

ERGONOMICS

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If your job requires you to sit for much of the day, sooner or later you may experience pain in your back, neck, shoulder, hands, or wrists.

You can avoid such problems by practicing the following strategies.

Comfort Basics

These tips can help you prevent stiff muscles:

- Take a five-minute stretch break every hour. Stand up and stretch your whole body. Gently shake your hands and wrists.
- Occasionally do tasks that you can do while standing, such as filing, returning phone calls, and so on.
- Exercise to strengthen your upper back, shoulders, and neck. Ask a fitness professional or physician for specific exercises to strengthen these areas.

Proper Posture

Improper posture is a primary cause of back, neck, and shoulder pain. To sit more comfortably:

- Sit with your back, head, and neck in a line perpendicular to the floor. Don't lean or hunch over your desk or keyboard.
- Sit in a chair that supports your back at the spine's curve. The end of the seat should not press into the back of your knees. Adjust the chair so that your knees are in line with your hips, and your feet rest flat on the floor.
- Keep your back at a right angle to the floor and your thighs and forearms parallel to it when you sit.
- Position your keyboard at the proper height – your forearms should be parallel to the floor while you type.
- Keep your shoulders down, not hunched or pulled up toward your head.
- Don't droop your head forward. Keep it squarely above your neck and shoulders.
- Use a footrest. Raising your feet and legs makes sitting more comfortable, helps relieve pressure on the back and legs, and improves circulation.

Hand and Wrist Protection

These tips can help you prevent pain in your hands and wrists:

- Keep your wrists flat and in a straight line with your forearms.
- Use proper typing technique. Touch the keys lightly and relax your hands when you pause between keystrokes.

- Avoid bending your wrists up and down or stretching your hands from side to side at the wrists. Move your arms to reach for keys at the edge of your keyboard.
- Don't push or rest your wrists or forearms against hard desk edges; doing so can cause pain and injury to your wrists.
- Do hand stretches before starting work and during short breaks.
- Have your keyboard cleaned or fixed if the keys stick.
- Keep your mouse within easy reach of the keyboard. Be gentle; don't grasp or tap it forcefully.

Daily Stretches

Taking a short stretch break every hour or so can relieve muscle tension and increase your productivity and comfort.

You can do all of the following stretches in three to five minutes:

- Overall body stretch: Get out of your chair, lift your arms above your head, and reach for the sky. Repeat three times.
- Shoulder-blade stretch: Clasp your hands together behind your back and pull your shoulder blades together. Repeat three times.
- Shoulder rolls: Slowly roll your shoulders five times forward, then five times back.
- Head tilts: Slowly and gently tilt your head to the right, to the left, and forward – stopping when you feel a stretch. Repeat three more times.