



Ergonomics 101: How to set up your desk to lessen back, neck or wrist strain

White collar workers can have their own type of injury risk from spending long days sitting at a desk, especially when the chair is not fitted correctly to the person or the desk. Consider that the only furniture someone spends more time in than their office chair is their bed.

Usually, a person's chair is provided by the company and if the company isn't sensitive to ergonomics, that can spell problems. Thankfully, most desk chairs sold in the last five years have some ergonomic consideration in their design. But that still doesn't mean the chair is adjusted to the person or the desk. There are guidelines developed by ergonomics experts that can lessen neck strain, back strain and the likelihood that you will develop carpal tunnel wrist problems from long periods at a keyboard.

How to adjust your chair

The key to preventing strain is adjusting your chair, because virtually every decent office chair has a height adjustment. So even if the employer invests in an expensive, well-designed ergonomic chair, that doesn't mean it's adjusted for you. A person must raise the chair so the angles are right for their trunk height in relation to their desk. In a properly adjusted chair, the chair height should be adjusted so the computer monitor is just below eye level. It may be necessary to raise the monitor up 3-6 inches to avoid looking down at a work desk.

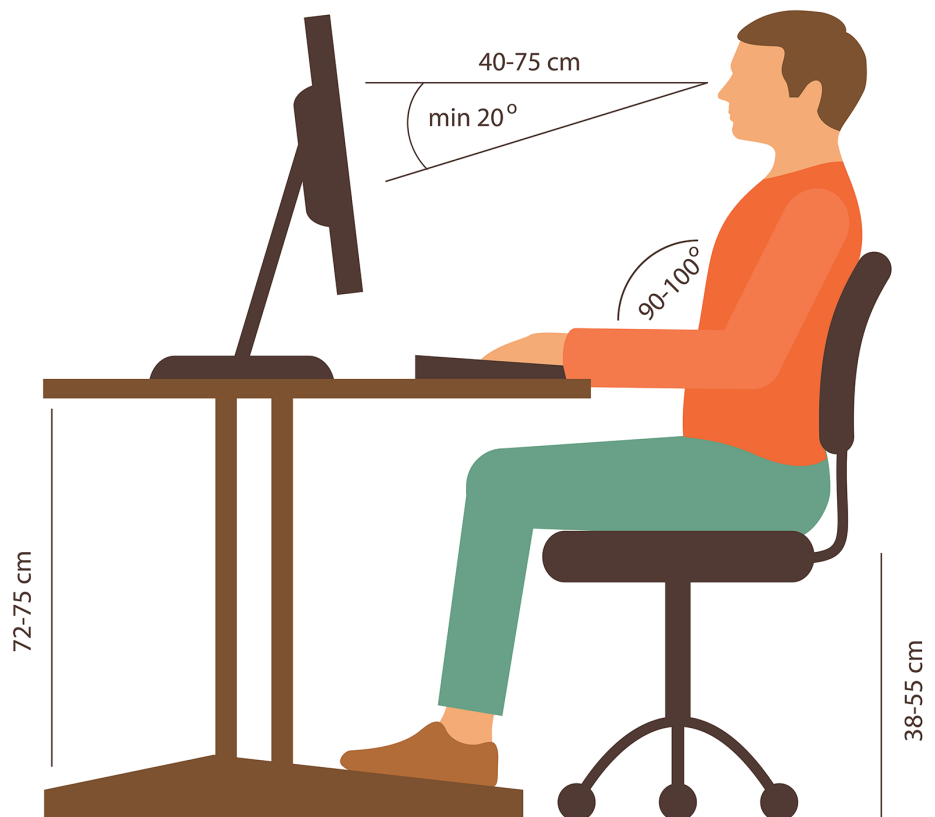
The computer monitor should be about an arms length away from your eyes. If the screen is too far away, it can lead to eyestrain and headaches throughout the day. Then adjust the lighting on your computer monitor to help reduce glare and eyestrain. Your forearms should be parallel to the floor and should not have to reach far to type on the

keyboard. Armrests that are too low can cause carpal tunnel syndrome and elbow strain. Your wrists should be straight when typing or using the mouse.

The lumbar spine (lower back) should be supported by the back of the chair with your feet planted on the floor. The backrest should fit snug and comfortable against your lower back. Your thighs should be parallel to the floor and knees at a 90-degree angle. Some people may find it most comfortable resting

their feet on the floor, while others may like a small support to raise their feet. There should be about 3-6 inches of legroom between your lap and desk.

Even with the best chair, though, a person should get up and move around throughout the day. The back is not designed to be in a static position for hours. Movement is like lubricant for the spine. So every 45 minutes or so, just get up from the desk, stretch a little.



ERGONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS: Having an armrest that is too high can cause pain and inflammation on the inner side of the elbow. Armrests that are too low can cause carpal tunnel syndrome in the wrist. If your chair is adjusted too low, this can also cause carpal tunnel or rotator cuff strain to the shoulders. A back chair that is too erect, or without enough lumbar support for the low back can lead to back pain, neck pain or headaches. Remember, your back hates a static position. Movement is like lubricant for the joints. Ideally, an office worker should get off their chair every hour to stretch or move around.