

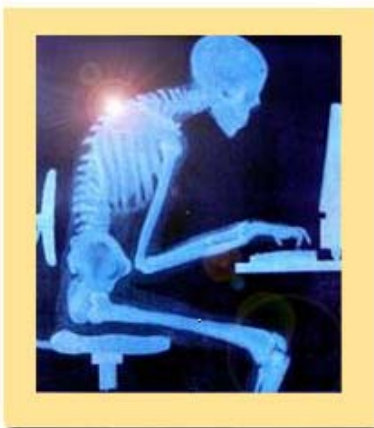
# REDUCING BACK PAIN WHILE SITTING at the computer

***The Australian Physiotherapy Association, and its member physiotherapists of North East Physiotherapy, are concerned about the number of people seeking physiotherapy treatment for back, neck and shoulder pain caused by poor computer posture, lack of exercise and regular breaks. Unquestionably, students and adults alike spend more time at computers today than 20 years ago***

How you use your computer can be a major cause of back, neck, and shoulder pain. Poor posture while sitting at the computer and lack of regular breaks and exercise can all contribute to the problem. Here are some simple tips, from the Australian Physiotherapy Association, on how to help prevent injuries when using your computer.

## **Essential Computer Workstation advice**

When sitting in an office chair for a long period, the natural tendency for most people is to slouch over or slouch down in the chair, and this posture can overstretch the spinal ligaments and strain the discs and surrounding structures in the spine. Over time, incorrect sitting posture and poor workplace ergonomics can contribute wear and tear to spinal structures or worsen recurrent episodes of spinal pain. This article outlines several guidelines for setting up your office chair and workstation to help prevent back strain and promote overall back health.



*Only two reports to go, then surely it must be time for lunch!*

### **Early warning signs should not be ignored.**

Any discomfort experienced at your computer is a sign you are doing something wrong. You may not be too concerned if the aches and pains, associated with sitting at your computer, disappear at weekends. But prolonged periods (and we could be talking years) of sitting in a poor position will alter your posture gradually until you begin to suffer all the time.

**If you experience any neck, shoulder, wrist or back symptoms, talk to your Physiotherapist.**

The longer these conditions persist the harder it will be to treat. For advice on improving your posture, contact a physiotherapist at Clinical Pilates Studio 20

## TIPS FOR IMPROVING YOUR INTERACTION WITH COMPUTERS

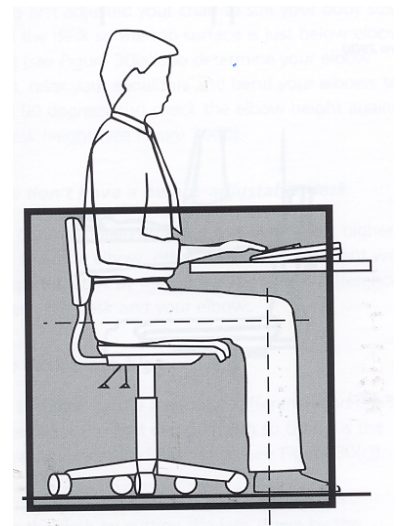
Here are some simple tips designed to help your posture and to help prevent back and neck injuries when sitting at the computer at home, school or work:

**Avoid static posture while sitting in office chairs.** It is important to remember that no matter how comfortable you are in your office chair, a prolonged, static posture such as sitting is a common contributor to back, neck and upper limb problems.

*Try to remember to stand, stretch and walk for at least a minute or two every half hour.* Even a quick stretch or some minimal movement – such as walking to the water cooler, printer or bathroom – will help. A twenty minute walk will help even more, promoting healthy blood flow that brings important nutrients to all the spinal structures. In general, moving about and stretching on a regular basis throughout the day will help keep your joints, ligaments, muscles and tendons loose. This in turn will help you feel more comfortable, more relaxed and more productive.

### **Adjust your work station to suit YOU**

- ***Always sit in a good quality, adjustable, and comfortable office chair.***
- ***Pull your chair close to the desk and adjust the seat height so that your elbows, hips, and knees are bent at approximately 90 degrees.***
- ***Your forearms should be parallel to or sloping down toward the desktop.***
- ***Your feet should rest flat on the floor—use a footrest if necessary.***
- ***Adjust the backrest of your chair to support the curve in your lower back and to help keep you upright when typing.***
- ***Relax your shoulders.***
- ***Sit up straight and position your computer screen at a comfortable viewing distance, generally at arm's length.***
- ***Keep the top of the screen below eye level and directly in front of you. Don't use your screen positioned to one side.***
- ***Don't work from documents flat on the desk. Use a document holder set close to the screen at the same distance from your eyes, or prop your work on a folder between the keyboard and screen.***



- **Ensure your screen is easy to see. Eliminate reflections by adjusting and tilting the screen and ensure there is no light source directly behind it. Adjust the brightness control to suit.**
- **Avoid having bright lights shining on your screen which make you crane your neck to see. Use a larger font size if possible.**
- **Don't use a notebook computer for extended periods. If this is unavoidable, plug it into a normal size keyboard and mouse. Check that the top of the screen is eye level.**
- **You may need a stand to raise the laptop screen to eye level.**
- **Limit continuous computer use to one hour and take breaks every 30 minutes to do some neck, wrist and shoulder stretches, followed by a quick stand and reach to the sky.**
- **Learn to touch type so you don't have to bend your neck forward repetitively to find the right keys. Alternate between mouse and keyboard by varying your inputting tasks. Learn the function keys and short cuts to reduce the amount of mouse use**
- **Maintain your general fitness. Keep yourself strong, active, and flexible. Manage the stresses of work and study with a balance of exercise, relaxation, and other stress management approaches.**
- **Take notice of early warnings. If you feel an ache or discomfort in any part of your body, check your posture, take a break and, if the pain persists, see a physiotherapist.**

For more details on the setting up your workstation, take the time to read thoroughly through **Appendix A – OFFICEWISE- A GUIDE TO HEALTH & SAFETY IN THE OFFICE**, Worksafe Victoria [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au) and search Officewise under publications



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