



# **Toolbox Talk: How to set up your work station using appropriate ergonomic principles**

## **Introduction/Overview**

Do you find yourself suffering from a stiff neck, sore shoulders, or an aching back at the end of the day? Maybe you've noticed a tingling or numbness in your fingers? These can be signs of a musculoskeletal disorder (MSD). A poorly set up work station may be to blame. An ergonomically correct work station helps eliminate MSDs. What is ergonomics? It is the science of creating a working environment that suits the worker while maximizing efficiency. In short, ergonomics is adjusting the environment to the worker, not the worker to the environment. Readjusting your work area could be just what you need to prevent minor issues from becoming crippling. Ergonomic injury risk factors include forceful movements, repetitive motions, awkward postures, and lack of rest.

## **Statistics**

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), MSDs account for more than \$15 billion in workers' compensation costs annually. In 2015 the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported MSD cases accounted for thirty-one percent of all worker injury and illness cases.

## **Talking points**

- **Chairs**
  - Adjust the lumbar support to your body. If your chair is not adjustable, place a small cushion at the curve of your back.
  - The height of your chair should allow your feet to rest flat on the floor or footrest with your thighs parallel to the floor.
  - Adjust armrests so your arms gently rest on them and your shoulders are relaxed.
  
- **Keyboard and mouse**
  - Place your mouse within easy reach and on the same level as your keyboard.
  - While typing or using your mouse, keep your wrist straight, upper arms close to your body, and your hands level with or slightly lower than your elbows.
  - Use a mouse pad to keep your wrists from laying on hard edges and surfaces.
  
- **Telephone and other frequently used items**
  - Keep objects that you regularly use close to your body to minimize reaching. If you can't reach something comfortably, stand up to get it. Do not overreach.

Developed by:

- If you talk on the phone and type or write, place your phone on speaker or use a headset. Do not cradle the phone between your head and shoulder.
- Desk
  - Make sure there is room under your desk for your knees, thighs, and feet. If the desk is too low and not adjustable, place blocks or sturdy boards under the legs to raise it. If the desk is too high, raise your chair.
  - Declutter your desktop. Give yourself room to work.
- Monitor
  - The monitor should be approximately an arm's length away with the top of the monitor at eye level or slightly lower. If you wear bifocals, you should lower the monitor an additional inch or two. You may want to consider getting glasses made for use with a monitor. Talk to your eye care provider.
  - Place the monitor directly in front of you. If you have more than one monitor, place them side by side on the same level to minimize the amount of neck movement.
  - Position your monitor so that the brightest light source is to the side.

**Additional Discussion Notes:**

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**Final Thought:**

The human body is designed to move. Staying in any position too long will cause discomfort, so in addition to the adjustments to your work area, take time to stretch and walk around. It's recommended that every hour you should get up and move around for about five minutes. Stretching tired muscles relieves pain, increases blood supply, and leads to less wear and tear on muscles, tendons, and joints.

**NOTE:** Always promote discussion with the attendees. If a question comes up that no one in attendance can answer, please contact OWC or the Loss Control Innovations consultants for assistance.

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**References:**

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[Office ergonomics: Your how-to guide](#)

[Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Safety and Health Topics Ergonomics](#)

[Bureau of Labor Statistics, Nonfatal Occupational Injuries and Illnesses Requiring Days Away from Work, 2015](#)