



Working Smart

Finding Your Way to Workplace Wellness

Ergonomic Tips for Desk Workers

These tips will reduce strain on the neck and shoulder muscles, low back and eyes.

- Adjust your chair so that your feet are flat on the ground. Scoot the chair in as close as possible. Sit up straight with your head above your neck. Avoid craning forward.
- Position your keyboard and monitor in front of you with the top at eye level and about fore arm's length away, allowing the weight of your arms to be supported by your desk.
- Use a headset instead of holding a phone between your ear and shoulder.
- Rest your eyes by reducing glare and glancing into the distance periodically.

Fulltime workers spend, on average, more than one-third of their day, five days per week at their place of work. We rely heavily on the fruits of our labor: skills, confidence, camaraderie, and most importantly, an income. Since our work life is so important to our livelihood, it makes sense to work smart. Workplace health and wellness includes activities and policies designed to promote the well-being of employees, support health behavior in the workplace, and decrease the risks of injuries. Employees can experience greater job satisfaction by making some key adjustments in the workplace.

Getting Started

If you are new to workplace wellness, keep in mind that with all changes, it helps to start with one change at a time. You can't fix everything overnight, but you can start today and roll out your plan over time. Here are some key ways to get on the path towards workplace wellness:

1. Do an ergonomic assessment. Ergonomics is the science of reducing stress on your eyes, back, arms and neck that may result from an awkward posture or repeated movement. For example, you may move your computer and keyboard directly in front of you to avoid having to repeatedly turn your head to see it. If your work includes repeti-

tive tasks or sustained awkward positions, request an ergonomic assessment from your employer or follow proper work techniques designed to reduce injury. Periodic rotations from one workstation or activity to another can help avoid repetitive actions or awkward positions for prolonged periods. See box for other tips for those with desk jobs.

2. Avoid sitting for too long. What's too long? The Mayo Clinic recommends taking a break from sitting every 30 minutes. Studies have linked sitting for long periods with obesity, elevated blood pressure, elevated blood sugar, and an increased risk for other health problems. The studies have also shown that an hour or more of moderately intense physical activity, along with regular movement throughout the day, can counter the effects of too much sitting. What will your workplace or responsibilities allow? Is it possible to try a standing desk (or a high counter or table) for at least some of the day? Can you take stretch breaks (helps to increase circulation and speed recovery)? Some people stand up while on the phone, and some employers encourage "walking" meetings when possible. See our newsletter for more information, [Sitting is the New Smoking](#).

3. Take care to prevent injuries. About 2 million workers are severely injured every year. If your job involves heavy lifting or other strenuous activities, brush up on your workplace safety procedures. If you've been doing the job for a long time, it is tempting to take short cuts when there is pressure to make deadlines or meet quotas. But an injury that requires ongoing medical treatment and prevents you from returning to work isn't worth it. Warm up your muscles with full body stretching before strenuous activities like lifting, pulling, pushing, carrying or throwing. Keep your workplace tidy so there are not obstacles to trip over or wet floors to slip on. Factor in how changes in the weather might affect your work. Wear appropriate protective clothing or gear. Practicing proper lifting techniques (use your legs to help lift the load and protect your back from strain).
4. Practice stress management techniques. Stress helps us get things done but too much stress can have a negative effect on performance, productivity, health and relationships. Some of the signs of work stress are being irritable, anxious or depressed, tired and having trouble concentrating. These are signs that you need to reach out to friends or family to talk out your concerns. Sometimes just airing your worries makes them seem more manageable. When stress levels are on the rise, don't skip your workouts. Exercise is a known stress-buster; it helps by increasing the feel-good hormone, serotonin, that will give you energy and sharpen your focus. Nutrition matters too; it has a big impact on how you feel. Minimize sugar and comfort foods (pasta and baked goods) that

lead to a blood sugar spike. Avoid alcohol (it's a depressant), nicotine (a stimulant that can make you feel anxious) and other things that you know will poorly affect your mood (for some, caffeine can add to anxiety). Be proactive about your workplace concerns by talking with your boss about specific conditions that are affecting your work. Is it time to request new assignments or a transfer? Or do you need to clarify your job description? For more ideas about managing stress, see our newsletter, [The Path to Emotional Wellness](#).

A Note About Shift Work

People who work unconventional hours, like night shifts, have an additional set of challenges. The work can often be attractive for parents juggling child care responsibilities, giving workers time to focus on other activities, such as study, and offering higher pay. However, shift workers tend to be at increased risk for diabetes, impaired brain functioning and cardiovascular disease. It is believed that these risks are connected to a disruption in circadian rhythms, our body's natural clock for determining when sleep is needed. To reduce the impact, experts recommend staying on the same sleep schedule every day, even on days off. When transitioning to a daytime schedule, it helps to delay bedtime and wakeup time by 1-2 hours. It is especially important to get adequate sleep (7-9 hours) each day (or night).

How is your workplace wellness? If you need help problem-solving your concerns, give your KnovaSolutions clinician a call. Let us lend an empathetic ear and help you find resources as you strive towards workplace wellness. We'll offer all the time you need to improve your health. Give us a call at **800/355-0885**.

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