

Work Becoming a Pain?

Conservative estimates suggest that 4 out of every 5 Australians will experience acute back pain in some way shape or form during their life. Several factors predispose or increase the risk of this. These include age, fitness, lifestyle, previous injuries and perhaps most importantly, occupational stresses.

By seeing your chiropractor, you are maintaining the health of your spine. However, the success of the structural and neurological (nerve) changes that your chiropractor has caused can be affected by how you treat your spine in day to day activities. For most of us regular everyday activities usually involve work. With an increasing reliance on computers, it is important that the rapidly growing 'office bound' section of the work force has a correct workstation set up and posture (called ergonomics) to help maintain proper spinal health. Incorrect work posture and office set-up will decrease your ability to maintain these spinal corrections and may even put you at risk of developing other, more serious problems.

The repetitive nature of office work can result in an accumulation of stresses building up over the course of months or even years until a relatively minor incident is sufficient to cause symptoms of pain, stiffness, numbness or pins and needles. These problems tend to take more time to correct because of the long time spent in their development. Arthritic and other degenerative changes can also influence how quickly the chiropractor is able to help you get rid of, and keep away the symptoms.

Advances in weight, shape and sound clarity of hands free phone headsets make them a better alternative to 'crooking' the phone, a position in which the phone is cradled between the neck and the shoulder.

Typing material should be held in an upright document holder. The position of the holder should be level with the height of the screen and should be moved from side to side on a regular basis to avoid prolonged neck muscle contraction.

Knees should be lower than the hips. An adjustable seat pan is ideal for this function. Adequate space between the desk and the thighs is also necessary to allow unrestricted movement.

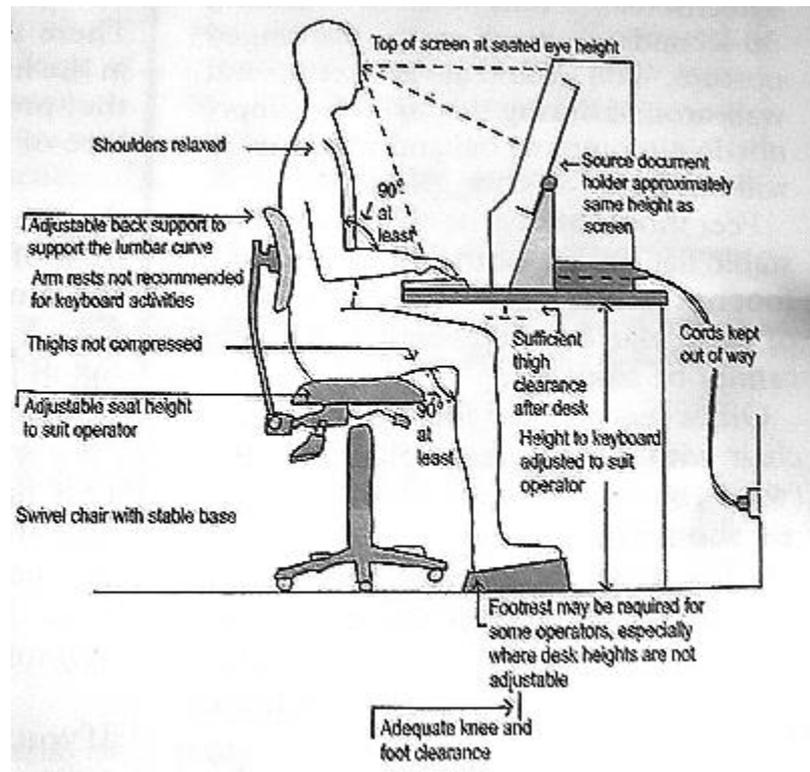
The best sitting posture maintains the 'lumbar lordosis' (lower back reversed 'C' curve) which helps it to distribute weight effectively. A lumbar support or rolled towel (roughly the size and shape of an airline pillow) placed within the sway of the back is ideal for maintaining this curve.

When using the keyboard the forearms should be parallel to the floor and elbows not forward of your belly button to prevent repetitive wrist injuries. Arm rests are not recommended for keying activities.

The mid and upper back should be maintained in an upright position avoiding the slouched shoulders that is responsible for muscle tension.

The top of the computer screen should be seated at eye level preferably with a glare screen mounted on the monitor (a flyscreen-like attachment that, as the name suggests reduces glare) or with the brightness level turned down as low as comfortably possible to reduce eye

strain. Note- Turning it down too much can also result in eye strain due to squinting, so choose a comfortable medium.



Air conditioners should not be blowing onto the neck or shoulders because this can cause the muscles to become cold and consequently tight.

Every 20 – 30 minutes you should take a micro break (It only needs to be around 30 seconds) to break up the prolonged posture. You should always get up and walk around during this stretch. Simply not doing computer or handwritten work will not have the same effect.

Feet should always be able to rest on a stable flat surface or incline, that is the ground or foot rest. Foot rests are a benefit when seat height cannot be adjusted.

Office seats should ideally be a swivel chair with a stable base. The seat pan, seat height and seat back should be adjustable.

Office desks should be large enough to allow room either side of the keyboard for document holders and allow room for the mouse pad near the keyboard.

The human body has a design that allows it to deal far better with regular movement than without it. These simple suggestions provide an optimal working environment to take care of your spine and other related structures. It is merely composed as a general guide and is not intended for use as a comprehensive or job specific reference.

Reference: Your Chiropractor Newsletter July – August 2001