

Fall 2023



# Ergonomics Newsletter

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## Happy Ergonomics Month!

October has been recognized as National Ergonomics Month since way back in 2003! The goal is to create awareness of the importance of good ergonomics practices, both in the workplace and in our daily lives. We hope this latest installment of our Ergonomics Newsletter gives you some inspiration to improve your health and productivity!

## Your Poms Ergonomics Team

### Karen Mestas-Harris, MOTR/L, CEAS II

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Karen leads our Ergonomics Team with over 20 years of experience in the field. She has worked in New Mexico public schools as an inclusion teacher, taught and directed at the university level in an occupational therapy program, worked as an occupational therapist in both schools and medical settings (hospital, rehab, ergonomics, etc.), and holds both MOTR/L (occupational therapy designation) and CEAS II Certified Ergonomics Assessment Specialist designations.

### Other Team Members

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*Contact us today to learn more about how our Ergonomics Team can help!*

## Desk Dynamics

Ergonomics is sometimes overlooked when thinking about potential hazards that exist in the workplace. This is because injuries caused by poor ergonomics are not as obvious as injuries caused from falls from heights or dangerous chemicals. However, ergonomics injuries can be just as detrimental to the workplace if hazards that cause them are left uncontrolled.

The ultimate goal of practicing good ergonomics in the workplace is to reduce the risk of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). MSDs include carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, strained muscles, and ruptured discs, just to name a few. MSDs resulting from poorly designed work stations can lead to reduced productivity, missed time, loss of income, increased insurance claims, and pain and suffering that impacts both workers and their friends and families.

Musculoskeletal disorders affect joints, ligaments, tendons, muscles, and bones. The pain can be acute or chronic, depending on the severity. The common symptoms of musculoskeletal disorder symptoms may vary according to the cause of the pain. These are:



Fatigue



Sleep Disturbances



Pain that Worsens with Movement



Aching and Stiffness



Muscle Twitches



Burning Sensations in the Muscles

To reduce the risk of MSDs, practice good ergonomics in the workplace. One of the best ways to accomplish this is picking the right desk for your job. When selecting a desk, there are many workplace ergonomic stressors that employees need to consider when evaluating a job.

## Ergonomic Chairs

Ergonomic chairs come with the following features which make them better than one that isn't designed for back support:

- 1) An ergonomic chair has adjustable head and armrests.
- 2) You can tweak the seat height to suit the height of your table.
- 3) The superior lumbar support ensures that your spine is not bent unnaturally.
- 4) All of the above settings help improve your posture, thus preventing a number of health conditions, such as arthritis, spinal dysfunction, muscle strain etc.
- 5) Some ergonomic chairs even allow you to modify your seat depth. This improves comfort level by offering enough space for you to rest your thighs and for the back of your knees to receive the support of the chair's edge.

With all these design features, an ergonomic chair not only helps improve your health but also enhances your productivity.





## Desk Set-up for Taller People



## Desk Set-up for Shorter People

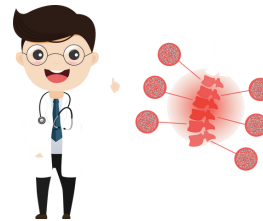
## Desk Dynamics (Continued)

### [Desk Ergonomics at Work](#)

- **Height:** While the average desk height varies a bit, most work surfaces are designed at the standard height of 28” to 30” from the floor to the tabletop. This is a good height for most people between 5’8” and 5’10” tall. If you are taller or shorter, you may have to make some more adjustments (see video in sidebar).
- **Arm Length:** The arm length of the desk should be long enough to support the employee’s elbows when seated. It should be 4” shorter in length than full-length arms for the ideal arm length. The major advantage of adding desk-length arms is to be closer to the desk or table without bumping into it.
- **Contact Stress:** Have you ever experienced discomfort while using your work desk design and thought about the reason? It may be because of its hard and sharp edges. If your desk has a hard edge, either pad it or use wrist rests.
  - Wrist rests are intended to support the straight wrist and reduce the pressure from the wrist by providing a soft surface to relax. Remember, however, that these are wrist “rests” and not wrist “supports.” Therefore, they should only be used to take a break while typing. Always choose a gel wrist-rest as foam wrist rests cannot take adequate pressure.
  - Padding is an important part of any workstation ergonomics and is used to cover the hard edges of the table. It gives proper arm support to the worker and distributes the pressure. Thus, its ergonomic design provides a good alternative on which to rest.
- **Monitor and Mouse Pad Height and Spacing:** Place the monitor right in front of you, about an arm’s length away. The top of the screen should be slightly below or at eye level. Also, the monitor should be kept just behind the keyboard. If any of the employees wear a bifocal lens, lower the height of the monitor by up to 1 or 2 inches for comfortable viewing. Also, the monitor should be tilted backward.
  - The mousepads with an ergonomic design have one or two features that make them more usable. They are generally curved or raised on the thumb side to support the hand in a handshake position.

## Sit Up Straight: Time to Re-Evaluate

1. **There is no single “correct” posture.** Despite common posture beliefs, there is no strong evidence that one optimal posture exists or that avoiding “incorrect” postures will prevent back pain.
2. **Differences in postures are a fact of life.** There are natural variations in spinal curvatures, and there is no single spinal curvature strongly associated with pain. Pain should not be attributed to relatively “normal” variations.
3. **Posture reflects beliefs and mood.** Posture can offer insights into a person’s emotions, thoughts, and body image. Some postures are adopted as a protective strategy and may reflect concerns regarding body vulnerability. Understanding reasons behind preferred postures can be useful.
4. **It is safe to adopt more comfortable postures.** Comfortable postures vary between individuals. Exploring different postures, including those frequently avoided, and changing habitual postures may provide symptom relief.
5. **The spine is robust and can be trusted.** The spine is a robust, adaptable structure capable of safely moving and loading in a variety of postures. Common warnings to protect the spine are not necessary and can lead to fear.
6. **Sitting is not dangerous.** Sitting down for more than 30 minutes in one position is not dangerous, nor should it always be avoided. However, moving and changing position can be helpful, and being physically active is important for your health.
7. **One size does not fit all.** Postural and movement screening does not prevent pain in the workplace. Preferred lifting styles are influenced by the naturally varying spinal curvatures, and advice to adopt a specific posture or to brace the core is not evidence based.



*Acknowledgment: The authors would like to thank Kevin Wernli @KWernliPhysio for his assistance in developing the illustrations for the figure.*





## The New Smoking: Sitting Disease

Sitting at your office desk working all week long may help you achieve your self-actualization goals, or pay your bills and keep you out of debt, but may also be setting you up for some future health problems. Sitting disease is the new smoking in the workplace, and it may be slowly draining your health.

One in four American adults sits for longer than eight hours every day, reports the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). On average, Americans sit for about 11 hours each day, with much of this time spent at the office desk.

Sitting constitutes physical inactivity and sitting for too long each day or on most days implies having a sedentary lifestyle, whether or not one exercises. Physical inactivity is linked to more than 3 million preventable deaths every year globally, ranking as the fourth leading cause of death resulting from non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

In the wake of this, many employers and health institutions, including the American Medical Association, are beginning to promote less sitting at the workplace, enacting policies that help employees cut physical inactivity during work hours.

### [Strategies to Cut Down on Prolonged Sitting in the Office](#)

Movement is the key - to reduce your risk of these diseases associated with prolonged activity, here are simple, cost-effective solutions:

### The Health Risks of Prolonged Sitting



Obesity



Chronic Joint Pains



Heart Disease



Diabetes



Cancer



Deep Vein Thrombosis



Mental Illness

## The New Smoking: Sitting Disease (Continued)

### [Change how you sit](#)

Move while you sit. A number of innovative seats help to redefine workplace design by promoting motion seating. **Swopper chairs** allow for rocking, bouncing, and perching while also helping to maintain a good posture.

Recreate your workstation

One way you could ensure you move around often is setting things up in your office to get you up often – place the printer, copy machine, and other office items away from your desk, so you have to walk to reach them every time you need them. Also, raise your work surface to a height that keeps you standing while you work. Standing for three hours every day can burn up to 30,000 calories. That's the same thing you get after running 10 marathons!

### [Stand up and Stretch every hour](#)

After every hour of sitting, take a walk around the office or just walk outside to get some fresh air. You may set a ringer to go off when it's time.

You can also take short exercise breaks at intervals. Stand-ups, squats, arm rolls, and push-ups are a few exercises you could try at your desk.

Go see a co-worker instead of sending them a mail or a text; take the stairs instead of the elevator, and; when you drive in, park at the back of the garage, so you have to walk a distance before getting to your car on your way out.

### [Walk while you talk](#)

Walk while you answer your cell phone or while conversing with a coworker. Employers may also set up walking meetings to curb physical inactivity in the workplace. This not only burns excess calories, but it also boosts mental clarity, creativity, mood, and energy levels.

Sitting may not be as harmless as you think: With the high risk of disease and death this seemingly innocuous activity is associated with, there's a call on employers, managers, and even entrepreneurs to rethink workplace design and culture and to encourage their employees and co-workers to ditch the chair and get moving!





## Contact Your Poms Ergonomics Specialist for an Individualized Review

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## Ergonomic Resources

[OSHA - Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#)

[Mayo Clinic](#)

[CDC - Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[NASP - National Association of Safety Professionals](#)

[National Institutes of Health](#)

