

Setting up and ergonomic office space

Long term use of an incorrectly set up office increases your chance of muscle aches, reduced blood supply to parts of your body and may induce severe health problems including repetitive strain injury (RSI). Symptoms of RSI include burning, aching or shooting pains particularly in your arms, shoulders and neck. The pain may stop as soon as you finish the activity but will often last for hours and in some cases days. For this reason it is important to set up your office in the most efficient manner and to have regular breaks and stretch to keep your blood moving. By setting up your office correctly you can reduce your chance of injury and make your time in the office more enjoyable.

When setting up an office space there are several items that you need to adjust. Set up your chair so that your feet are flat on the floor, with your thighs horizontal and your lower legs vertical. Adjust the backrest so that the seat's curve follows the curve of your back. Choose a chair with 5 wheels as this will be stable and less likely to tip over. Ensure the wheels move freely. If your seat has arm rests they should slide under the desk. The desk should be high enough to rest your elbows. The floor surface needs to be hard and smooth as it is necessary for the chair's wheels to roll easily. Some thick carpets, uneven tiles or floorboards make it hard to roll the wheels; this can be overcome by using a specialised plastic mat under your chair.

You should sit at arm's length from your monitor. Your monitor should be setup so that it is at or just below eye level. If you need to lift the monitor up, use a computer tower. The keyboard should be as close to the front of the desk as possible so your upper arms are close to your body. The keyboard should have a guard to support your wrists when typing. The mouse should be placed directly next to the keyboard.

Lighting is important; natural lighting is preferred but if you don't have natural light use a desk lamp so you are not straining your eyes, but ensure there is no glare. Glare reducing screens can be fitted to monitors however modern monitors have glare resistant glass as a standard feature. Other items you use regularly such as printers, the bin, filing cabinets, in trays, phone, fax and scanners should be in reach so you do not strain to access them. If it is not possible to have these items in easy reach, put them in a position where you must get out of the seat to access them. This makes

you stand up and move your body and minimises the likelihood of you stretching too far in your seat and straining a muscle.

Desk top computers allow better ergonomic positioning than laptop computers. You can improve the comfort of using a laptop by attaching a separate key board and mouse so the screen can be raised to the right height on a laptop docking station. Separate key board and mouse are easier to use than the ones built into a laptop as they are bigger and more conveniently designed.

Rest your eyes by taking frequent breaks to walk around the office and at the same time ensure you stretch. You should have a stretch break every half hour. Stretch your legs, back, neck, arms and fingers. A slideshow of different stretches and a description of how to do them can be viewed at the following website <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stretching/WL00030>

There are companies that sell specialist ergonomic office furniture. This furniture is more user friendly than cheap office furniture and when you consider how often you will be using your office the investment in quality office furniture is often an investment in your health.

If you require new computer accessories including mouse, keyboard, new monitor or a glare reducing screen drop in and see Josh in the Commonwealth Bank Building in Main Street or call him on 6343 1720.