

Everyday Ergo

The workplace isn't the only place to think about when considering ergonomics. Many hobbies and other everyday activities performed outside of the workplace can be sources of ergonomic stressors. Use the information below to learn more about how to incorporate Ergonomics in your everyday life.

HOME COMPUTING/GAMING

Many people these days use their computer or gaming console at home to unwind. But these pursuits at home can provide just as much opportunity for static and awkward postures as work-time computing. If you are a console gamer, remember to take breaks and shift position regularly. Sit directly in front of the screen, preferably at a distance where you can view the entire screen at one time with your neck in a neutral position (i.e., head not tilted back or forward or twisting to the side). Hold your controller with your arms relaxed and by your sides and your wrists straight. Use the lightest touch possible when activating your controller. Ensure there is adequate lighting with no glare on the screen. Turn off or limit the time using the vibration feedback of the controller.

HANDHELD DEVICES

Many people are spending more and more time with their tablets and smart phones, but these are not free of ergonomic stressors. Here are some things to remember when computing on the go.

- Texting and some other small-screen features can be hard on the thumbs. Limit typing time to less than 15-minute sessions.
- Stretch often when spending extended concentrated time on your device.
- If you use a stylus, try to find one with a larger grip handle.
- Think about maintaining a neutral posture while on your device. You may elect to use something to support the arms so that you are not holding them aloft for long periods and/or maintaining a prolonged bent-neck posture.

GARDENING

Gardening can be hard on the body due to the propensity for prolonged awkward postures. In general, good ergonomic basics should be remembered while gardening: keep work close to you, take frequent rest breaks, use the proper tools, and maintain neutral postures whenever possible.

SEWING, QUILTING, AND NEEDLEWORK

Some things to remember while doing your sewing, quilting, or needlework:

- Keep the area well-lit to avoid eyestrain. Since these are often up-close tasks, remember to take breaks every 20 minutes or so and focus your eyes on something in the distance for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid hunching over your work. Adjust your chair to your body dimensions and sit with back straight, arms by the sides, and head up while you work.
- Face your work straight on; do not twist at the hips, back, or neck. Some sewing tables can be tilted toward you slightly to reduce hunching. Remember to take breaks frequently to avoid static working postures.
- If you are standing at your work, an anti-fatigue mat and comfortable shoes will help.
- If you sew, quilt, or do needlework frequently, consider investing in ergonomic tools designed to promote neutral joint postures. Some tools may have a bent handle, allowing the user to work with a straight wrist. Some tools can be found in electric or otherwise partially automated versions to reduce strain.
- Pay attention to your hand position while using tools such as needles, scissors, etc. Try to keep a straight wrist.
- Keep your work surface at elbow height.
- Keep your commonly used tools and items nearby to minimize reaching and twisting.
- Do not work through discomfort. Find out what is causing your pain and think how you might eliminate it. Look out for repetitive stress injury hallmarks such as pain, weakness, tingling, or numbness.
- Take frequent breaks or rotate tasks between intensive parts of your work.

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MUSIC

Many musical instruments require repetitive motions and/or static and sometimes awkward postures to play. For instruments that are played while seated, it is important that your chair, bench, or stool fit your body dimensions. In general, try to ensure that the height of your seat places your knees and hips at about the same level. Practice proper body mechanics for your instrument while you are playing. Remember to warm up, stretch, and take adequate breaks.

Keyboard Instruments

When playing a keyboard instrument (such as a piano or organ), try to use a bench that can be adjusted to your body dimensions. While seated at the instrument with fingers on keys, hands should be at about elbow level when your arms are relaxed by your sides and elbows bent. Some keyboard instruments such as pianos can be found with smaller key widths. This can benefit those with smaller hands and shorter reaches.

String Instruments

Ergonomically-designed string instruments are common now. Important things to keep in mind are pressure-inducing spots on your instrument. For instance, there are now guitars with beveled-edge bodies to reduce the pressure where the right arm rests on the instrument. Some violins and violas have been modified to remove part of the body to make it lighter and/or easier to play in the higher positions. There are also ergonomic cellos and other string instruments.

Woodwind Instruments

The use of a neck strap or support post is possible with several woodwind instruments. There are flute designs to address the difficulty of holding the instrument out to the side. A new angle between the mouthpiece and keys allows the flutist's neck and shoulder to remain in more neutral positions. Extensions can sometimes be

added to various woodwind keys to allow shorter fingers to reach more easily.

Brass Instruments

While generally associated with the lowest rates of performance-related injury, brass instruments have also had some ergonomic modifications developed. Support posts are available and four-valve trumpets with the valves arrayed in an arc rather than straight across are available. Fiberglass mouthpieces exist for those playing in cold weather.

Percussion Instruments

Work to arrange drum sets so that each instrument is within easy reach, with most used items being the closest at about a forearm's length away.

SCHOOL

Whether you are a grade schooler or in college, it is important to be knowledgeable about ergonomics while working on the rest of your education.

Backpacks

Wear both straps of your backpack. A backpack is preferred over a "messenger bag" type of pack that is only carried on one shoulder. It has been suggested that no one should carry more than 25 pounds in their backpack. Those under 100 pounds themselves should carry less than 15 pounds. Find a pack with wide, padded straps and perhaps a waist belt. Plan your day to try to split your load into smaller pieces with frequent trips to a locker or other storage location. Position the backpack so that it hangs just below the shoulders and rests on the hips and pelvis. Backpacks with several compartments can help distribute the load better. Heavier items should be packed closer to the back, with pointy and bulky items toward the outside of the pack. Use the smallest backpack you can that fits your needs.

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Laptops/Notebook Computers

Because of the inherent design of the notebook computer, when the screen is at the optimal height and distance for viewing, the keyboard is usually not at the optimal height and distance for typing, and vice-versa. It is recommended that the keyboard be placed at a comfortable distance for keying and screen settings changed to make viewing more comfortable. If you are using your notebook computer for more than one hour at a time, consider getting an external keyboard and/or monitor. An external pointing device (such as a mouse) is recommended and is usually very portable.

Computing

School work can involve hours of computing. Insert office ergo or how to setup station link to learn more about how to set up your computer workstation. These principles also apply to notebook/laptop computing, so do your best to implement them whenever possible.

Writing and Note Taking

While writing, especially for long periods, remember to take breaks and check your posture. While not always possible in a school setting, try to find a comfortable chair that allows your knees and hips to be at about the same level, and a desk height that puts your hands and wrists at about elbow level when you are seated upright with the arms relaxed by the sides. Place feet on floor. If you cannot place feet on floor then you may need a stool or use of an item to get the support you need.

Your tools are important. Make sure your pens and pencils work well to minimize the amount of pressure you need to apply while writing. Felt-tips, gel pens, or roller ball pens all have tips that glide easily over paper. Use the lightest grip possible and consider getting wider-grip pens and pencils if it decreases discomfort. Try to keep a neutral wrist posture and don't plant your forearm or wrist on the table. Use your shoulder to initiate the movement of writing. Get close to your work surface to minimize

reaching and make sure nothing's in the way of your writing – extra items should be stored elsewhere if there is little writing surface. Try not to lean on the wrist or forearm, especially on the sharp edge of a desk. Remember to take breaks when possible.

School Kids

Younger children and sometimes smaller people encounter their own issues with ergonomics. Items made for adults can sometimes be too large for them. Make sure that the equipment fits the body dimensions. Smaller chairs, desks, and even mice and keyboards are available for smaller bodies that do lots of school work. Adjustability is essential when a family shares a computer workstation. Begin teaching about proper postures early and it will become a habit into adulthood.

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