

## Office Ergonomics

Many people suffer from conditions such as back pain and repetitive strain injury (RSI) as a result of their working environments. If you spend time in your day sitting at a desk or computer station, it is important to make sure that the area is set up correctly to prevent you straining the structures in your body through bad posture or movement patterns.

This information sheet is designed to help you make sure you are doing all you can to prevent injuring yourself when at work. Most employers have an Occupational Health representative that you should contact if you need to make more than minor adjustments to your work station.

- **Your seat back**– Adjust the angle of the seat so that your back is comfortably supported, and so that the small curve at the base of your spine is maintained. If this curve is not supported, you could try changing your chair or placing a small rolled up towel or lumbar roll behind your lower back to help maintain a good and comfortable posture.
- **Your seat base** – This should not touch the back of your knees- if it does this means that it is too long. If possible, adjust this, or you may have to request a new chair with a shorter seat length.
- **Chair height** – Adjust this so that when your hands on your keyboard and your shoulders are relaxed, your elbows are at 90° with no angle at the wrist.
- **Foot rest** – When your chair is at the correct height, your knees should rest comfortably at a 90° angle, without compressing the underside of your thighs. If this is not the case you will need a foot rest to place your feet on, which can be bought or improvised using a box or piece of foam.
- **Chair Position** – Move your chair toward the desk until your elbows are in line with your shoulders when your hands are resting on the keyboard. In order to achieve this, you may need to alter the arms of the chair so that they fit under the desk, and you may need to move your keyboard closer to you.
- **Monitor Position** – The centre of your monitor should be directly in front of your eyes so that you do not need to bend or extend your neck to view it comfortably. Avoid having the monitor in a corner, as this will put strain on your neck and back. The ideal distance from your eyes to the monitor should be about 22 – 26” (55 –65cms) so that you can focus easily.
- **Keyboard Position** – Your keyboard should be placed centrally in front of you at the correct distance so that your elbows are in line with your body. If

you rest your hands on the desk when you type, you will need to get a wrist support to prevent strain on your wrists.

- **Mouse Position** – Move your mouse so that it is as close to the keyboard as possible, so that you don't have to reach or lean to use it. Make sure that it doesn't stray during the day by sticking your mouse mat down to the desk!
- **Document Positioning** - If you often refer to documents whilst typing use a document holder. This should be positioned at the same height and distance as your monitor. If you look at the documents more than the screen put the document holder directly in front of you and the monitor to the side.
- **Phone Positioning** – Arrange your phone and any other items of equipment that you use regularly so that they are close to you. Avoid twisting to reach things as this can cause strain if you repeat the movement often. Never place the phone under your chin when working – this places considerable stress on your neck and can cause restrictions to the flow of blood to your brain. If needed request a hands-free set so that you can speak on the phone while doing other tasks.

### **Additional Points**

- Even if your work station is well positioned, it is important to maintain a good posture. This means not slumping, and trying to avoid crossing your legs when sitting at your desk.
- Always take regular breaks from sitting at your desk. This increases blood flow around your body, rests your eyes and allows you to stretch your back and limbs.
- If you suffer from back pain, you could try using a special cushion to help encourage good posture and relieve your back pain. These are usually filled with either air or gel - ask your physiotherapist for advice about purchasing one.
- If you suffer from stiffness and pain when sitting at your desk, see your physiotherapist about a set of stretching exercises. These can be performed throughout the day to help you keep your joints and muscles relaxed and mobile.