simple adjustment to the chair. The following guidelines may assist you in evaluating your computer workstation:

- The desktop should be organized; so that frequently used objects are placed close to the user to reduce excessive reaching.
- The work surface should have a matte finish to reduce visual glare.
- Position your lamp or light source to illuminate the document without causing glare to the screen or direct illumination to your eyes.
- To reduce the effects of glare, the monitor display screen should not be placed directly facing a window.
- Place the phone on the side of your non-dominant hand.
- Utilize a sturdy and adjustable document holder, and position it on either side of the monitor screen. The document holder should be at the same distance from your eyes as the display screen to reduce frequent changes of focus.
- Learn the adjustment features of your chair. Take the necessary time to adjust your chair to meet your postural and comfort needs. Remember that sitting with proper posture may not be comfortable at first, especially if you have developed poor sitting habits.
- A footrest should be used if, after repositioning the height of the chair, the feet do not rest flat on the floor.
- The area underneath the desk should be free from clutter to allow you to sit at a proper angle in relation to the computer, and to allow the legs to stretch.
- Utilize a phone headset to reduce neck and shoulder strain if you use the phone frequently throughout the day.
- In some cases, the use of an articulating keyboard tray on a workstation that is too high or low can provide the proper keyboard height adjustment for the user without changing furniture. This tray is especially effective on stations with multiple users.

Although ergonomic adjustments are recommended to reduce strain and improve safety, our bodies need to move and stretch. The risk of providing the optimal workstation environment is that the user tends to stay in one position. Some ergonomists prefer to locate a piece of equipment, such as a printer or a fax machine, away from the workstation. As a result, this will require that the user periodically get up and move to retrieve the copy. If you would like to have a comprehensive analysis of your computer workstation please contact **Occupational Health Services of Norwalk Hospital, phone # (203) 852 – 2417.**