



## SEVEN STEPS TO MAKING ERGONOMICS CENTRAL TO WORKPLACE CULTURE

We all want to be healthy, happy and efficient at work – and one of the best ways employers can help achieve this is through good ergonomics.

To boost organisational performance in every area, from improved health and productivity to decreased absence rates and work-related injuries, ergonomics should be a priority.

Using well designed equipment is one starting point, but effective ergonomics should also be central to workplace culture.

A culture of ergonomics develops when human comfort and efficiency is a priority in every decision and action taken, and healthy working practices are the norm.

This requires employers to put preventative, educational and assessment measures in place, and follow these through all year round. It also means all of us considering and supporting our own wellbeing in our workspaces.

### EFFECTIVE OFFICE ERGONOMICS CAN REDUCE

#### MUSCULOSKELETAL PROBLEMS



by **61%**

#### LOST WORKING DAYS



by **88%**

#### STAFF TURNOVER



by **87%**

This is a goal worth working towards. The Chartered Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors says that effective office ergonomics can reduce the number of musculoskeletal problems by 61%, reduce lost working days by 88% and reduce staff turnover by 87%.

Here are seven steps to creating a workplace culture with ergonomics at its heart:

### 1. Plan ergonomic training

Knowledge of what a healthy workspace and safe working practice looks like is the key to a fully ergonomic workplace.

Everyone should be involved in this. While we know that sitting down for long periods of time without a break is not good, many of us still need to sit and work, so employees in every area need to understand what good seating practice is.

A workshop with a physiotherapist or workplace ergonomist will help people review their posture, check their workspace set up and discuss the best ways to work safely and comfortably.

A trained professional will be best placed to talk through the potential long term health consequences of a poor seated position, such as neck and back pain, and give specific one-to-one advice and tips for preventing, or reducing the impact of, injuries.



A training session can also demonstrate what a healthy workstation looks like, and how every item of equipment can, and should, be adjusted to our specific needs. It will cover the biggest postural issues we can experience from sitting for hours at a time and give practical support to help stop potential health problems in their tracks.

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### 1. Plan ergonomic training

Knowledge of what a healthy workspace and safe working practice looks like is the key to a fully ergonomic workplace.

### 2. Promote proper posture

Mindfulness of our posture is a huge factor in employee wellbeing. Beyond any training, we all need to remember to check our seating position, sit comfortably and help prevent injury, every single day.

Among the key elements of good posture is back position. This should be supported by the back of a chair or a back rest so that we don't need to lean forward. If we lean forward from our lower backs to work, this can put more pressure on the vertebrae of our lower spines and compress our disks.

Our eyes should also be level with the top of the monitor screen, as any slight angle forward can place a strain on the muscles of the neck and upper back. If we need to lean our heads forward, the more work our necks and upper backs will have to do.

Good posture also includes keeping our elbows at the side of our bodies. If we're forced to move our arms forward to work, this will lead to greater strain, and potential injury over time.



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### 3. Run workspace assessments

The aim of a Workstation Risk Assessment is to make sure that we're working safely and comfortably wherever we are, in the workplace, or home office if we're a remote or hybrid worker.

While organisations are legally required to carry out regular Workstation Risk Assessments (EU Directive 90/270/EEC), these should be seen as much more than just 'meeting requirements.' When carried out correctly, these can quickly uncover issues and improve health and comfort in achievable and practical ways.

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### 4. Invest in ergonomic equipment

Any ergonomically well-designed workplace should have equipment that supports good posture, minimises the need to twist or stretch while working and provides comfort.

We should be able to adapt almost every element of a workstation to our personal needs so that we can work easily. Some ergonomic desk equipment designed for adjusting to individual heights and optimal sitting positions includes:

#### Height adjustable desks

We should switch between sitting and standing at our desks if possible. A [height adjustable desk](#) allows much more flexibility, granting us the ability to adapt our posture throughout the day.

#### Monitor Arms

When sitting or standing at a desk, the top of a monitor screen should be level with our eyes. A [monitor arm](#) helps adjust the height of a screen to individual needs.

#### Monitor Stands

Another way to raise the height of a monitor to the right level is with a [monitor stand](#). These offer several height levels, are easily transportable for workers moving between office and home and can include storage space.

#### Laptop Supports

It's just as important to ensure our laptops are at the right height by using a [laptop support](#) to bring the top of your screen up to your eyeline.

#### Back Supports

The lower back should always be supported when sitting, either through built in lumbar support in an office chair, or by a [back support](#) that can be attached to your chair.

### Wrist Supports

To prevent repetitive strain and ensure our wrists are comfortable when typing or mousing, a wrist support is invaluable.

### Foot Supports

When seated, our knees should be level with or slightly lower than our hips. A foot support will help raise your legs and maintain the right position.



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## 5. Encourage movement breaks

Encouraging each other to take regular movement breaks is essential. People who work at desks are likely to have relatively sedentary lifestyles, sitting for around ten hours a day on average, which brings a range of negative health risks, including obesity and Type 2 diabetes.

Anyone at a workstation should break up periods of sitting with short bursts of activity, such as walking.

To further help balance out the potential problems of sitting for hours at a time, the following ergonomic exercises are recommended by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists:

### Chest Stretch

- Sit forward from the back of your chair.
- With your thumbs pointing towards the ceiling, open your arms out to the side until you feel a stretch in the front of your chest. Ensure your shoulders are back and down.
- Aim to switch on the muscles between your shoulder blades by gently drawing them together. You should not feel pain or tingling in your arms.
- Hold the stretch for 20 seconds and repeat three times.

### Leg Stretch

- Stand in front of your desk and place your left hand on it for balance.
- Standing on your left leg, raise your right heel towards your right buttock.
- Grab hold of your right foot with your right hand. You should feel a stretch along the front of your thigh.
- Hold the stretch for 20 seconds, repeat three times and then switch legs.

### Sit Stretch

- Perch on the edge of your seat and stretch your right leg out in front.
- Rest your heel on the floor with your foot pointing up.
- Lean forward slightly from your hips and look straight ahead. You should feel a gentle stretch but no pain along the back of your right leg.
- Hold the stretch for 20 seconds, repeat three times and then swap legs.



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## 6. Set up ergonomic policies

Making ergonomics an integral part of company policy makes sense, as these are a recognised element of staying safe at work.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) points out that taking account of ergonomics and human factors can reduce the likelihood of an accident and improve health and safety in the workplace.

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## 7. Nurture open communication

Creating change means staying in touch with employees on ergonomic issues, and their individual experiences. It could also include asking for their input and ideas for improvements that will bring benefits and prevent issues from developing further.

Monitoring feedback on a regular basis, through surveys, emails or meetings, will also help to gather data on company performance, employee morale and individual health and injury experiences that will shape planning and build an even stronger culture of ergonomics moving forwards.

