Ergonomic Concerns for Computer Workstations

A computer workstation is an area designated to conduct tasks on a desktop or laptop computer. It usually consists of an adjustable chair and desk, a desktop or laptop computer, one or more monitors, a keyboard, mouse, wrist rest, and office equipment (e.g., printers, document holders, speakers, external disk drives, telephones). While computer work may seem like a low hazard, this type of work is not without safety and health (S&H) risks. This one pager describes those hazards and provides tips to reduce the likelihood of ergonomic risks or concerns.

HAZARDS OF COMPUTER WORKSTATIONS

Many workers spend six (6) or more hours at a computer workstation each workday. Some common health concerns associated with computer use include:

NOTE - There is no federal ergonomics standard.

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- Muscle pain, stiffness, and/or physical discomfort in the neck, upper or lower back, shoulders, hands/wrists/arms, or buttocks

- Tiredness, loss of concentration, irritability, or dizziness

- Eye irritation and discomfort, headache, or vision issues.

TIPS TO REDUCE COMPUTER WORKSTATION RISKS

Check your Department of Defense (DoD) Component S&H regulations for specific ergonomics program requirements and guidance. Follow these tips to reduce ergonomic risks:

Worker Tips	General Office Tips
Alternate tasks throughout the workday	Maintain a comfortable room temperature and humidity
Take stretch breaks – refer to the Take Time to Stretch poster	Keep your monitor at a 90-degree angle to windows and overhead lights to prevent glare and eyestrain
Use a handsfree device to reduce neck strain during phone calls	Place document holders next to your monitor at the same angle and height
Use minimal force when typing on your keyboard	Clean your monitor screen weekly for better visual clarity
Adjust your screen brightness, contrast, and resolution	Adjust screens to "night mode" setting to reduce blue light and glare when working at night
Consider prescription computer glasses to reduce potential eye/neck strain	Consider task lighting when additional light is needed at your desk

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COMPUTER WORKSTATION SETUP

Proper set up of your computer workstation helps maintain a neutral body posture and reduce ergonomic risks. Follow these tips for proper setup at your standing and/or sitting workstations:
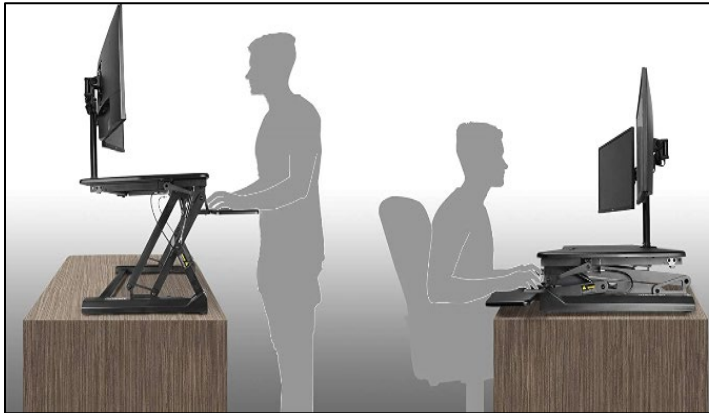

Tips for standing or sitting workstations:

- Adjust the top of the monitor(s) to eye level, promoting neutral neck posture
- Keep your eyes 18–30 inches from the computer screen (about an arm's length away)
- Move your elbows close to the body, at about a 90-degree angle to the keyboard
- Keep your hands, wrists, and forearms straight and parallel to the floor

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Additional tips for standing workstations:

- Ensure the height of the keyboard and mouse are slightly lower than your standing elbow height
- Stand straight, with your shoulders relaxed and positioned gently back and down
- Avoid leaning on your sit-stand workstation
- Take care not to lock your knees – stay balanced and relaxed, with knees slightly bent
- Distribute your weight evenly on both feet and shift occasionally to promote blood circulation

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Additional tips for sitting workstations:

- Relax your shoulders and allow your upper arms to drape naturally at the side of your body
- Consider using lumbar support to maintain and support the natural curvature of your spine
- Sit with hips to the rear of the chair seat to support thighs and hips
- Keep your knees about the same height as your hips, with your feet slightly forward
- Rest your feet comfortably on the floor or footrest

Image retrieved from OSHA

Contact your local Safety or Industrial Hygiene Office for workstation ergonomic evaluations. Other resources include: SMCX One Pager – Home Office Tips: Setting Up Your Workstation and OSHA's Computer Workstations eTool. For additional information on the SMCX's services, please visit the SMCX-hosted website: https://www.smscx.org/.

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